



# weekly **worker**

**Michael Jackson: August 29 1958 -  
June 25 2009. From showbiz childhood  
to being consumed by his own image**

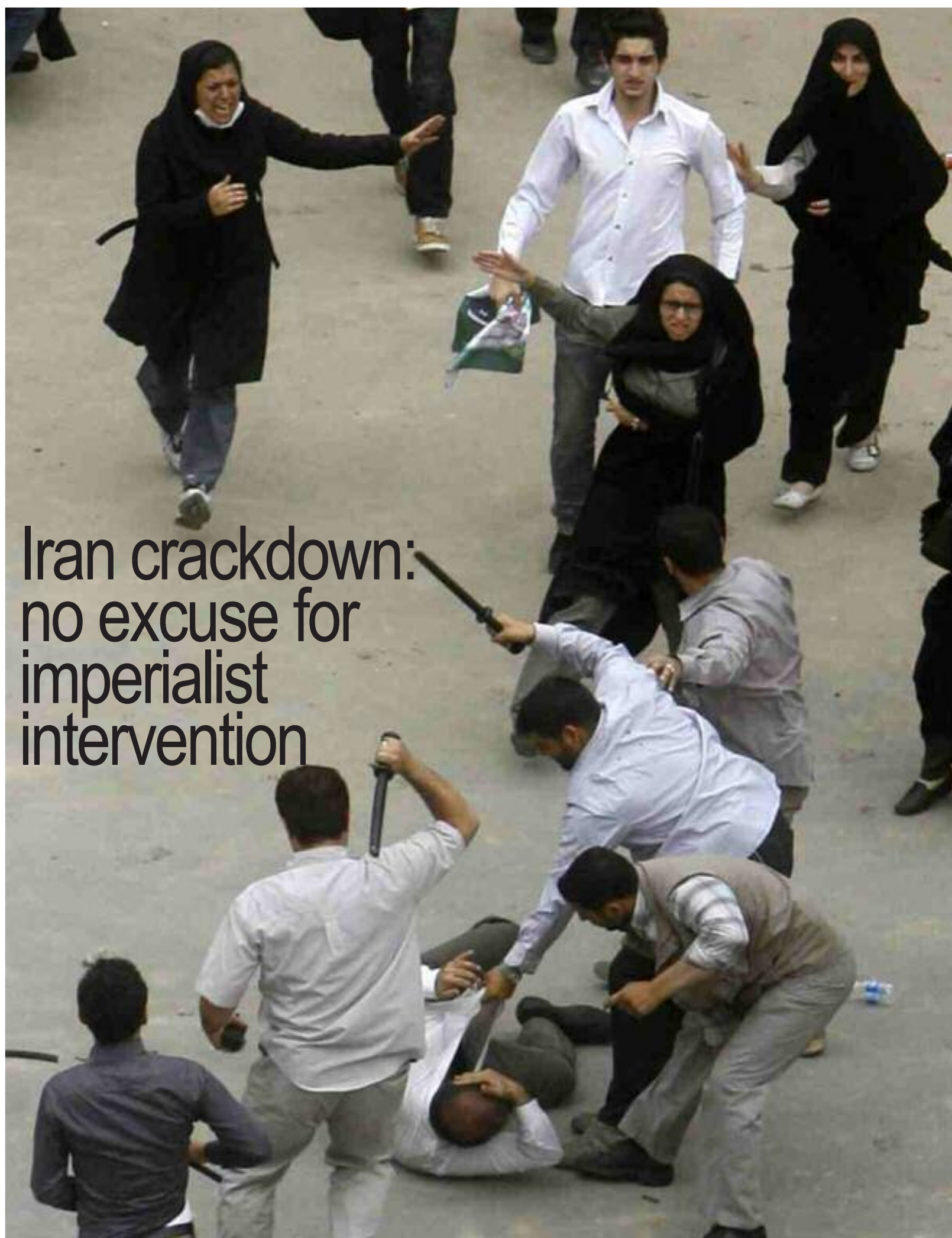
- Iran protests in Ireland
- Darwin and human origins
- Left unity and SWP
- Lawrence Daly obituary

No 776 Thursday July 2 2009

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Iran crackdown:  
no excuse for  
imperialist  
intervention

## LETTERS



Letters may have been shortened because of space. Some names may have been changed

## Clumsy CPGB

I have been following with interest the debate in the *Weekly Worker* over 'Yes to Democracy, No to EU'. Like many comrades, I believe the CPGB's criticism of Bob Crow's project was fundamentally correct, but its intervention flawed and clumsy.

Several political questions were raised, perhaps the largest being the nature of the Labour Party itself. The Socialist Party in England and Wales was quick to announce the de-Labourisation of Labour following its expulsion. Angst rather than sober analysis seemed to be the overriding driver to this conclusion. Twenty years have now passed since they and other leftists were driven out, and New Labour has been in government for the past 12.

No-one would argue that Labour's proletarian pole is ascendant. The question is whether it still exists. And if it doesn't, how would our approach to the party change? These are the questions that need to be debated. Did the driving out of thousands of leftwing activists, among them the then Militant, mark a qualitative change in the nature of Labour? Did it mark the beginning of a process which has yet to be concluded? Or was it the rupture that SPEW claims - and subsequent events merely the rumble of thunder after the flash of lightning?

It has been argued that the Blairite 'wing' has little or no roots in the party - it is a thin layer of careerists concentrated in the parliamentary party. That may or may not be true, but what roots does the left have? The collapse of the old CPGB and the decline of the revolutionary - and even the reformist - left has meant the withering of Labour's left wing. Anecdotally, this is reflected in the party's membership.

It may be argued that Labour remains the party of the trade union bureaucracy. What of it? I'm sure that trade union bureaucrats - and many vaguely class-conscious workers - view the US Democrats in much the same way and have a very similar relationship to the party machine.

One final word on Labour. We may have witnessed the demise of Britain's bourgeois-labour party (and not realised it) - I have yet to be convinced one way or the other. What is clear is that the de-Labourisation of Labour has mirrored the political decline of our class. We on the left saw Labour's crisis as resulting from our own hand - Labourism would be positively succeeded. This is not how things have panned out.

Which brings me to No2EU. Our target in No2EU should have been SPEW itself. Its politics are weak, but, if we seek to positively resolve the current crisis of working class politics, SPEW, with its history, activists and body of ideas, needs to be engaged with and challenged. We let Taaffe and co off the hook. Critical support for No2EU, perhaps support only for those lists topped by SPEW or SPEW-leaning candidates, would have allowed us to intervene more productively.

Contradictions - massive contradictions - existed inside No2EU between SPEW and the ideas to which it claims adherence and fidelity, and those of the Crow-CPB bloc. We could have developed those contradictions. Instead, we shot ourselves in the foot.

**Andy Hannah**  
East Midlands

## Kill dogmatism

John Robinson (Letters, June 25) reappears with more hidebound orthodox-Trotskyist dogma, occasioned as usual by an article of comrade Mike Macnair's ('Against rightist populism', June 4),

though various basically false accusations (eg, that Mike does not confront the question of the capitalist media in his article, which he does) betray little familiarity with his actual argument.

In doing so, he reveals the extremely shaky ground - both in terms of theoretical coherence and the historical record - that this corner of the political universe occupies. His entire letter is predicated on a simple premise - 'the fundamental principles of communism' are 'soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat' (from Lenin's *Leftwing communism*).

The difficulty is that the argument for soviet power, even from the post-1917 Bolsheviks, is not conducted on any level of fundamental principle. Rather, it is conducted on the basis that the soviets are the spontaneous form of working class power in a revolutionary situation. The Russian experience is cited as evidence, as is the experience of the *Arbeitsräte* in Germany and other examples, though all but the Russian soviets were crushed. In other words, it is an operative conclusion drawn from historical evidence, which must be constantly open to re-evaluation. It is not a principle of theory that descends logically from Marx's *Capital* or anything else.

This is emphasised by Gregory Zinoviev, in a four-hour speech in favour of soviet power delivered to the USPD conference in 1920: 'Should the German working class create another form of dictatorship,' he concedes, 'then we will greet it with pleasure, for we have always said that everything does not have to be like in Russia, and that the working classes of the other countries will perhaps do a better job of it than we did' (English translation forthcoming). That's an awfully *blasé* way to treat a 'fundamental principle' - of course, the soviet form is no such thing.

The ahistorical approach advocated by comrade Robinson (he is not, unfortunately, alone) is revealed in its full absurdity when he declares that 'The highest organs of struggle built in Britain were the councils of action set up in 1926. These were in fact soviets. In a future revolutionary situation these will undoubtedly rise again.' *Undoubtedly*, comrade? Only from a formalistic and fetishised view of the soviet.

The soviet is nothing more than a *form* for power; it arises as a *solution* to the problem of the dictatorship of the proletariat. How is the working class to rule? By what means? This is the fundamental point - communists seek to transform society in such a way as to replace the rule of the bourgeoisie with the rule of the proletariat. The soviets are only anything more than a footnote to working class history because they were able to fulfil this role in the Russian Revolution - they became the locus for the transfer of class power.

In reality, in spite of comrade Robinson's airy and rather ignorant dismissals, the 'fundamental question' is - here as it is everywhere else - *extreme democracy*. The fact that the soviets were precisely living organs of power, in which parties were able to compete for leadership, through which militias and the like could be organised, made them organs of proletarian revolution. Where they have arisen elsewhere, they have very often *not* fulfilled this role, and so they have been crushed.

But 'there can be no abstract democracy (extreme or otherwise) in class society', claims comrade Robinson. 'Abstract' is here simply a buzzword - the confusion is between concrete/existing organisations of class power (America is a bourgeois democracy), and democracy as such (the rule of the majority). There is no such thing as bourgeois democracy in general, against which we can counterpose proletarian democracy.

Rather, there are basic necessities that state power must fulfil to sustain bour-

geois rule, and likewise for proletarian rule (not simply, as comrade Robinson implies, the ability to crush class enemies). The former (defence of private property, etc) are ultimately *incompatible* with fully-realised democracy. The latter are nothing less than fully realised democracy, the only condition under which the working class can rule. To renege on democracy is simply to hand power to the labour bureaucracy - which is an institution of *bourgeois* power.

Everywhere, Trotskyists get entirely hung up on the soviets - this fetishism not only sends their views of the party question and tactical method skewiff and distorts their theory of political democracy, but completely misses the point of the soviets in the first place.

**James Turley**  
Plymouth

## PR job

John Robinson said that Lenin argued that "the fundamental principles of communism" are "soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat", with the latter phrase meaning rule just by the working class. Lenin did indeed call for "all power to the soviets" when he returned from exile to Russia in 1917, contradicting the position of his party (the Bolsheviks) in calling for a constituent assembly, and he played a key role in persuading the party to abolish the assembly after they lost the elections to it following the October revolution. Rather than basing our positions on what Lenin said, since when there have been 90 years of world capitalism, surely it is time to reassess.

It is good that the CPGB is doing that and has adopted proportional representation. The CPGB is not alone. Recent editorials in SPEW's paper and an article by the SWP's Alex Callinicos have advocated PR too, and I have heard that the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain supports the single transferable vote.

John complains about the prospect of "all members of the capitalist class and their counterrevolutionary hangers-on each [having] a vote equal to that of revolutionary workers". What's he worried about? Either there are so few of them that they can easily be outvoted or there are so many of them that a revolution would not be practicable at that time and attempting an insurrection would be doomed to almost certain failure.

He argues that "the capitalist class will, as at present, have total control of newspapers and the mass media". He is wrong; what about the role of the left press, including the *Weekly Worker* and the internet? He is also confusing a pre-revolutionary situation (in which those who control the mass media may try to exclude leftwing voices) with the situation after a revolution in which the masses coming to power can control the media irrespective of whether a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is established. Giving parties access to the media according to their level of support would be preferable to trying to keep dissenting voices completely out of the media.

Although John says that "the task of communists is not to hold polite conversations with fascists", but "to shoot them", I suspect he considers that the same fate should await anybody who objects to all power being in the hands of the working class.

Now that capitalism is self-destructing and all the mainstream parties are set to stand for massive public spending cuts and/or tax rises at the next general election, we need to point out the need for a sudden and thorough change of society, whether or not we use the word 'revolution'.

Michael Rosen's reply to the SWP's "open letter to the left" (*Socialist Worker* June 20) suggests "a federation or umbrella" of cooperating groups/parties that don't stand against each other as the way forward. This is probably the

best that can be achieved in the short term, bearing in mind the hostility and sectarianism between different left groups in Britain. It would be a crying shame if such a federation was constructed and none of its participants put forward such a revolutionary programme, to determine which sort of party is most effective in practice.

**Steve Wallis**  
Democratic Socialist Alliance

## Oppressor rights

There is no confusion at all in my position on nationality and the nation-state, contrary to Moshé Machover's assertion (Letters, June 25).

Up to 20 or 30 years ago, if asked what nation they were members of, most people would have instinctively said 'British'. Up to the 1950s, the Tories, the party of unionism, had a majority of seats in Scotland. Of course, since then there has been a fragmentation and today most but not all people would probably define themselves as English, Scottish or Welsh. In other words, a nation is something that changes and is in flux. It is not a fixed entity. And when, as in Scotland, the specific nationality is asserted (where, it might be remembered, only a handful, mainly confined to the Western Isles, still speak Gaelic), the nation-state itself is also challenged.

Yes, I confess I do look forward to the unification of Palestine within the boundaries of what was the British mandate. I think this is part of a wider political problem. It is common currency, not least among left Zionists for whom two states is their solution, that the real cause of the conflict in Palestine is a national one, not one of settler-colonialism. Of course, their two-state solution is really one state and a series of semi-autonomous enclaves. But, as Moshé is more than aware, such a solution is advocated by even the most racist Zionists, such as Arnon Sofer, professor of demographics at Haifa University. It is a means of artificially preserving a Jewish majority because, even without the Palestinian refugees, roughly half of Palestine today would be Palestinian. That is why the commonly accepted notion that the root of the conflict in Palestine is national needs to be thought through and, in my opinion, rejected.

For Moshé, the Palestinian nation is really just a subset of the Arab nation, yet this concept of an Arab nation is itself problematic. There is no one single Arab economy or even consciousness. There is an Arabic language, but language does not in itself make a nation or the English nation would encompass much of Africa, as well as India! There is an oppressed Palestinian nation of sorts, but it too is not a fixed entity and to assert that such a nation can encompass both Arabs and Israeli Jews has nothing to do with forcible Arabisation nor severing the Palestinian Arabs from the 'greater Arab nation', whose existence I frankly doubt.

If we look at it in a wider context, the Ulster Protestants see themselves as British. Supporters of Irish reunification see them as Irish, regardless of how they see themselves. Likewise, white South Africans didn't see themselves as African, but as part of a separate white tribe or nation. Self-definition as a nation doesn't mean that there is a nation.

A Palestinian nation-state would be obliged on democratic grounds to ensure that there was complete equality of the Hebrew and Arabic languages and any other cultural manifestation. Further than that, complete equality between Arab and Israeli Jewish citizens. It is the formation of a separate Israeli-Jewish nation-state that would be problematic because it would result in the recreation of a Zionist entity under the patronage of imperialism.

I therefore agree with the fundamental point of Yossi Schwartz (Letters, June 18) that in all of this one has to take as

one's starting point the socialist standpoint that oppressor nations, if that is what Moshé wishes to call the Hebrews or Israeli Jews, do not have a right to self-determination because at the root of their national identity is the oppression of the indigenous population.

**Tony Greenstein**  
Brighton

## Zionist

Moshé Machover reflects in his answer to me a clear pro-Zionist bias. He writes: "First, I never denied that there are fewer Hebrews (so-called Israeli Jews) than Palestinian Arabs *worldwide*. What I said was that the Palestinian Arabs are a national minority in *Israel*. This is a fact: they constitute approximately 20% of Israel's population" (Letters, June 25).

The Zionists deny that there is a Palestinian nation that has the right of self-determination in occupied Palestine from the river to the sea. They claim that the Palestinians are Arabs and it is the responsibility of the Arab states to settle the Palestinian refugees. For the same reason, some of the Zionists claim that the solution for the Palestinians is to settle them in Jordan and turn it into a Palestinian state.

Ignoring the mass expulsion of the Palestinians in order to create a Jewish majority, the pro-Zionists argue that the Palestinians are a national minority in Israel rather than the majority with the right to occupied Palestine.

Echoing this line, Machover argues that the Israelis are fewer than the Arabs worldwide, as if this is the question rather than the Palestinians' right of self-determination, including the refugees in their stolen land. In his reply, Machover simply avoids the real question, which is: including the Palestinians in the lands stolen in 1948, in the West Bank and Gaza stolen in 1967, and the refugees, are the Palestinians the majority while the settler colonialists are the minority? Is there any question that, once the Palestinian refugees return, the Israelis will be a minority in this land?

The second argument that exposes his political bias proceeds: "What I actually implied was the very opposite: the *only* thing that prevents the Hebrew nation from recognising itself openly and officially as a separate nation is the dominance of Zionist ideology. How can an ideology be dominant if the majority do not believe in it?"

Once again, this is not the question. The question is whether, for the majority of the Israeli Jews, Zionism is a false ideology, as some, including Machover, claim, or a reflection of their material interest as settler colonialist.

Considering the nature of Zionism, there is no place for the self-determination of both Israelis and Palestinians in Palestine. One's right comes at the expense of the other, and revolutionary Marxists can only support the right of self-determination of the oppressed nations whose struggle is part of the struggle against the imperialist system.

Whether the Israelis are a nation or not, as Marxists, we cannot support the right of self-determination for imperialist states. Following World War II, the state of Israel was the only former colony to become an imperialist state. It became an imperialist state before the 1967 war, after it accumulated its primitive wealth through the expropriation of the Palestinian people and later on through the reparations from Germany, followed by massive support from American imperialism.

For the Israelis to form an Israeli national consciousness rather than a Zionist consciousness, it is necessary to break with Zionism and its main proposition that the Israeli Jews are part of the world Jewish nation and that Israel is the state of all the Jews - their ancient promised land. For the Israelis to form an Israeli national consciousness, it is necessary to remove the law of return.

However, most Israelis will support this law with arms in their hands. The Israeli government, with the full support of most Israeli Jews, demands that the entire world, including the Palestinians, recognise Israel as a Jewish state (not an Israeli state), as the land of their forefathers. In other words, the Palestinians who are citizens of Israel are not part of the nation, while Israel is the state of all the Jews around the world. The Zionists claim that Jews in other countries are still living in exile (the diaspora) and sooner or later will be forced to come to their real ancient homeland.

Zionist consciousness incorporates the following central themes:

- the Jews of today are the direct continuation of the ancient Israelites and Jews, the same nation that was uprooted from their ancient land and has lived in the diaspora, and the Jews who live in the diaspora are foreigners to the countries they live in;
- thus, the Jews in Israel are part of the Jewish world-nation that has been preserved because of their genetics, unique religious belief and constant persecutions;
- the deforming experience of the Jewish existence in exile created deformed Jews, unlike the ancient Israelites and Jews of the time of the *Bible*;
- anti-semitism is a constant attribute of the non-Jew (Goy), the promised land is the only place where the Jews can become normal and escape anti-semitism, and as long as the Jews do not return to their ancient land they live outside of history;
- sooner or later all, or at least most, Jews will be forced by anti-semitism to return to their promised land;
- the Arabs who conquered Israel in the 7th century robbed the country from the real owners of the land, the Jewish nation, and the role of the Jews is to redeem the land from the foreigners;
- the Israeli Jews, in their generosity and love for peace, are ready to give up on part of their country for a demilitarised Palestinian mini-state; and
- Israeli culture is superior to the primitive Arabs' culture.

This racist view is the same outlook of anti-semites in the second part of the 19th century in Europe, and it is only fair to say that Zionism is the Jewish branch of racism and anti-semitism in general.

This view is based not on false ideology, but on the material needs of the settler-colonialists who need Jews around the world to support Israel financially and politically, and for many of them to immigrate to Israel to increase the Israeli Jewish population and its army against the Arabs, the Iranians and, most importantly, the Palestinians.

Thus, the class and political nature of the settler-colonialist society that dispossesses the native Palestinians prevents the development of an Israeli national consciousness. This Zionist consciousness manifests itself in many forms. Where it says 'nationality' in an Israeli ID card, for instance, Jews can either write 'Jew' or leave it empty.

In the left-liberal margins of the Zionist movement, there are several people who define themselves as post-Zionists and claim that there is an Israeli nation which has the right of self-determination. But this claim ignores the real history of the Zionist movement and its role in the world class struggle.

The extent of Machover's capitulation to Zionism is expressed in his third and last argument: "... comrade Schwartz in effect looks forward to a future in which Zionism will have been overthrown, the Palestinian Arabs will have won the right to national self-determination, but the Hebrew nation - no longer the oppressor - will be denied that same right. This reminds me of the old Soviet joke: 'In the USSR we no longer have exploitation of man by man; here it is the other way around.'"

The Israelis can stop being oppressors only in a Palestinian workers' republic from the river to the sea. This is precisely what Machover rejects when he embraces the right of self-determina-

tion for the colonialist settlers who will argue after a socialist revolution that they have the right to settle their own state in order to sever the revolutionary victory of the exploited and oppressed.

#### Yossi Schwartz

International Socialist League, occupied Palestine

## Ragamuffin

I cannot help agreeing with Dave Walters - sort of. If I remember rightly, the introduction of licensing laws for alcohol came during World War I and the Firearms Act in 1920. It's these bloody Bolshies, you know.

Previous limitations on gun ownership were largely about game hunting - until 1870, after which you had to licence a gun at the post office if you carried it outside your own property. This was clearly designed to deal with possible poachers and raise some cash for the chancellor of the exchequer. And you could not have a licence if you were under 18 or so obviously drunk that the postmaster noticed.

Otherwise, according to our bill of rights, "the subjects which are Protestants may have arms for their defence suitable to their conditions, and as allowed by law." That cut out all our Hibernian friends, and ragamuffins like Walters would not have been allowed to carry swords (although a musket would have been fine).

So I agree with Walters' position in a way, but my petty bourgeois nervousness makes me wonder if it would be an entirely good idea if any recently released occupants of the loony bin could easily get hold of a firearm.

**Ted Crawford**  
email

## Well regulated

I am in broad agreement with David Walters on the right to bear arms, but I think he should have mentioned that the US second amendment refers specifically to a "well regulated militia".

It was intended as a defence against any powerful anti-popular force, whether foreign or indigenous. It was an historic gain for the majority against the ruling elite and should be defended, whatever the social period we happen to be living in.

Criminal gun culture reflects a quite separate social problem at the heart of American society. In fact it represents the individualism and social atomisation within modern capitalist society that enables class exploitation to take place. The "well regulated militia" can only come into existence when and where there is a widespread and deep-seated sense of social solidarity amongst the masses.

Communists are for a "well regulated" workers' militia, not a disorderly rabble or criminal sub-culture. In fact what we have in mind represents the very opposite to atomisation and criminality.

As the overwhelming majority in modern capitalist countries, the working class will inevitably take the lead in democratically operating these militias and shaping their programme. We also need to be involved in everything from cookery to cricket if we are to challenge the bourgeoisie for power.

**Phil Kent**  
Haringey

## Not for Britain

In reply to David Walters, yes, I do have a historical understanding of democratic demands. The first thing I know is that they are not of divine origin, but are invented by people who live under specific historical conditions.

The right to bear arms came from a specific bourgeois revolution, at a certain stage of development. Naturally it ignores the fact that society is divided into classes, and the very right itself reflected, and still reflects, the relatively low level of class struggle in America. The US bourgeoisie has never felt

threatened by the general right to bear arms.

The suggestion that the logic of my argument, in opposing the general right to bear arms because it can be used by the class enemy, can equally be applied to freedom of speech and association, is a good point, but fails to understand that these freedoms are not the same as the general right to bear arms. If you ignore the class nature of society and argue that the counterrevolutionary elements should have an equal right to bear arms with the revolutionary elements, which is the logical position Walters arrives at, you are no longer in the camp of communism, but of bourgeois rights. I certainly support Walters' right to bear arms, but if his neighbour is a KKK, I don't feel obliged to support the latter's rights.

Walters wants to impose American gun culture on the rest of us. No doubt his reason is, what's good for America is good for the world, but this is not true. For instance, if I lived in the US with its deep-seated tradition of gun culture and high levels of gun crime, I may certainly want to be armed to protect myself. This wouldn't stop me campaigning against gun culture and its consequences. But to turn the bearing of arms into a universal right, in a class society, and worst, to artificially seek to import this culture into a country where a long tradition of gun culture does not exist, such as Britain, is harmful in the extreme. It would be arrogant for Walters to believe we should seek to promote American gun culture in Britain under the guise of a right.

In Britain, communists should promote the idea of workers' militias - not as an immediate goal, but as a future prospect, to aid what may well turn out to be a relatively peaceful transition to socialism, a development which cannot be dogmatically ruled out, and is indeed preferable to civil war. Also, the *peak oil economic crisis* which is unfolding, raises the possibility that, at a certain stage, the bourgeois state may be used as an instrument of reform to introduce socialism. Today it is not a question of reform or revolution, as it was in Lenin's time. Now either of these strategies may be possible, depending on how the crisis plays out.

Walters asks whether I realise that the bourgeoisie is already armed. Yes, but no revolution or socialist reform process has ever succeeded if the armed forces of the state remain on the side of counterrevolution. Revolution succeeds when most desert the old order and join the revolution. If the trained, disciplined armed forces remain on the side of capitalism, individuals possessing guns would make little difference.

**Tony Clark**  
London

## Gross

On March 26, the corporate management team at the University of East London suspended me for "gross professional misconduct". Among other things, my crime was to proceed with organising the Alternative G20 summit despite my employers' decision to close down the entire campus at the last minute.

My disciplinary hearing is scheduled for July 10. Friends and comrades wishing to defend me against possible dismissal will find more information on my website ([www.chrisknight.co.uk/2009/06/03/my-suspension](http://www.chrisknight.co.uk/2009/06/03/my-suspension)). If you can spare a minute, please add your name (with an accompanying statement) to this petition: [www.PetitionOnline.com/knight09/petition.html](http://www.PetitionOnline.com/knight09/petition.html).

**Chris Knight**  
Chair, Docklands UCU

## Cruel

After watching *Upstairs, downstairs* on TV I have come to realise that it is the so-called upper class that is cruel to animals. After all, isn't it the rich who go fox-hunting and shooting down little birds?

**Susan Boutell**  
Middlesbrough

# ACTION

## Communist Forums

**London:** Sundays, 5pm. Study topic, plus weekly political report from Provisional Central Committee. Ring 07950 416922 for details.

**July 5:** No Forum.

**July 12:** August H Nimzt Jr *Marx, Tocqueville and race in America*.

Subject: 'Explaining the civil war: the new struggle in the press'.

**July 19:** August H Nimzt Jr *Marx, Tocqueville and race in America*.

Subject: 'Explaining the civil war: from a constitutional to a revolutionary war'.

**South Wales:** Call Bob for details: 07816 480679.

## CPGB podcasts

Every Monday, we upload a podcast of commentary on the current political situation. In addition, the site will feature voice files of public meetings and other events.

<http://cpgb.podbean.com>.

## Communist Students meetings

**Central London:** Every Wednesday, 7pm. 07792 282830; [ben@communiststudents.org.uk](mailto:ben@communiststudents.org.uk).

**Manchester:** Every Tuesday, 5pm, students union. [manchestercommuniststudents@googlegmail.com](mailto:manchestercommuniststudents@googlegmail.com).

**Sheffield:** Every Sunday, 7pm. 07949 763130; [sabbagh1984@googlegmail.com](mailto:sabbagh1984@googlegmail.com).

## One year on - no justice done

Friday July 3, 3pm to 7pm: Vigil and public meeting - justice for Habib 'Paps' Ullah, who died on July 3 2008 during a police stop and search.

Vigil: 3pm, High Wycombe police station, Queen Victoria Road, High Wycombe.

Public meeting: 7pm, the Hub (next to Union Baptist church), Easton Street, High Wycombe.

Organised by Justice For Paps: [justiceforpaps@aim.com](mailto:justiceforpaps@aim.com).

## Solidarity with the people of Iran

Saturday July 4, 5.10pm: Public meeting at Marxism, hosted by Hands Off the People of Iran, room 3B, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. Speakers: John McDonnell MP, Yasmine Mather (Hopi chair), Socialist Workers Party (invited), Socialist Party (invited).

The masses in Iran are continuing to defy the regime, while opposing imperialist intervention. They urgently need our material and ideological solidarity. Hopi has urged the SWP to incorporate the meeting into its Marxism event.

Organised by Hopi: [www.hopoi.org](http://www.hopoi.org).

## Colombia solidarity

Saturday July 4, 10am to 5.30pm: Conference, School of Oriental and African Studies, Brunei building, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1 - indigenous and popular resistance.

Followed by Bolivian and Latin American dance, 6pm, Arch INKA, 202 Coldharbour Lane, London SW9. £5/£10.

Organised by Colombia Solidarity Campaign: [info@colombiasolidarity.org.uk](mailto:info@colombiasolidarity.org.uk).

## Soho Theatre - 'Everything must go!'

Until Saturday July 4: 7.30pm; matinees: Saturday June 27 and Saturday July 4, 3pm. Tickets £15 (£10).

Soho Theatre's most exciting writers take on the economic crisis to create provocative and playful bargain-basement theatre.

Directed by Lisa Goldman and Esther Richardson.

Saturday July 4, 10am-6pm: 'Everything must go!' - the debate. A day of provocation and debate around theatre and the economic crisis.

020 7478 0100; [sohotheatre.com](http://sohotheatre.com); 21 Dean Street, London W1.

## Justice for Shrewsbury 24

Saturday July 4, 10.30am: March and rally with Ricky Tomlinson. Assemble St Julian's Friar car park, Shrewsbury SY1.

Organised by PCS Shropshire: [www.pcsshropshire.selfip.org](http://www.pcsshropshire.selfip.org).

## Cricket for the people of Iran

Saturday August 1, 12 noon: Fundraising match, Hands Off the People of Iran v Labour Representation Committee, Low Halls sports ground, South Access Road, London E17.

Hopi (captain: Attila the Stockbroker) will play LRC (captain: John McDonnell MP) in a 30-over game to raise £1,000 for our comrades in Iran. Also 'calypso cricket', bar, barbecue, car boot sale, stalls for organisations and campaigns.

Followed by benefit gig, Dalston social centre, 2a Belgrade Road, London N16, with Attila the Stockbroker, Tickin' Time Bomb John, the Avatars and many more.

Organised by Hopi (Ben: 07792 282830) and LRC (Rory: 07790 007273).

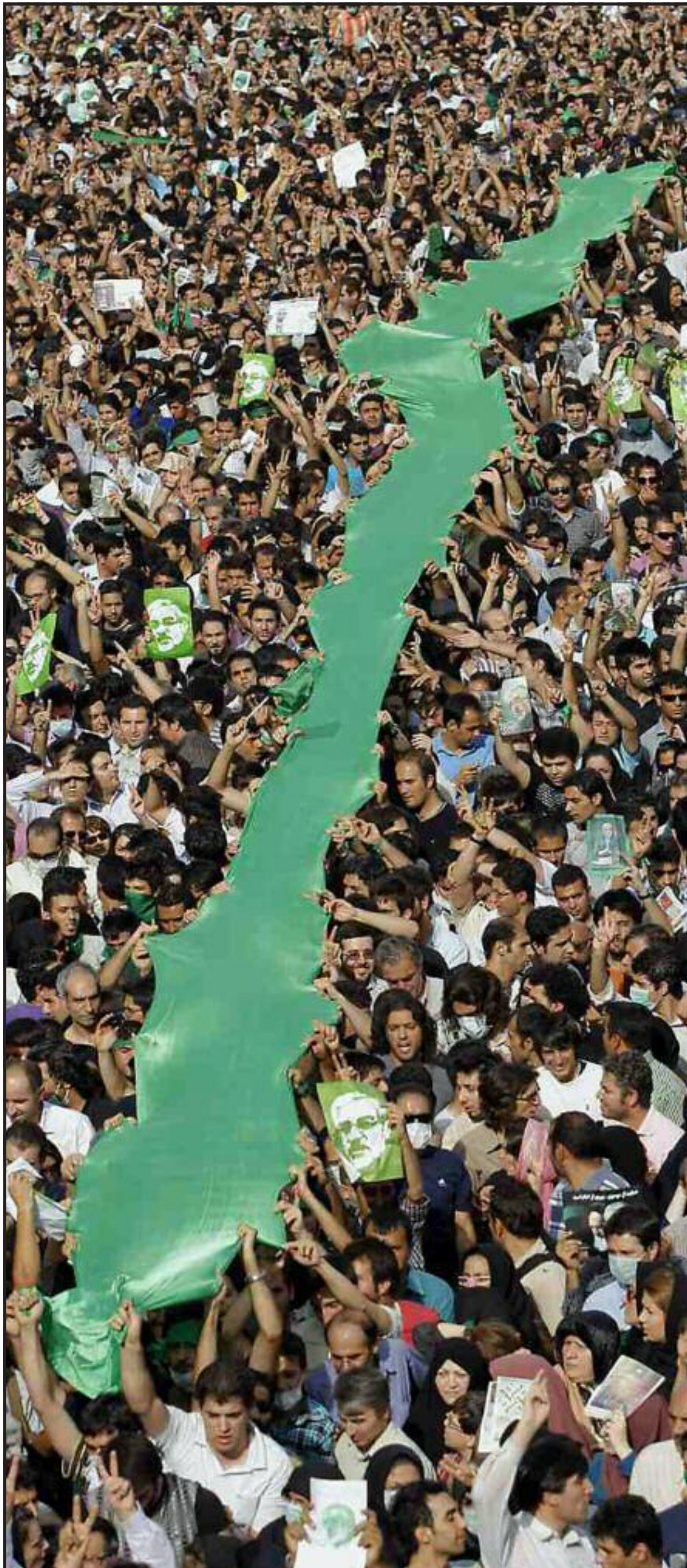
## CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

## RDG

To contact the Revolutionary Democratic Group, email: [rdgroup@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:rdgroup@yahoo.co.uk)

## IRAN



Giant green banner: colour revolution?

# Against against

Mike Macnair explains why it is now more urgent than ever to fight on two fronts

In last week's issue James Turley charted the responses of the British left to the mass mobilisations in Iran against Ahmadinejad's 're-election' and to the repression unleashed by the regime. In the main comrade Turley celebrated the fact that the majority of the organised left had chosen the right side, though towards the end of the article he warned against the Alliance for Workers' Liberty's uncritical support for the social-imperialist International Trade Union Confederation's June 26 solidarity protest ('Litmus test for the soul', June 25).

In the event, this sort of uncritical support turned out to affect wider parts of the left who attended that protest. It is therefore necessary to re-emphasise a very fundamental point. Solidarity with the mass movement in Iran has to be placed *together with* opposition to the US imperialist state's (and its British side-kick's) threats against Tehran, to the sanctions and to US plans for the Middle East.

Hands off the People of Iran has been arguing since its formation for the converse. That is, that opposition to US imperialism's threats to Iran has to be placed *together with* solidarity with workers' and democratic movements in Iran. Clearly it is one and the same point, simply seen from different angles. An independent working class policy in this context starts from fighting positively for the interests of the working class. It therefore involves fighting on two fronts: *both* against the big criminals (the central imperialist powers) *and* against the little criminals (the local capitalist states - in Iran, the clerical regime).

The victory of the working class can only come through 'winning the battle of democracy'. This implies radical democracy in the government of particular states - and therefore, in Iran, the overthrow of the clerical regime; and therefore, immediately, support for the mass movement against Ahmadinejad's ballot-rigging. But radical democracy also requires an end to the subordination of one nation to another - and therefore, opposition to an imperialist military attack on Iran, to the current regime of sanctions blockade and to any extension of sanctions. This also means opposition to the sort of regime change from above or stage-managed 'colour revolution' which would put in place a government more immediately dependent on the US.

## US imperialism

The replacement of Bush by Obama has altered the tone and the rhetoric of US policy. But the same underlying structural dynamics are still in place which have led to the continuing war in Afghanistan, the invasion and occupation of Iraq, US support for the Israeli war in Lebanon in 2006 and air strike against Syria in 2007, and the war threats and sanctions against Iran.

US productive dominance in the world economy is in (relative) decline, just as the productive dominance of British capital was in (relative) decline in the later 19th century. The result is a necessity for the US to shift - as Britain shifted in

the later 19th century - towards increased exploitation both of the central role in finance and of military-political resources, in order to maintain its dominance or at least slow its decline.

In this context, the US has an objective interest in control of the Persian Gulf region. This was stated as a formal foreign policy principle - the 'Carter doctrine' - in 1980. The underlying ground for this interest is military, and not an interest in 'cheap oil'.

It is true that cheap petrol and other energy resources support the American suburb, the mechanised agriculture of the Midwest, access to the wilderness resorts in the mountains, and the cities in the deserts like Las Vegas and Los Angeles. In doing so, cheap petrol supports the domestic political-economic regime in the US which provides consent for its regime and its imperialist role from the US 'middle class' (in US terms, mainly the upper part of the working class). But until the 1960s US oil producers dominated a cartelised oil market, and since then oil markets have become globalised. So political arrangements in the Middle East are almost completely irrelevant to the availability of cheap fuel - Cyrus Bina, in *The economics of the oil crisis* (New York 1985), provides a systematic treatment of the issue.

More fundamental is the fact that the *military* regime which has continued to operate since the US victory in World War II runs, almost entirely, on oil. Except for a few nuclear-powered submarines and aircraft carriers, the navy runs on diesel, the air force on aviation fuel, and the army on petrol and diesel. Not only does oil fuel the direct weapons of war (fighting ships and aircraft, tanks, etc), but also the logistical underpinning which keeps troops in the field and these weapons running and supplied with munitions.

The problem this poses is not that of US access to oil (or to cheap oil) to run its military. Again, oil resources are global and the oil market is globalised. The problem is, rather, of US capacity to *interdict* access to oil by potential state competitors under hypothesised conditions of open great-power war (when the globalised oil market would disappear). The potential state competitors are all on the Eurasian 'supercontinent': the USSR before its fall, Europe if it can overcome its political subordination to the US, China if it can manage the transition from Stalinism to imperialism successfully. Hence, given US air and naval dominance, oil reserves in the Americas and Africa are strategically secondary. Military-political control of the Gulf region is strategically dominant.

The other side of this coin is that the cold war system allowed the local states of the Middle East some room for manoeuvre between the US and the USSR. Thus Iran was - until the revolution of 1979 - a US client, while Ba'athist Iraq was - between the late 1960s and Saddam Hussein's coup in the same year - a Soviet client. In 1979 the US lost a client in Iran and gained one in Iraq, until changing US needs led to the Gulf War of 1990-91 and all that has followed.

The fall of the USSR immediately

# imperialist war, theocratic rule

seemed to create a 'unipolar world' round the US, and the 1991 Gulf War - a display of US military power for its own sake, and of US leadership in the 'international community' through the UN - seemed to emphasise the point. But the underlying relative decline of the US has meant that there was still room for manoeuvre for local states, albeit on a smaller scale than was possible with the USSR. Thus both the Iraqi regime under sanctions and the Iranian clerical regime have been able to manoeuvre to some extent with European countries and with China.

The Carter doctrine provides the context for continued US support for Israel, and for America's successive wars and manoeuvres in the Middle East since 1979. What the US seeks in the region is the sort of degree of political control of the local states which the US had, in the high period of its dominance, in Latin America.

There is a sense in which the project of maintaining US global dominance through military-political control of the Persian Gulf region is a utopian delusion. All dominant powers sooner or later decline, and the US is most unlikely to be an exception. Moreover, there is some evidence in recent wars of a tendency towards exhaustion of the US oil-based military model as a means of imposing order (as opposed to its capacity to merely inflict destruction). An actual failure of the US military model would, in turn, imply that control of the Middle East would lose its geopolitical significance.

There is also a considerably stronger sense in which the invasion and occupation of Iraq was an irrational means of pursuing US interests in the region. This

irrationality is an indirect effect of the deepening destabilisation of global capitalism, which tends to bring to the fore irrational trends in politics - and also strengthens the direct capitalist interest in war spending as a form of economic stimulus.

None of this, however, means that the US does not have an objective interest in control of the Middle East and in particular of the Persian Gulf region. This implies an interest in (preferably) obtaining a political regime in Iran which is directly politically subordinate to the US state. Or, if this is not feasible, an interest in destroying Iran's capacity to act in the wider region through massive destruction of its infrastructure and military capability.

If anything, the Iraqi fiasco *strengthens* the US interest in 'dealing with' Iran. Having invaded Iraq, the US attempted to impose the sort of political order the neocons believed could be created - and failed. It fell back on the traditional method of imperialism: backing whichever local group was willing to take US support. In Iraq, that has meant mainly the Shia Islamist parties, who are clients of the Iranian regime. The overall effect was therefore to *strengthen* the regional position and autonomy of the Iranian regime.

## Iranian election

Paradoxical as it may seem, the withdrawal of US troops from urban bases and routine patrolling in Iraq (June 30) actually strengthens the US military position in the case of an attack on Iran. Instead of troops spread thinly over wide areas, vulnerable to guerrilla attack or a sudden change of sides by the 'Iraqi security forces', there are a relatively small number

of large fortified bases, backed by air power.

The Iranian presidential election took place in this context. The mass movement which erupted as the fraud became apparent was not a 'colour revolution' orchestrated by mass media and backed by a powerful US NGO/diplomatic/media presence and by a section of the local state apparatus, like Ukraine, Georgia or Lebanon. It was a real mass movement of outrage at the electoral fraud, backed by a section of the elite of the clerical regime who saw the fraud - correctly - as a coup by the Revolutionary Guard and associated factions.

The US and British political leaderships and media struck a studied pose of 'neutrality' until the immediate outcome - the repression of the movement - had become clear. This *in itself* is evidence that the US and British states did *hope for* a 'colour revolution', but merely lacked the means to create one. Once the outcome was clear, the US and British leaderships and media turned at once to condemning the repression.

The ITUC is part of this state operation. It came out of a merger in 2006 of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, which originated in the cold war as a CIA-sponsored operation in the labour movement (funny how the US is so keen on free trade unions outside its own borders, while within they are subject to elaborate legal controls), with the Catholic - Christian Democrat-sponsored - World Confederation of Labour. The ICFTU's policy for the 47 years of its life has dutifully tracked US foreign policy.

In terms of politics *outside* Iran, the outcome is win-win for US imperialism and its British sidekick. If the mass move-

ment *had* led to the fall of the regime or even to a 'reformist' incumbency, the US could have offered the new Iranian administration deals on sanctions, etc, which could bring it into closer subordination to the US. The electoral fraud and the repression of the movement, on the other hand, will inevitably strengthen the hand of advocates of 'tougher sanctions' and - from Tel Aviv and from sections of the US state - of military action against Iran in the short term.

We should therefore expect to see at the very least new proposals for sanctions, and an increasing amount of Ahmadinejad = Hitler rhetoric in the mass media. The advocates of an attack on Iran will attempt to exploit the political advantage in 'western' opinion which they can expect to gain - at least for a time - as a result of the election fraud, the mass movement and the repression. It is therefore not impossible (though it is hard to assess the likelihood) that there will be a rapid escalation of tensions round the nuclear issue preparatory to air strikes in the short term.

## Anti-war and solidarity movement

The danger in this situation is that the imperialist powers will move towards - at least - more sanctions, and - at most - war in the short term; yet the anti-war movement will be unable to respond effectively because it has committed itself to prettifying the Iranian regime in ways which cut it off from broad masses. Meanwhile, the advocates of solidarity with the Iranian masses against the regime are seriously at risk of simply becoming a tail for US and British foreign policy.

We need to fight on two fronts, as Hopi has argued: *both* against the imperialist sanctions and war threats *and* for solidarity with workers' and democratic movements in Iran. This is not just a matter of moral principle.

In order to oppose the sanctions and war threats effectively, we need to do so with eyes fully open to the tyrannical and corrupt character of the Iranian regime and the fact that its 'anti-imperialism' is no more than rhetoric. Otherwise, we will cut ourselves off from broad masses who *do* recognise the character of the Iranian regime and are tempted - in spite of Iraq! - to imagine that 'the international community' or our own state can play some sort of progressive role by getting rid of it.

But equally, in order to build real solidarity with workers' and democratic movements in Iran, we need to oppose the sanctions and war threats. In the case of the sanctions, the point is obvious. The sanctions at the end of the day penalise the Iranian working class and the poor, and provide opportunities for lucrative money-laundering and smuggling operations for sections of the Iranian elite. If they fall, the bombs, too, would inevitably fall not only on the hardened target of Iranian nuclear operations, but - as they fell in Serbia and in Iraq - on any part of the Iranian infrastructure which could be claimed in some way to have 'military value'.

The elections, the fraud and the mass movement all make this struggle *more* urgent. The majority of the organised British left took a step forward by being on the side of the mass movement against the regime. It now needs to take the next step further forward: to recognise the need to fight on two fronts *continuously*, not merely episodically ●

## Hopi Ireland Solidarity protests



More than 40 people joined the Hands Off the People of Iran protest in central Dublin on June 27. We brought the struggle in Iran to Central Bank Plaza with striking images of the demonstrations in Tehran on prominent display.

The Gay Pride march streamed past

our demo and we leafleted the marchers, receiving a very warm response. The situation for gay people in Iran is a very serious and often life-threatening one. Many marchers identified with their plight and were glad to show their support.

Speakers at our rally included Cillian Gillespie from the Socialist Party and Fariba, an Iranian political activist. Comrade Gillespie made clear his organisation's commitment to the working class in Iran. He stressed the need for organisation against the Islamic state and also his total opposition to any intervention from imperialism.

A statement from independent left councillor Cieran Perry, who had to leave early, was read out. It pointed out that the Iranian state is supported by the International Monetary Fund, which also props up the Irish state - itself hell-bent on attacking the working class. His loyalties lay with the working class struggling in both Iran and Ireland. He believed that the protests in Iran had gone beyond a simple reaction to a rigged election and now the very foundations of the state are being questioned.

Fariba spoke of the bravery and tenacity of the demonstrators. She called for

the immediate unconditional release of all prisoners and for a stop to the arrests and killings. She wanted people to be aware of how important even small acts of solidarity are.

We finished our protest by chanting slogans in support of the striking workers and the struggle for mass democracy. We shouted, "Down with the Islamic regime" and "Solidarity with the movement". We also made clear our absolute opposition to imperialist intervention - we do not want another Iraq. We want solidarity from the working class in Ireland, not from the Irish government.

A large number of people signed up to get involved in the campaign. In particular a number of Iranians came forward. This has given a great boost to the Dublin branch of Hopi. We now plan to organise other meetings and stalls in the capital as well as in Cork, where we have a launch meeting on July 2. We hope that people in other parts of the country will come forward to help, especially as we have had very good coverage on local radio stations ●

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## DISCUSSION



Homo erectus: first out of Africa

# Evolution's revolution

Mike Belbin looks at the emergence of human culture and the vital role of symbolism

**"Do materialists really think that language just 'evolved', like finches' beaks ...?"**

**- AN Wilson, 'Why I believe again' New Statesman April 6 2009**

**"We are annoying to the leopard because our ancestor stole fire from theirs"**

**- South Amerindian story**

What kind of animal are humans? To the crude materialist we are, according to taste, chiefly animal; bundles of needs, habits and reactions; savage or simple. To the spiritual believer, animal matter required something extra, something originally separate, to become human. Is human culture then just another kind of animal behaviour? What does it mean to trace humanity's development from nature to society? What is the 'missing link' between natural history and anthropology? If animals communicate, and they do, is there anything special about human language?

## Darwin's dog

In the *Descent of man*, Charles Darwin argues that many capacities of human beings have their origin in the basic abilities of animals - to communicate, to feel affection for one's young, entailing self-sacrifice, and to appraise the immediate environment.

He takes as an example something close to home: "My dog, a full-grown and very sensible animal, was lying on the lawn during a hot and still day; but at a little distance a slight breeze occasionally moved an open parasol, which would have been wholly disregarded by the dog, had anyone stood near it. As it was, every time that the parasol

slightly moved, the dog growled fiercely and barked." No doubt, the dog was confused, understanding that the movement, as Darwin puts it, "indicated the presence of some strange living agent". The dog had learnt that the movement was linked to a presence, perhaps a member of Darwin's family, the sound being similar to a woman's crinoline skirts. Yet the cause of the noise was invisible.

Darwin adds that this presumption of invisible life may be the animal source of ancient people's belief in spiritual agencies: that is, attributing agitation in the world to a human-like presence with "the same passions, the same love of vengeance or simplest form of justice, and the same affections they themselves experienced".<sup>1</sup>

The human then starts with the same capabilities as other animals. Frederick Engels, in his classic *Origin of the family*, sketches out human development in terms of the freeing of hands. At one time, certain apes began walking upright, so freeing their hands to grasp - not only in gathering food, but also in the use of tools. Human groups fished, then hunted, following rivers then stalking prey. Another stage produced the bow and arrow and the beginnings in some areas of settlement.<sup>2</sup>

In the century since Engels wrote, conjecture about these developments has been greatly refined and the role of sexuality and language acknowledged as part of the process.

Between 4.5 million and 2 million years ago, evidence has been found in Africa of small-brained apes walking upright. These are assumed to have come down from the trees permanently, perhaps in response to climate change and a search for food. Their teeth were stronger, use-

ful for chewing tougher foods, such as meat. These apes were classified as Australopithecines. During the Pleistocene period - one million years ago - they became *homo erectus*, early human. These primates from the Middle Pleistocene had skulls that were like a narrow dishpan turned upside down, while a later branch - *homo sapiens* - had skulls like an inverted bowl. Remains of this round-headed creature have been found in Java, China, east and north Africa. Another branch of hominids found from this period are the Neanderthals, who later died out (see below).

From the late Lower Pleistocene, simple tools are found with animal bones. These were sticks shaped to dig up roots and stalk small game animals. They had been cut by sharpened flint pieces, which were later tied to the sticks and became hand axes. Spears appear later that can bring down a horse, ox or deer. Similar tools though have been found that were not worn away by use. These could be sacred objects. Meanwhile, the skulls found near them indicate a brain of modern size. Dated 100,000 to 60,000 years ago, these skulls are found among evidence of practices such as the burying of the dead and the building of boats.

Hunting large animals with spears implies teamwork, while the use of sacred symbolic objects indicates myth-making, the passing on of knowledge. Somehow, the upright ape had developed the custom of working in groups, using tools and passing on an understanding of the world.

How had this change occurred?

## Sex and sociability

Most species reproduce enough offspring to ensure survival of their genes

because the male is alerted as to when the female is ovulating and ready to conceive. Chimps and baboons, for example, have an obvious reddening of the sexual parts.

Like other primates, our animal ancestors could have lived either in promiscuous groups or in subgroups or 'harems' controlled by a dominant male. The ape ancestor of humans was probably clear about when the female was ovulating. It has recently been suggested, however, that at some point a female must have been born that had the signs of ovulation concealed. Mating with these females, males in promiscuous groups could not be sure which offspring were theirs. One effect of this would be to stop the usual practice of primates, which is to kill off the children of other males.

Concealed ovulation may have meant in effect that offspring belonged to everyone. Such ambiguity of parenting might make for closer groups all round - more sharing of food and more affection and solidarity between adults and children. These more sociable groups would have had a survival advantage. Flexible female mating might also have encouraged both females and male to copulate just for pleasure, mutual pleasure. The appearance then of mutual sexual pleasure and promiscuous parenting could be the source of human solidarity.<sup>3</sup> Force would not have achieved the bonding necessary. Whatever practices of male dominance, incest taboos or monogamy conventions followed, in the beginning was sexual communism.

## Intelligence agent

These sociable creatures began to develop something else: transmittable intelligence or language. In *Prehistory*

*of the mind*, Steven Mithen allies the physical and social growth of early humans with the kind of intelligence he speculates developed at different times.<sup>4</sup> The perceptiveness of post-erectus *homo sapiens* was in many ways indistinguishable from animals. As with other mammals, they were familiar with the appreciation of climate and danger. To this was added an expertise in hand tools like stone-cutting implements. For communication, it is likely that these early humans used a simple set of sounds, like animals, to give commands or warnings - 'keep away', 'fruit here', 'large prey ahead'.

Animals use communication for many purposes: marking territory, warning adversaries, courtship. In his work on primate groups, anthropologist Robin Dunbar focuses on the purpose for apes of one particular form of physical communication.<sup>5</sup> While living in groups, apes convey information to and about each other by grooming - picking out fleas and lice from each other's bodies. Whom one chooses to give this attention to, for how long and whom you let watch - these function as social messages, affirming relationships, as well as getting rid of dirt.

Dunbar reckons that any one primate spends 30% of their time grooming others. It is his proposition that, as group size increased, and relationships grew more complicated, spoken language developed as a supplement to physical interaction. Even simple 'chattering' speech communicates better and faster to others than massage: conveying liking, mood and defining a common enemy or rival.

In close-knit groups, the best at such grooming would be those sensitive to the moods of others, communicating

when required, appealing to emotional states, sensing 'bad moods'. Those who could infer 'social knowledge' about other minds and their intentions, as well as defining who to dislike and exclude, could have acquired an evolutionary advantage. 'Reading' and defining others may even have made some individuals leaders.

Furthermore, following Dunbar, it is Mithen's contention that it was this rudimentary language, these particular sounds - words - that began to act as a 'vehicle' for mixing the different intelligences, technical and environmental, acquired in the life of the group. Once created, these names for interpersonal concepts - like/dislike, hostile/friendly - became transferable to other relations in the rest of the physical world. The sky, like a person, is treated as readable: signs of 'discontent' in the sky are not only comprehensible as climatic changes, but as a 'bad mood' or hostile other, contributing to a 'cosmic analysis' of a human-like presence that inhabits the sky.

This may have been followed by rituals to placate the sky, a sort of cosmic grooming - rituals which then bond members of the society together. These 'modern humans' can feel that little bit more confident with the world and each other - 'knowledgeable' - by using their special sounds that are applicable to the state of persons and applying them to the state of things. But why were these sounds transferable in this way? How, in other words, did they work as symbols?

### Standing for something else

Charles Peirce defined a symbol or sign, which could be a word, a sentence or a picture, as something that stands in the comprehension of somebody for something else in some respect or capacity.<sup>6</sup> The words 'dog' or 'bitch' can thus equally stand for a canine. Peirce called the thing that stands for something, the *representamen* and what it stands for, the *object* or *ground* - its idea. The way it is understood in the mind of another was the *interpretant* - when you say 'cheese', you may be thinking Cheddar, while I may take it as Brie.

A representamen can be of three kinds. It can be an 'icon': that is, it resembles its object in some way - a cartoon or a photograph can both be a portrait. A sign can also be an 'index', physically connected with its object - no smoke without fire. Lastly, it can be a 'conventional' symbol, only understood within the interpreting mind as part of a particular code - 'dog' is part of English, while '*un chien*' is French: they are part of different codes. Visual signs can belong to different codes, according to context: on the beach, a red flag may signal danger; on a demonstration, solidarity. Once you have a material representamen or sign, you have something that can be detached, transferred, applied.

It is with this power of detachability that language goes from being rudimentary communication to developed creation, to metaphor, where a word for one thing can stand for another. With this the sociable ape begins to construct what anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss called "the science of the concrete"<sup>7</sup> - a perception of the world as being similar to the human being.

In this 'science', understanding of interpersonal relations, of intentions and actions, is applied to the events of the natural world. Like Darwin's dog, we intuit an invisible presence. The cosmos is felt to be inhabited by something similar to people - spirits, the supernatural, gods - whose actions explain the world. For instance: why are leopards fierce towards humans? Because, says one South Amerindian tribe, they are annoyed at us. Our ancestor, the first human, was once the servant of the leopard, tending the fire that belonged to the beast. One day the ancestor stole the fire and ran off to start human society. There has been an understandable antagonism ever since.

Not only words, but also their combination in a sentence, suggest the action of people on others and the world. Noam Chomsky in his work on linguistics argues that causation and 'embeddedness' form the deep structure, the generative grammar,<sup>8</sup> of all sentences. Though word order may differ in different societies, these ways of connecting noun and verb are universal: 'We are annoying to the leopard because our ancestor stole fire from theirs'; 'The Big Bang sent out various elements which became the universe and created water and hence life on this planet'; 'Chimp 1 made chimp 2 feel friendly enough to allow them to go food-gathering together'.

According to Chomsky,<sup>8</sup> awareness of these ways of formulating things is a deep part of our memory - hard-wired in our brains, as it were - just as the skills of grasping are an inherent possibility of our hands. With the casual and connective relations in sentences, narrative becomes a tool for mapping the world. So began art and science: the fabrication of models to understand things. A general intelligence appears - first as superstitious knowledge, but still a cosmic analysis nevertheless, not just gestures between bodies.

### Synthesis

This is a qualitative change, and, if you like, the missing link. However, it is no snapshot. Between 100,000 and 40,000 years ago, *homo sapiens sapiens* appears. With a detachable material manifestation - signs - their understanding of personal motivation is applied to things: the concept of annoyance applied to the leopard, the concept of anger to the sky. These were then embedded in narratives resulting in a universe filled with cause and motivation.

Lévi-Strauss comments that this form of thinking is mythical, but just as logical as later science, given the appreciation of other people and the behaviour of other parts of the cosmos. Relating to the spirits in things; placating them with ceremonies; imitating them in pictures and dances; contacting them in trances and intoxications; constructing narratives that explain and categorise - all rely on the characterisation of the world gained through analogy between things and people. Not only is the modern human born in Africa, but culture itself comes out of African animism. Once these 'models' of the universe begin to be made, humans then have the opportunity to differentiate between true and false. So begins belief, science, criticism.

This new technology of signs proved decisive. In the area now known as Europe, the most recent hypothesis about why Neanderthals declined and humans flourished is due to this difference.<sup>9</sup> Between 35,000 and 24,000 years ago, the former were outbred by humans because humans maintained supportive cultural bonds connecting groups over a vast area, as evidenced by widely found artefacts like sculptures of lion-headed men and basic musical instruments. The Neanderthals may have had comparable tools and even harder physiques, but the humans had a better form of solidarity, through words, art and music: 'religion' (from *re* + *ligare*: to bind).

If you want to celebrate our ancestors' distinctive survival skills: beyond any knife or bowl, look to one of those chunky female statuettes, often called Venuses or earth goddesses, with their divine rolls of fat, carried from Asia into Europe as the Neanderthals became extinct. Humans survived, through drought and ice age, because they sang to the fat lady.

In summary then, one branch of primates due to natural conditions evolved an upright posture and efficient hands, which promoted improved tool use. At one point, these animals become promiscuous in childbearing, which encouraged teamwork. On the basis of these differences, the species *homo*, the sociable ape, acquired various techniques and knowledges, which were then

combined in a general intelligence embedded in language. This communication by transferable symbols, starting from a rudimentary level, attained concepts of causation and connection - generative grammar - by making analogies between interpersonal understanding and natural events. *Homo sapiens* became a maker not only of things, but also of symbols: *homo fabricator*.

As Darwin commented, "If it be maintained that certain powers such as self-consciousness, abstraction, etc are peculiar to man, it may well be that these are the incidental results of other highly advanced intellectual facilities: and these again are the result of the continued use of a highly developed language."<sup>10</sup>

### Design issues

If we are just animals, then constructive change is an idle dream. Apes do not discuss what a good life is: they just live (often by force); apes do not discuss how one should treat apes. If we are mainly spirits, then maybe the superior spirits - the pure spirits, rather than us - should decide what the good society is, which is probably something that exists only where they live, in a realm that has no connection with the matter of which we are made.

The different philosophies and legends thrown up by class history show that fabrications need not be true, and benefit everyone, to be effective. Their hold on the minds of *homo fabricator* has been described as 'fetishism', similar to the worship of a fetish, a doll containing a spirit. "In that world," Marx comments, "the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relations both with one another and the human race." He applies this not only to early belief, but also to acceptance of the political and social present: "So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands."<sup>11</sup> We still take too many human creations, from economic relationships to constitutions, written and unwritten, for living necessities.

Yet the inadequate constructions of yesterday always exist on sufferance. The sociable ape's urge to fabricate, to redesign, is still with us, if only as a survival skill. The growing interest in self-determination and justice heard in many forms today prevents any easy deference to the established. Many more people too are questioning the unforeseen effects, social and ecological, of our inventions. It remains to be seen whether this expanded awareness can go all the way to a full diagnosis of the problem rather than rest satisfied with treatment of symptoms.

Of course, there is a fear of 'redesign'. We have the utopias of the 20th century, whether 'communist' or 'free market', to discomfort us. This is part of the caution about our constructions: that they may backfire on us. However, though we may no longer aspire to be gods, neither are we cattle. We may not ask people to be perfect, but we do ask them to be accountable. We must continue then to evaluate mistakes and test new proposals, asking the right questions, and construct a greater space for the very process of evaluation itself, all over the world. Criticism is sacred.

Why should the adventure of the fabricating ape be over? We have made our bed and we can change it ●

### Notes

1. C Darwin *The descent of man, and selection in relation to sex* (1871), part 1, chapter 2.
2. F Engels *The origin of the family, private property and the state* (1884).
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4. S Mithen *The prehistory of mind* London 1996.
5. RIM Dunbar, 'Co-evolution of neocortical size, group size and language in humans' *Behavioural and Brain Sciences* No16, 1993.
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8. N Chomsky *Language and problems of knowledge: the Managua lectures* (1988).
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## POLEMIC

# Unity for what?

In the latest 'broad left' initiatives, Marxist politics are once more being forgotten, argues Peter Manson

As was only to be expected, the Socialist Party in England and Wales has reacted in a sullen, resentful way to the Socialist Workers Party's "open letter to the left". The SWP has called for a "conference of all those committed to presenting candidates representing working class interests at the next election", in the hope of establishing a non-specific "united left group".<sup>1</sup>

You might have thought that SPEW would view this development as a step forward. After all, it has been campaigning for several years now for a new, broad "mass workers' party" to replace Labour, and the SWP's proposed conference would, at the very least, give SPEW a platform to agitate for this in front of various sections of the left. But not a bit of it. While the statement from SPEW's executive pays lip service to what it considers the outside possibility that the SWP leaders have "changed [their] methods, and are now willing to work together with others" (which SPEW would "of course welcome"), most of its 2,000-word reply pours cold water on the very idea of such a thing.<sup>2</sup>

In a sense SPEW's knee-jerk response is understandable. Following the SWP's disastrous Respect adventure and the humiliating experience of its Left List in the 2008 London assembly elections, Alex Callinicos, Martin Smith, Chris Bambery *et al* had written off the chances of any viable leftwing electoral intervention as being "more modest than ever" - there will just not be any space for us to contest until "after the next general election".<sup>3</sup>

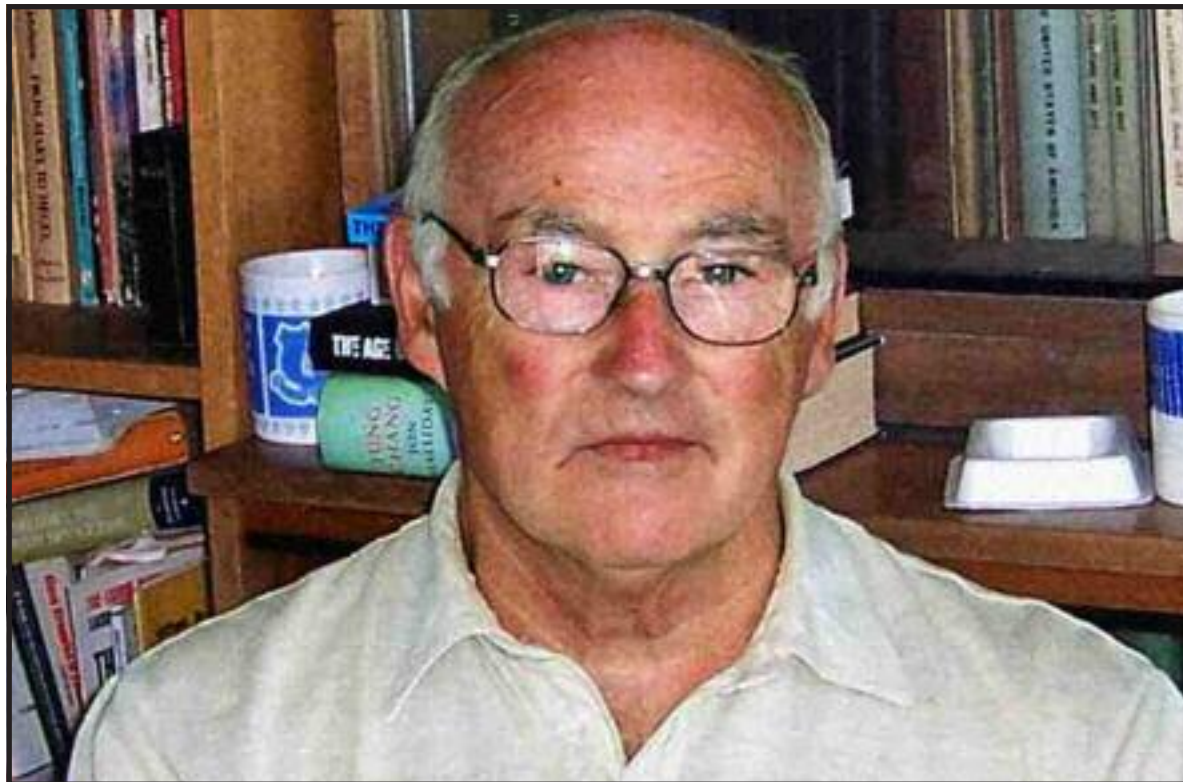
This absurd position seemed to leave the way open for SPEW. Not that its Campaign for a New Workers' Party had been making any headway whatsoever, but when Bob Crow and the RMT union decided to launch a platform, drawn up by Brian Denny of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, to contest the June 4 European Union elections, SPEW was able, thanks to its good working relationship with comrade Crow in formations like the National Shop Stewards Network, to get in on the act.

SPEW chose not to see - and later even deny - the blatant anti-EU British nationalism of 'No to the EU, Yes to Democracy'. No2EU was, after all, "the first electoral challenge to New Labour initiated by a national trade union, the RMT, the most militant industrial union in Britain".<sup>4</sup>

## Left nationalism

The SPEW leadership calculated that No2EU's left nationalism was a price it had to pay to regain the initiative after June 4. It had secured a commitment from Bob Crow that - despite the CPB's insistence that No2EU was *not* an attempt to launch a new party and would be wound up after the elections - a conference would be convened in late 2009 to discuss how to take the process forward. Peter Taaffe, Hannah Sell and the rest of the Socialist Party leadership were convinced that this would put SPEW in the driving seat for the 2010 general election and beyond. They thought the SWP could be written out of the equation.

However, the SWP had been quietly observing No2EU and planning its counter. Obviously No2EU could be dismissed as any kind of serious, permanent force - it did not take a genius to work out its results would be just as pathetic as were the Left List's the previous year. So the SWP timed its "Time to fight back together" move for the week following the EU poll as a way of pulling the ground from under SPEW's feet and attempting to win back hegemony over a dispirited, fragmented left and the thou-



Peter Taffe: not exactly being straight about the past

sands of despairing, unaffiliated socialists - the flotsam and jetsam.

No wonder the SPEW leadership is so upset. That is why it makes a big song and dance about the SWP's failure to even mention No2EU in its open letter. After all, "Given that No2EU was founded only weeks before election day, we believe its vote was creditable and, particularly when taken alongside the vote for the SLP, gives an indication of the potential to create a fighting left electoral alternative."<sup>5</sup>

There must be very few people who believe that No2EU's 1% of the vote is "credible" - especially when it is quite likely that a fair proportion must have come from people believing an organisation named 'No to the EU' might be a *rightwing* nationalist group. Surely the SWP should have made special mention of Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party too - it did poll more votes, don't forget. And if the SWP is to be criticised for its failure to highlight No2EU, then what about its omission in not mentioning the only marginally less "credible" Left List? Its 0.9% in London in 2008 actually translated into a few thousand *more* votes than No2EU, because of the higher turnout for the assembly elections (22,583 for Left List, as against 17,758 for No2EU in the capital). But not even the SWP thinks that Left List's successor, Left Alternative, has any credibility.

And, oh dear, the SWP had the cheek to launch its open letter without consulting with SPEW first, complain the comrades: "In the coming weeks the components of No2EU will discuss trying to build on the campaign in order to create a broader challenge for the general election. To put out an 'appeal for unity' which writes No2EU out of existence - with no prior formal or even informal approach to its constituent organisations - will not be considered serious by those seeking a way forward."<sup>6</sup>

So what's the problem? How about writing back to the SWP proposing a joint conference? Well, you see, the "importance of No2EU" was that it enjoyed the "active participation" of "broader sections of militant workers" (the RMT bureaucracy) - isn't that much better than "any of the existing socialist organisations declaring their initiative to be 'the alternative'?" The experience of No2EU, therefore, "should now be built on, with

a new name, for the general election".

Clearly all this whinging is just about jockeying for position. *SPEW* does not want to be part of any electoral alliance in which it is not the biggest organised left group - the very accusation it makes against the SWP. That was exactly what the Socialist Alliance demonstrated - *SPEW* walked out at the first opportunity, when the SWP refused to accede to its demands for a federal constitution and the right of any group (ie, itself) to veto decisions of which it disapproved.

But *SPEW* holds up the top-down No2EU as an example to emulate and compares it favourably to the Socialist Alliance under the SWP. In No2EU, "the different component organisations had complete freedom to produce their own material. The Socialist Party, for example, was able to produce leaflets putting forward our socialist programme and explaining that our candidates, if elected, would only take a worker's wage." This freedom to operate, claims *SPEW*, is "a considerable advance on the position [the SWP] adopted in the Socialist Alliance, where [it] opposed such latitude being allowed for constituent organisations."<sup>7</sup>

All this is a complete misrepresentation. For all the bureaucratic faults the SWP was guilty of in the SA, it never tried to stop component groups producing their own material. What it argued for - correctly - was for each component to distribute *SA* material, and there was no ban on the various groups supplementing this with their own propaganda. In fact, as far as I can tell, a parallel situation applied in No2EU - except that the content of the website, official leaflets and election addresses had been largely determined by the CPB and Crow before *SPEW* came on board.

In the SA, however, *SPEW* demanded the right to distribute its own material *instead of* that of the alliance itself. In the 2000 London assembly election, for example, *SPEW*'s Ian Page was the official London Socialist Alliance candidate for Lewisham and Greenwich. But the material put out by *SPEW* did not even mention the fact that the LSA was standing across London and called for a vote for a rival group, the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation!

By the way, *SPEW* itself brings up the inadequacy (to put it mildly) of No2EU's

platform, which it says was "limited" simply because it "brought together different organisations around a common programme in order to maximise its electoral impact". However, that programme was definitely not "nationalist", *SPEW* insists, despite the accusations of "some" SWP members. And, of course, we get the usual assertion that No2EU "called for 'international solidarity of working class people'", which is supposed to prove it.

In short, *SPEW*'s response to the SWP's open letter does not show itself in a good light. By contrast, the SWP is bending over backwards to appear reasonable and cooperative. *Socialist Worker* is running a series of short responses from individuals who are either SWP members or those to its right. Some warn about the lack of trust that previous left unity initiatives have generated, but national secretary Martin Smith warns: "Now is not the time to rehash old arguments or settle old scores."<sup>8</sup>

He reveals that the SWP has "begun the process of holding meetings with other organisations and individuals on the left" (including the Socialist Party?) and looks forward to a conference that is "open to all and with no preconditions, to talk about the possibility of united electoral work" (*Socialist Worker* July 4)

## For its own sake?

All the *Socialist Worker* contributors talk about the urgent need for unity - almost for its own sake. Bill Kerry wants to "keep any formation as broad as possible" - it "could be based on the simple 'golden principle' of believing in the need to narrow the gap between rich and poor". And Michael Rosen pleads: "We desperately need to make the things that unite us count more than the things that divide us" (June 20). Meanwhile, Kumar Murshid looks forward to the "red, black and green platform crying out to be created" (June 27).

But what is this unity *for*? The idea is exactly the same as what has been propagated for the last decade: we all come together in some vague way, which must be better than staying apart - mustn't it? Well, actually, it depends on what we do. We could form a leftwing pressure group that hopes to get some exposure in the media. Or we could aim for a Labour Party mark two - only one where the revolu-

tionaries are allowed to operate. Or we could simply cooperate more closely in a series of single-issue campaigns, as Permanent Revolution suggests: "... a stronger unity can be forged through common struggle and solidarity" if everyone works together constructively in the National Shop Stewards Network and Unite Against Fascism. And how about the SWP's Right to Work campaign uniting with *SPEW*'s Youth Fight for Jobs?<sup>9</sup>

For its part, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty simply welcomes the call for a united left and conference of those on the left intending to contest the general election: "This is in line with our call for a new Socialist Alliance."<sup>10</sup>

As I write, the International Socialist Group has not yet publicly responded to the open letter - although the latest *Socialist Outlook* (spring 2009) is still talking about "building Respect as its central project". However, this "could mean at a later stage arguing that Respect should become a part of something bigger and broader which could do the job more effectively". However, the ISG-sponsored *Socialist Resistance* is due on July 1 and its website promises a headline which "sums up the mood across the left: 'Election disaster! Now the left must unite'".<sup>11</sup>

Workers Power too welcomes the SWP call, while slating *SPEW* for its "outright sectarianism". It goes further than the other groups in insisting on "the historic need for a new working class party" and "the need to begin building that party here and now".

WP proposes a "nationwide discussion ... on what kind of programme the party should have and what sort of party it should be".<sup>12</sup> Of course, Workers Power itself advocates a revolutionary party, yet poses as a key task the need to "break the hold of the Labour Party over key unions". So what sort of party do the comrades think those key unions would want to launch?

The truth is that the left seems intent on a repeat of the 'left unity' debacles of the last decade - the SA, Respect, Campaign for a New Workers' Party and now No2EU. All of them insisted that unity had to be 'broad', based on the "80% that unites us" - the "us" being made up of both reformists and revolutionaries. That meant watering down our own programme in order to appeal to Labourites as *Labourites* in the SA and ditching even more of our principles in Respect.

Yet, funnily enough, neither succeeded in recruiting many Labourites - what you had was the 'revolutionaries' pretending to be reformists (sometimes they did not have to try too hard). So are we set for a rerun? It seems both the SWP and *SPEW* want to control initial moves towards whatever new formation is eventually created - whether it be a mini-Labour Party mark two or a mere electoral alliance - crucially so as to be able to recruit from it to their own group.

But the only left unity worth fighting for is one that unites us in a democratic centralist party based on the principles of Marxism - what the SWP, *SPEW*, AWL, ISG, WP and PR all claim to uphold. Why won't they fight for *this* unity? ●

## Notes

1. *Socialist Worker* June 13.
2. 'Workers' party must be built' *The Socialist* June 24.
3. See my report of the Left List/Left Alternative conference *Weekly Worker* November 13 2008.
4. *SPEW* statement, [www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/7070](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/7070).
5. [www.permanentrevolution.net/entry/2747](http://www.permanentrevolution.net/entry/2747).
6. [www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org), June 10.
7. <http://socialistresistance.org/?p=566>.
8. [www.workerspower.com](http://www.workerspower.com), June 29.

**MICHAEL JACKSON**

# Fantasy liberation

**M**uch to the delight of media-owners everywhere, Michael Jackson died suddenly last week after being taken to a Los Angeles hospital. He was aged only 50 and was about to embark on a 50-concert 'come-back' tour starting on July 13 at London's O2 arena. The consequent wall-to-wall coverage, bursting like a tsunami, has made it impossible to ignore the tragic - and often truly bizarre - life story of the 'king of pop'.

Clearly, there has been an outpouring of popular - deflected - grief for Jackson, not entirely dissimilar to the wave of anguish generated by the equally sudden, shock death of Diana Spencer. Many millions feel some sort of emotional attachment to a man they had never met, or only saw on a giant projection screen at some stadium. So we see Filipino prisoners on Sunday in the provincial jail in Cebu - who became an instant YouTube hit in 2007 for their *Thriller* routine - donning saffron uniforms and zombie make-up again to expertly dance to various well-known Jackson songs, such as 'I'll be there', 'We are the world', and 'Ben'. In explanation, one of the prison security consultants, Byron Garcia, remarked: "The inmates consider Michael Jackson as a god here" (<http://tinyurl.com/lgoemd>).

It would be churlish in the extreme to deny that Jackson was a talented individual. Opinions differ, naturally, as to where his true talents and abilities lay. For example, possibly suffering from a touch of hyperventilation, Germaine Greer compared Jackson to Dionysus and Orpheus - not to mention "fellow transcendent dancing boys" Nijinsky and Nureyev, who were but "two candles pale in the light of Jackson's blazing star" (*The Guardian* June 26). While Quincy Jones, who produced the mega-selling *Thriller* album, stated: "He was the consummate entertainer and his contributions and legacy will be felt upon the world forever" (<http://tinyurl.com/m7gpxp>).

In death as in life, Jackson's passing is surrounded by controversy and febrile speculation - some of a fanciful nature, as is only to be expected. Though it will still be several weeks before the results of the first post-mortem are known - somewhat unsurprisingly, the toxicology tests are proving to be very time-consuming - Jackson's family are now awaiting the results of a second post-mortem. The understandably distressed Joe Jackson, Michael's father, even hinted at one stage that he thought "foul play" might be a possible explanation for his son's death.

Then we have the depressingly inevitable sordid squabbling over Jackson's vast fortune - exactly who gets exactly what? So, according to the legal papers filed on behalf of the family, Jackson died without a valid will. Yet the *Wall Street Journal* claims that the entertainer drafted one back in 2002, which divided up his estate between various charities, his mother and his three young children (Prince Michael, Paris Michael Katherine Jackson and Prince Michael II). The Associated Press news agency, for one, is reporting that Jackson had some \$567.6 million (£345 million) in combined assets - such as his Disneyesque Neverland ranch, his share of Sony/ATV Music Publishing, including the rights (ie, royalties) to the Beatles' back catalogue, numerous cars, various antiques and collectibles, etc.

In other words, a lot of dosh to get her up about. And enough paper trails and e-trails to keep lawyers, accountants, financial advisers and all such manner of creatures extremely busy, and in clover, for decades.



**Pop icon, pop victim**

Jackson's death gives us a glimpse, once again, of the grotesque and profoundly distorting celebrity culture which the insatiable mass media both reflects and promotes - and lauds. Whether it be pop royalty like Jackson, 'real' royalty like members of the dysfunctional Windsor family, film stars or the fading and wannabe celebrities featured in soul-destroying shows such as *The X-factor*, *Britain's got talent*, *Big brother*, *Hell's kitchen*, *Strictly come dancing*, *I'm a celebrity - get me out of here* and so interminably on. All indications of a perverse and alienated 'greasy pole' society.

And undeniably Michael Jackson is just about the ultimate example of the awesomely destructive power of the mass media and celebrity culture - and a sad masterclass in alienation and estrangement.

However, all this is only to be expected when you examine, if only for a moment, Jackson's extremely aberrant childhood and upbringing - which saw him being ruthlessly exploited by both his father and Berry Gordy, the Motown pop mogul. As a founder member and lead singer of the Jackson Five - where he closely modelled his dancing on the

unquestionably great James Brown - the young Michael acquired astonishing levels of fame and money at a disturbingly early age. Instead of throwing a football around, hanging about with the kids next door, playing games and learning basic life skills, from the age of five Michael was working as a professional entertainer and all that means in terms of relentless rehearsals, gruelling tours and exhausting recording sessions. The Jackson Five made 15 records for Motown and with their first four singles making it to No1 in the US this generated a huge income stream (not least for Motown records). With the job consuming his life from such an early age who wouldn't get screwed up? Added to which the family were also devout members of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Michael actually engaged in door-to-door evangelising in 'disguise' - only in 1987 did he formally break with the religion.

So, of course, it came as no great surprise in 1992 when he told the *Oprah Winfrey* show of his extraordinary domineering father, whose obsessive - almost Faustian - desire to see Michael 'succeed' in the music/entertainment business meant sacrificing his son's

chances of living any sort of normal or satisfying childhood. The poor Michael was almost doomed to a stunted, wretched, existence - fatally prone to all manner of irrational and morbid whims and desires. Rather than an enviable superstar in charge of his own destiny, Jackson was more a *slave* to celebrity culture and its addictive, gaudy trappings.

Hence his crazily self-indulgent spending patterns, akin to a decadent monarch or aristocrat of old. His longstanding, and confessed, addiction to a toxic cocktail of painkillers and various other prescription drugs - which may well have led to his death. His two absurdly inappropriate, and disastrous, marriages - the first of which, to Lisa Marie Presley (Elvis's daughter), was widely regarded as being unsummated. His statement that the youngest child, Prince Michael II (aka 'Blanket') was the result of artificial insemination from an undisclosed surrogate mother and his own sperm cells. Making the spoon-bending, harebrained screwball and semi-fraudster, Uri Geller - who insists that his 'paranormal powers' were given to him by aliens - his 'personal advisor'. His friendship to Elizabeth Taylor and Liza

Minnelli - not exactly role models of how to lead a healthy, balanced life. And sleeping in an 'oxygen bubble' to prevent ageing.

No wonder that Jackson invested so much time and energy, and money, in concocting a fantasy liberation on earth - thus the aptly named Neverland, though many would regard it as more of a dystopia than a utopia. A pseudo-retreat, a bolt-hole, from the unbearable pressures, and generalised insanity, of what was Michael Jackson's life.

But, having said all that, communists stress that none of this automatically made him into some sort of criminal or monster - least of all a "serial paedophile" who uses "pornography and alcohol" in order to "groom" young boys, as was alleged four years ago by the prosecution lawyer at the media circus that passed itself off as a trial. Though eventually acquitted, Jackson faced 10 charges relating to the supposed sexual abuse of a then 13-year-old male teenager, Gavin Arvizo, which saw the singer also charged with "conspiracy to kidnap" and "administering an intoxicating agent".

Indeed, before and after the trial, Jackson had been dogged for many years by accusations - and rumours - of 'paedophilia' and the sexual abuse of 'minors'. Yet the essential point for communists is that, even if Jackson had been guilty of the charges, this would have demonstrated the need for effective *treatment* - not to be cast into the nightmarish and criminal US prison system, which contains some 2.3 million inmates (disproportionately black). Or inhumanely shoved into the specialised colleges of paedophilia that the 'rule 43' segregated wings create.

There is one particularly disturbing aspect to the sorry Michael Jackson story. In his hit song, 'Black and white', Jackson sings: "I said if you're thinkin' of being my brother, it don't matter if you're black or white." But, of course, it certainly mattered to Michael Jackson - it mattered a great deal. He wanted to be *both* black and white. Or, to put it another way, Jackson was a living example - if that term is not in bad taste - of how *racialised* United States society still is, Barack Obama or not. Only a fool would say otherwise.

Hence the utterly bizarre changes to Jackson's skin pigmentation - making him paler and paler. Whether this was due to a powerful course of drugs or the effect produced by a highly sophisticated hi-tech mask is still unclear.

Here we have a striking paradox. Jackson - a black man - gained an audience amongst white listeners. In that sense, Jackson played a progressive role in breaking down racial segregation - musical and otherwise. Yet it seems that in order to reach out and capture this audience, he felt impelled to become a 'white' person as well as a black person. Clearly whiteness represented some ideal of beauty in a mind that was shaped by 1960s US racism.

Jackson's demise serves to remind us of the fundamentally amoral nature of the 'bubblegum' pop and entertainment industry, which depends (and increasingly so) for its enormous profits on the exploitation of children - whether as performers or consumers. This means the ceaseless and cynical manipulation of the fancies, whims and fantasies of pre- and early teen girls and boys, especially girls. Such an industry by its very nature - just like capitalism in general - breeds rapacious greed and, more often than not, malfunctioning and thoroughly one-dimensional, non-rounded, hapless human beings.

Like Elvis Presley, Phil Spector and the unfortunate 'Wacko Jacko' ●

**Eddie Ford**

## OBITUARY

# Worker-intellectual who fell prey to the right

David Douglass looks back at the life of Lawrence Daly: October 20 1924-May 23 2009

**B**y the late 1960s, the left was on the ascendancy within the National Union Of Mineworkers. This was illustrated in 1968 by the election of my mate, the left-Labour Lawrence Daly, for NUM general secretary, beating Joe Gormley, the arch-moderate. But we were not having it all our own way. In 1971 Gormley defeats Mick McGahey for NUM president. The pitmen think red Mick - the communist and leader of the Scottish miners - is a step too far; perhaps they think Joe will strike a balance with our Lawrence.

But his election was the start of a wind of change that would blow away the cobwebs from the union and in the process bring down a government. As it turns out, though, Lawrence is more Labour than left, but we were not to know that just then.

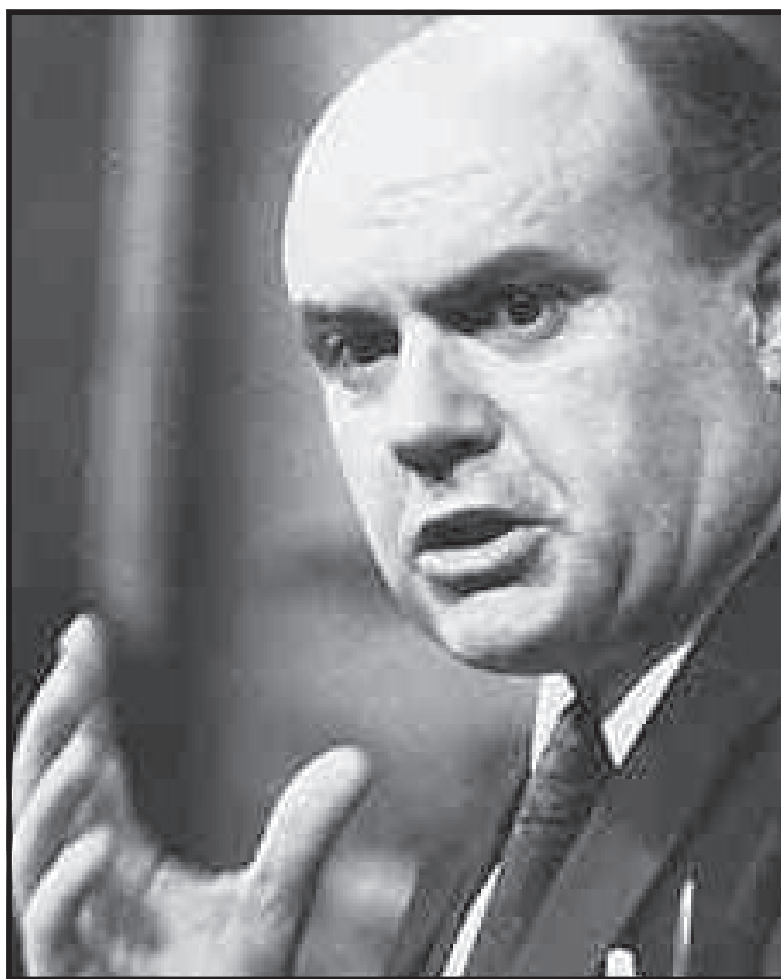
He was a man of the old tradition of Marxist worker-intellectuals and thoroughly well read. He knew his literature, he knew his political theory, he was a lover of art and poetry. On the TV *Book club* intellectual discussion programme, given over to a panel of writers and critics, Lawrence was a regular member of the team. Analysing books, plays, poems. That he was a coal miner and leader of our union was a great source of pride for me.

One of the authors of a new, comprehensive, though flawed, book on the 1984-85 strike recalls how he "treasures the memory of standing with Daly on Euston station at midnight, some time in the early 70s, after long sessions in the pub, and reciting the whole of act 1, scene 2 of *Julius Caesar*. First Daly played Brutus, then they changed parts and he played Cassius" (F Beckett, D Hencke *Marching to the fault line: 1984 miners' strike and the death of industrial Britain* London 2009, pp20-21).

Lawrence was a member of the prestigious International War Crimes Tribunal investigating America's war on Vietnam. It had been established by the great veteran peace campaigner, Bertrand Russell, and included internationally famous philosophers, lawyers, parliamentarians, historians, writers and scientists. Lawrence's voice was there, not only as representative of the British working class, but also in an equal intellectual capacity as Sartre, de Beauvoir, Deutscher and the others. He visited Vietnam as the bombs fell - defying all caution, he went to see for himself whether or not the USA was devastating civilian towns.

Lawrence was born of Irish roots, and mixed religion, in the West Fife coalfield. His dad, Jimmy, had been a founder member of the Communist Party, and a militant in the Miners' Federation. The family felt the whip of the blacklist and eviction time after time, as the coal-owners crowded on top of their dung heaps following the massive defeat of the 1926 strike and lockout. Lawrence went down the pit at 14 and joined the Young Communist League that same year.

His early years were deeply immersed in the culture of Scotland, the politics of class struggle and Marxist theory. In 1972, I invited Lawrence back to Ruskin College, Oxford to a boozy, noisy sing-song, discussion and poetry reading of the kind which dominated the left workers' movement at that time. Memorable, of course, was his fine rendition of Scottish workers' songs and his faultless



Lawrence Daly: yearned for Scotland

presentation of Burns. One of the comrades - Big Chris Green, a cockney locomotive fireman - suggests to Lawrence: "I think you will be the last general secretary of the NUM" and Lawrence, with a twinkle in his eye, replies: "No, he will be", pointing at me. It was quite an honour and a noble prediction - but, no, it never came to fruition: the forces of political opposition always had more organisation than I did.

Lawrence was to the left of the Communist Party, having publicly torn up his membership card (although no-one seems quite certain if this was in protest at Khrushchev's anti-Stalinisation in 1956 and what they considered a right turn or the crushing of the Hungarian rebellion that same year).

The NUM HQ in London stood at the end of Euston Road, round the corner from North Gower Street - which, as it happened, was the home of the Agitprop bookshop. I encountered the two buildings at the same time. What I think none of us realised was that the NUM offices were opposite those of the state's secret political service, MI6 - that was discovered decades of surveillance later. They probably had extensions attached to our phones - in fact they needed only to open their windows to earwig on the NUM and urban guerrillas.

But Lawrence was a fish out of water down there. At the end of his shift in the office, he would stroll round to the pub on North Gower Street and after a few jars regale the scattered commuters with fine renditions of pit songs and rebel verses. "The foggy dew" was one of his best performances - head back, arms outstretched: "While Britannia's sons with their long-range guns sailed into the foggy dew ..."

An unlikely team we made. There were the comrades from Agitprop - militant, anarchist, some to be the bedrock of

at. I must have stayed for the weekend, because I recall our loud conversations in the country pub, about strikes and rebellions and history, drawing disdainful remarks about "full-time, well paid trouble-makers". "That's us," said Lawrence, "Na, that's you," said I.

The wage or the house we paid Lawrence wasn't a matter of contention. He was a Scottish communist collier through and through, and a sudden change in income and venue wasn't going to make him cross the class line (but his isolation and class loneliness probably cost his health).

Lawrence did in the end move to the right, though. On the crucial issue of the 'social contract' he and Gormley switched from the union's stated opposition to this Labour government project to one of support and threw the union's votes behind the collaborationist scheme. That was to draw a withering criticism from me in the pages of *The Miner*. Lawrence responded in person in the next edition with a double-page defence of his actions.

That the national secretary had deemed to publicly cross swords with me, a person of no particular position, demonstrated just how deeply he felt the criticism. He was more than aware that it was the rank and file that had put him there, through a combine of unofficial agencies represented by people just like me, and it might be said in opposition to Gormley. That movement had not yet finished its work.

Lawrence chose in the end the wrong side, and was as far as his health was concerned in the wrong place. He became caught in that pincer, but I actually didn't discover to what extent he was a casualty of it until nearly the end of my tale.

In 2002 at the NUM Yorkshire area council meeting, I notice in the report of the finance and general purposes committee, that Glencraig, Lawrence Daly's house provided by the union, has been sold. Few people apart from myself knew whose house this had been. I enquire why it is being sold and I am told that Mrs Daly is moving back to Scotland. I assume Lawrence, my old comrade and

later sparring partner, has died. Nobody contradicts me.

Then in June 2005 Ian Lavery, the national chairman of the NUM, with whom I had been to see *Billy Elliott*, the musical, and with whom I had argued, debated and disagreed over policy, principle and history, phoned to tell me that he could now confirm my old mate was in fact still alive. He was living alone in a bedsit in London, apparently a victim of some mental-health problem. I am "astounded", to use one of Arthur Scargill's pet words. In fact, I now discover he had spent the last 10 years of his life, since 1989, in a nursing home in Luton, but I had told everyone, including Ian, that Lawrence had died around 1986. How could such a man, a giant of humanity, wit, poetry and wisdom, be discarded like a rusting hulk on some abandoned and unknown shoreline?

I made it my intention to see if we could at least check on his welfare and if we could draw him back into our solidarity. I never succeed and on May 23 2009 he died - I had never got to see him again. His family resolved that his funeral service was to be a private affair, so we did not get the chance to celebrate Lawrence's great humanity and intellectual capacity, and the love many of us in the miners' movement felt for him regardless of political differences over the passage of time. However, the Scotland area, along with Northumberland and Durham, are talking about having a memorial rally for him. When they do the left and union movement should attend it on mass.

What can we say of Lawrence in conclusion? A pitman of the old school, a Marxist and communist steeped in the old-time religion of communist organisation and history. A brilliant union orator and negotiator. An intellectual, font of music, song and poetry. A comic and storyteller.

He fell victim to isolation from the rank and file and prey to rightwing, social democratic influences. But his life and contribution should not be judged solely on that. Farewell, comrade.

Our sympathies go to his family, close friends and comrades ●



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**REVIEW**

# Back to the futurists

Tate Modern **Futurism**; ends September 20

To mark the centenary of the futurist movement, the Tate Modern is now displaying what it describes as a “ground-breaking exhibition”. Despite this bold claim, the experience is actually rather low-key and captures little of the feverish drama of early 20th century Italian modernity.

In 1909, FT Marinetti penned the ‘Futurist manifesto’ in the newspaper *Le Figaro*, and declared his contempt for all backward-looking forces that inhibit the full expression of modernity and vigour. With all its madness, destructiveness, misogyny and (rather uninformed) glorification of war, the futurist movement was a celebration of the new. But 100 years later, Marinetti finds himself firmly in the grasp of the “archaeologists and antiquarians” he so despised.

The new Tate exhibition is a stale, retrospective study of futurist and futurist-influenced painting and sculpture of the sort that would provoke the most acerbic reaction from any self-proclaimed partisan of the movement. The thing about futurism is that it is all talk, showing off, bombast, cacophonous noise and demented writings - nothing of the movement’s pretence or energy is really captured by a series of paintings accompanied by boring historical prose. The futurists were not seminal painters: they were enshrining an idea; and to celebrate their anniversary by purely focusing on this is to miss the point spectacularly.

That is not to say that there were not some superb works on display. Futurism’s borrowing of simultaneity of experience from Cubism, combined with its particularly visceral choice of subject matter certainly produced some striking images. Carra’s huge ‘Funeral for the anarchist Galli’ canvas, depicting a police raid and subsequent riot, looms over the viewer and draws you in with its mechanistic, violent shapes and dynamic force lines.

Umberto Boccioni’s ‘Forces of the street’ allows the viewer to experience the speed of an approaching tram as it looms in the distance, clatters towards and eventually over you in a single instant. Modern life, it seems,



Liubov Popova, ‘Study for a portrait’

moves much faster than our perceptions will allow us to comprehend.

Another work by Boccioni is better still: his 1911 triptych, ‘States of mind’, depicts travel in the three images of ‘The Farewell’, ‘Those who go’ and ‘Those who stay’. The pictures sing of movement and excitement, but the anonymous figures, bent double in the whirl of speeding landscapes, are desolate and heart-rending.

On leaving the exhibition, I was left with the

strong feeling that this was an opportunity missed. A look back at such a vigorous, but naive an artistic movement as futurism should not have been such a studious affair. Perhaps though, these anarchistic, patriotic and warped children of modernity got just what they deserved: a dedication that represents their own personal hell.

*Futurism* is on now at the Tate Modern and runs until 20th September ●

Dani Thomas

## Summer Offensive

# Meat and money

The Socialist Workers Party’s Marxist event starts on July 2. Communist Party comrades will be joining supporters of Hands Off the People of Iran at this important event on the left to build for a Hopi-hosted meeting on the Saturday, July 4 (see ‘Action’ column for details).

The willingness of masses of people to confront the regime on the streets - whatever our estimation of the political leaders who had hegemony over the rebellion - is inspiring. It underlines the essential truth of the message Hopi has consistently propagated. The raw material for fundamental, progressive social change exists in Iranian society itself. Imperialist intervention in the form of direct military attack - like ‘soft war’ sanctions - would be a disaster which would disorganise and scatter the social forces capable of challenging the Islamic regime: crucially the working class itself.

In last week’s paper, James Turley noted that most of the left in this country had more or less measured up to the events in Iran, had offered critical support to the protesters and taken a decent line. But the sad truth is that the solidarity we have all been confined to has been overwhelmingly of a journalistic variety - a reflection of the scattered and ineffectual state the left has imposed on itself.

The CPGB has been central to the work of Hopi and fully supports its initiative in

calling this meeting and its attempt to pull bringing the left together to discuss the implications of events in Iran for the region and the world. Perhaps, with some luck and hard work, it might also lay the basis for united solidarity initiatives with a little more meat on them. With principled unity we could perhaps start to get some *really* serious work done.

The CPGB consistently fights for this sort of unity, not simply at the level of campaigns like Hopi - important as it is - but, crucially, at the highest level: that of a working class party. That is the message this paper pumps out in one form or another every week and that is the message that is actually starting to convince a wider periphery in the movement. Injecting real momentum into our project requires lots of things, not least cash - and that’s why the annual Summer Offensive is so important.

This week has been very pleasing indeed. In my last column, I made the call for the pace of the campaign to be picked up - and readers certainly responded! Our running total this week has shot up to £8,589.50 - some £4,925 came in from comrades. Fantastic work, everyone!

Two hefty donations account for a large chunk of that total. One from comrade SK, who becomes the first to actually fulfil his individual SO target (and now has the time to forge on to higher levels,

of course ...?). Second, DR donated £2,000 on behalf of our comrade, Cameron Richards, who was taken from us by cancer last year.

Numerous smaller donations also came in and are much appreciated. MM - a first-time SO donor, I think - gave £100; SM, a long-time comrade now in Glasgow, donated £40; NR has taken a large chunk out of his target (£300); WD, a new associate member, produced another tenner for the fund; veteran supporter FK gave £25; JD needlessly apologises for ‘only’ donating £50, as he is “a pensioner with commitments” - including to the party, obviously, comrade; PB slipped £10 on top of his re-sub, despite his membership of another left group; GS’s £20 nestled in the same envelope as his application to become an associate member of the party; and finally £25 came in from RF just as I was writing this paragraph!

All greatly appreciated, comrades. An excellent week for the campaign. And, as many readers will have noticed, progress is being made in repairing our website - we had 12,086 visitors last week ●

Howard Roake

Help the Summer Offensive. Fill in a standing order form (back page), or send cheques, payable to Weekly Worker

# What we fight for

■ Our central aim is the organisation of communists, revolutionary socialists and all politically advanced workers into a Communist Party. Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ The Provisional Central Committee organises members of the Communist Party, but there exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called ‘parties’ on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed ‘line’ are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars, occupations and sanctions, in particular those in which the British state is directly complicit. We constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, ‘One state, one party’. To the extent that the European Union becomes a state then that necessitates EU-wide trade unions and a Communist Party of the EU.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. We oppose the slogan ‘British jobs for British workers’. All forms of nationalist socialism are reactionary and objectively anti-working class. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote. They will resist using every means at their disposal. Communists favour using parliament and winning the biggest possible working class representation. But workers must be readied to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.

■ Communists fight for extreme democracy in all spheres of society. Democracy must be given a social content.

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women’s oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin’s Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

■ All who accept these principles are urged to join the Communist Party.

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# weekly worker

## Lessons of Lindsey workers' victory

# Political fight to make the gains permanent

**A** protracted and hard-fought struggle has drawn to a close at the Lindsey oil refinery (LOR). And there is little doubt over who has come out on top - all the workers' demands have been met, including the reinstatement of nearly 700 made redundant and sacked, guarantees of work, and (paper) commitments not to victimise militants.

This is not the first time in recent history that a dispute at LOR has taken on significant proportions - in January this year, an unofficial walkout followed the news that a construction subcontractor would be shipping in the workforce for their job from Italy and Portugal; the contractor, IREM, refused to release details of pay agreements, but the fact that these workers were housed on barges miles away from the site and driven back there for lunch says it all. These workers were being used by IREM to undercut standing union agreements in Britain.

What happened next is well known - the LOR walkout was followed by solidarity actions all over the country. Even the rightwing media supported the strike, opportunistically highlighting chauvinist slogans that had some limited traction in the early days of the strike ('British jobs for British workers'). Yet Polish workers walked out alongside their British brothers and sisters at an oil refinery in Plymouth; in fact, it was perfectly obvious to most workers that this was a particularly brazen attack on working conditions at LOR, and by extension on the rights of all workers - in spite of the idiotic abstentionism practised by some far leftists unwilling to be associated with a trade union struggle for jobs and conditions because of the chauvinist slogans adopted by some of those involved.

Eventually, IREM was forced, broadly speaking, into a truce; but the capitalists in charge at the plant and its satellite contractors were not likely to forget the bloody nose they had been dealt. It seems that, four months after the original dispute, Total - the French oil company which owns LOR - decided that it was now safe to deal with troublesome militants, serving 51 redundancy notices without warning and without the standard option to transfer to another local contractor. On June 11, hundreds walked out of work to overturn the redundancies.

Total's first major response (apart from refusing to come to the negotiating table, as usual) was to very publicly fire another 647 workers, effectively imposing a lockout - this prompted calls for solidarity action, which were met by workers around the country. In fact, well over 20 workplaces (mostly, as in January, in the energy and construction industries) saw significant walkouts, again involving foreign workers. The anger was palpable, with the Socialist Party's *The Socialist* quoting Unite steward Kenny Ward: "Would Total do the same in France? Absolutely not, because there



Burning redundancy notices

would be tankers turned over on their sides ... because the French wouldn't put up with it ... Our government will be subservient to companies like this. But we won't!" (June 23).

Total posted up notices saying that workers could reapply for their jobs on an individual basis - the strikers burned them. Eventually the company was forced to the negotiating table, at which the 647 sacked workers were reinstated, the 51 compulsory redundancies rescinded, and promises of work drawn up. Assurances have apparently been made that no worker who came out in support of Lindsey will be victimised (though no doubt there will be attempts to do so).

So the workers have won for now (although it has to be said that the agreement does not provide for permanent, secure jobs: the 51 originally sacked were short-term contractors) - and the rest of our class can take heart in a general way, that defensive actions can be highly successful even in times of severe crisis. The scale of the walkouts also point to the elementary solidarity that comes

naturally to the working class.

This has once again provided us with a clear lesson: the anti-union laws introduced by Thatcher and perpetuated by New Labour can be broken to the advantage of workers. Spontaneous walkouts of the type that followed the first 51 redundancies are comprehensively illegal - so, of course, are secondary and solidarity strike. The bourgeoisie knows that the power of the working class lies in its *unity*. Since the proletariat is separated from ownership of the means of production, it needs the highest possible degree of united organisation - both trade union and political - to force the bosses and their state to comply with workers' demands. Injunctions against solidarity actions are aimed at undermining that unity, by making the organisation of legal strikes a procedural nightmare. While for workers the anti-union laws are an affront to industrial and political freedom, for the bourgeoisie they are a very sensible class warfare tactic.

Legislation is only effective inasmuch as it can be enforced, however. Just how

shaky the ground is under the anti-union laws was demonstrated in 2007, when the Prison Officers Association - which formally has a non-strike agreement - successfully organised a one-day action which was simply not legally challenged at all. Similarly the experience of Lindsey - both in January-February and June - proves that determined action in defiance of the law can yield results.

It is common on the left to leave it here. The Socialist Party, which has played a leading and generally positive role in both LOR disputes, has unsurprisingly covered the recent battles fairly closely. "The anti-trade union laws were brushed aside by the determined strike action and the solidarity," writes Alistair Tice on the SPEW website, summarising the events - before drawing other lessons concerning the role of shop stewards and so on ('Lindsey workers: militant action pays!', June 26). *Socialist Worker* celebrates the victory in a series of articles that note how the anti-union laws are no match for militant unity (July 4).

Not only can defying these laws produce results for individual struggles: it symbolically weakens the law as a whole. But to disregard a law is not to overturn it - a particular struggle is perfectly inspiring, but the anti-union laws remain real, bureaucratic obstacles to effective trade unionism. They also constitute a shield for the labour bureaucracy to hide behind and use as an excuse for failing to stand up for their members. This legislation must be entirely overturned - which demands a more generalised fight, not just audacious infractions.

And in fact, with every union-type action that contravenes the extant legislation, this becomes *more* urgent. It ups the stakes, and challenges the bourgeoisie to strengthen its hand further in this regard. Total did not simply let the January-February strikes slide; neither will the bourgeoisie class as a whole let the work-

ing class off the hook for its increasing willingness to contravene Thatcher's laws.

Which means that even a more generalised union struggle to force the anti-union laws off the statute book is insufficient. Both trade union and legal gains are, by their very nature, temporary. A *political* fight is inevitable - and it is critically important to take the battle to the capitalists in an organised and coherent fashion. If the class enemy has a free run in high politics, it will find other ways to restrict even further the power of the unions.

And so we arrive at the fundamental question facing our class today - the question of *party*. Parties are, among other things, machines for linking diverse struggles and aspects of social life so as to transform them. There is no such 'machine' in this country presently fit for purpose. Indeed, the very fact that the brief flurry of militant strikes has so brightened up the world of the workers' movement testifies to the long, grinding periods of darkness from which they emerge. For the light to be switched on permanently, you need permanent organisations that are independent of the capitalist state and any particular sector of production - on these counts, unions in their basic tendency and the majority of their concrete manifestations do not fit the bill.

A party cannot simply limit itself to donkey-work in particular struggles, however. The old 'official' CPGB undertook many key tasks of basic class organisation - yet its programmatic degeneracy ultimately rendered it useless even as a galvanising force in the union bureaucracy. The fight for full trade union rights must be part of a full programme for conclusively reshaping society in the interests of the working class ●

James Turley

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