



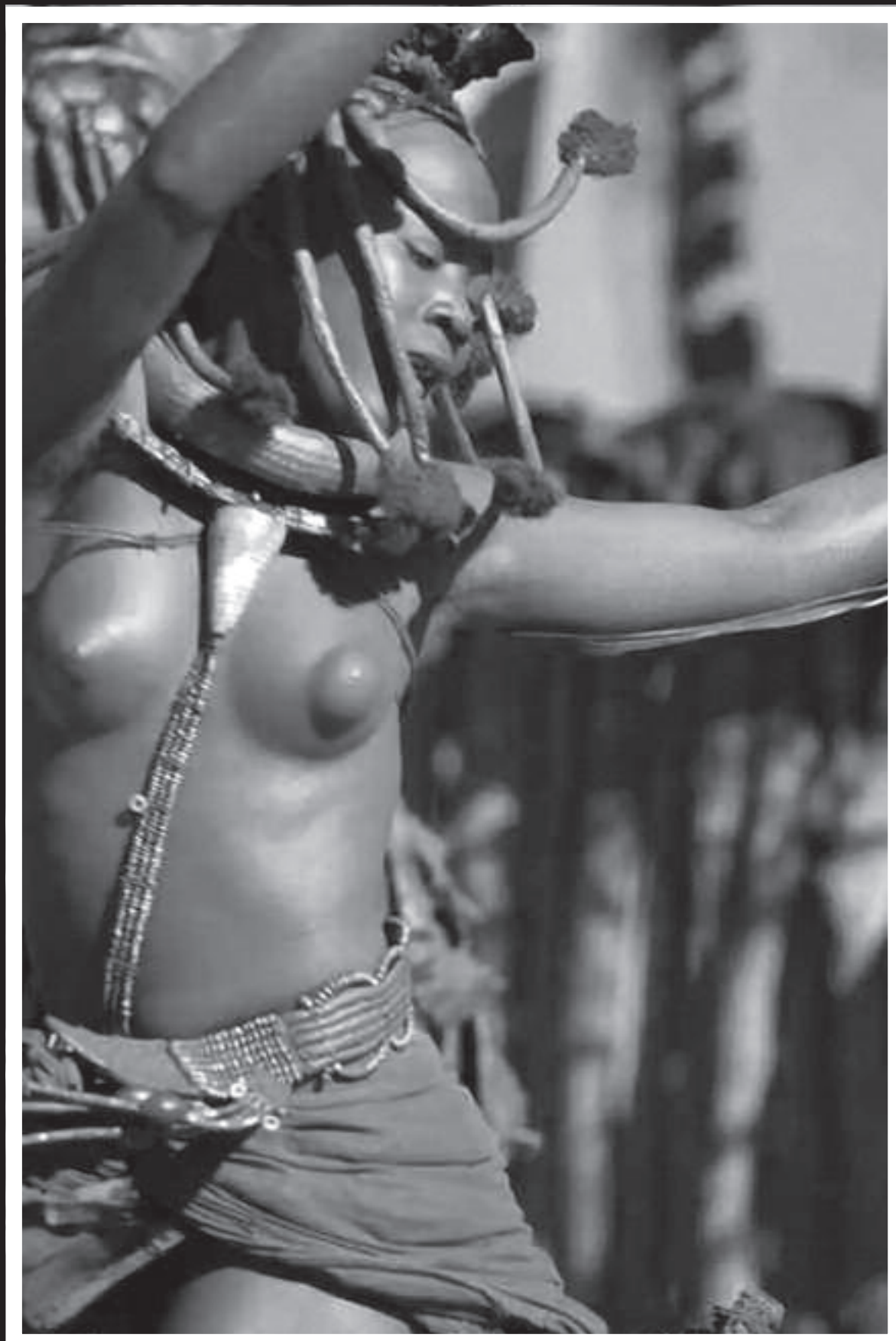
weekly **worker**

**English Defence League stunts:
Ben Lewis discusses the real
lessons of the 1930s**

- Leeds cuts strike
- John McDonnell
- Irish crisis deepens
- Iran re-ignites

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Sex and the human revolution



LETTERS



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

Disappointing

Whilst I have not studied in detail the recent plans to vet the approximately 11 million adults who work with children in one form or another, I do have some disagreement with the notion that it represents a form of reactionary offensive limiting individual liberty ('Farical and reactionary', September 17).

James Turley trots out a number of issues in a black and white way. That most sexual abuse of children occurs in the home is not an issue for dispute. Likewise, however, it is also true that paedophiles (for want of a better term) do seek work or roles that put them into contact with children on a regular basis and that this has been the vehicle for abuse of a multitude of children in the past. Having worked with sex offenders, I can testify to this personally.

Whilst this legislation on its own will not stop sexual abuse *per se*, I feel that it will stop *some* abuse. That some *Daily Mail*-reading types may feel affronted at being queried about any 'worthy' work they do in schools or with young people more generally is not a primary issue of concern, in my view. It strikes me that this represents an affront to the ego of some individuals rather than a concern for policies aimed at reducing risk to children.

I don't know of any social workers, teachers or probation staff who feel anything but total ease about having to go through police checks prior to taking up posts. Generally, it is understood that roles involving work with young people or vulnerable adults require some scrutiny for what strike me as obvious reasons.

Following the logic of this article, should these checks be viewed in the same light? Should the socialist left call for an end to police checks, full stop? I don't think so. There may be issues to discuss around police checks, the Independent Safeguarding Authority, the age of consent and so on. Simply taking a polar opposite view, however, strikes me as ill-informed and disappointing.

Lawrie Coombs
Stockton-on-Tees

Draconian

I find SKS's letter most confusing (September 17). He (or she) is against draconian age of consent laws but *in favour* of age of consent laws generally, without saying how the two differ.

His letter claims that child and adult sexuality are two very different things, but that teenagers are between the two. Three distinct and incompatible sexualities. Does that mean that he is in favour of consensual sex amongst infants, teenage sex amongst teenagers and adult sex amongst adults? If so the present age of consent laws make all three illegal - unless, of course, you think 16-year-olds aren't teenagers. And if 16-year-olds are sexual adults, is he in favour of mutually consensual sexual relations between teachers and students, or is that unprofessional even if carried on entirely outside the school environment?

I accept his point that the question of consent is a complex one and that we live in a society where all sorts of power relations between people exist that muddy the waters; and he is right to call for social action to tackle these problems. However, mutual consent is still the best method of regulating human relations of all sorts (not just sexual ones).

So mutual consent should be the starting point and concrete analysis of the actual relationship the method of enquiry. Blanket proscriptions are not

the answer. They are just an arbitrary, authoritarian way out. While consensual sexual relationships should normally be private, there are many situations where this may not be so and it is reasonable for other concerned and responsible people to check it out. They might be right; they might be wrong - but if the relationship is based on mutual consent they should normally respect it, unless, of course, it involves practices that are injurious to life or health. Then maybe we need to think again. Nothing is simple about human relationships and no easy answers are available.

On the subject of Helen Goddard, she has now been sentenced to 15 months in prison and banned from teaching for life for having a sexual relationship with a 15-year-old pupil. If the girl had been a few months older, no criminal offence would have been committed. That is arbitrary. There was no evidence submitted that any physical or emotional harm has befallen the younger girl.

What is the point of this law in this circumstance? Banned for life! That is irrational. Do people never learn from experience? The effect of arbitrary laws is that they have draconian effects on individual lives. They take power out of the hands of the individuals directly concerned and give arbitrary rights to the state.

Arthur Lawrence
email

Age of consent

The mysteriously named comrade SKS from New York (September 17) argues at great length that age of consent laws are needed "in a society where sex goes hand in hand with power". In effect this is a defence of the status quo and therefore of state control and snooping on the sexual relationships of young people. The comrade puts forward no alternative to what exists in Britain, the United States or anywhere else.

Abolition of age of consent laws is not an isolated demand, but forms part of the communist programme. It is not about "imposing" the sexual needs of adults upon young people. Nor is it a paedophiles' charter, nor a green light for teachers and lecturers to make sexual demands in return for extra tuition and good exam marks. It is one of a comprehensive set of demands designed to empower youth in capitalist society.

Communists want the education system for all over the age of 16 to be thoroughly democratised. We want 16-year-olds to have the vote. We also want to encourage a healthy and natural attitude towards sexual relations. That means full and honest information, non-judgmental health advice and free contraception on demand. Knowledge is power. So if someone who is 25 happens to have sex with someone who happens to be 15, that should be their business. Ditto if both partners happen to be under 16.

Young people should be free to decide when they want to start having sex ... which is the case with the vast majority anyway, whatever the law says.

In countries like Bhutan, Egypt and El Salvador it is illegal to have sex until you are 18. In many places gay and lesbian relationships are outlawed or treated differently to straight relationships. Doubtless this is done in the name of preventing the powerful exploiting the weak, protecting the young from making silly mistakes and, all in all, promoting moral behaviour.

Many other countries have adopted a more flexible and, dare I say it, rational approach. Mostly homosexuality is no longer a criminal offence and is, with very few exceptions, treated equally with heterosexual behaviour nowadays.

In Japan and Spain that goes hand in hand with an age of consent of 13. In Austria, Denmark, Italy, Israel, Hungary and Germany, it is 14. And, yes, there are

laws against coercion and offering inducements. In Mexico 18-year-olds are, I believe, free to have sexual relations with partners as young as 12. Even in the USA, the state of Indiana allows young people between 14 and 16 to have sex without breaking the law. And civilisation has not come crashing down.

Communists seek to empower youth and build a healthy relationship between the generations. This has nothing to do with the media hounding of Helen Goddard, let alone sentencing her to 15 months in jail, putting her on the sex offenders register and banning her from teaching for the rest of her life ... for having a loving and consensual sexual relationship with a 15-year-old pupil.

Sections of the left, it seems, share the irrational, anti-sex attitudes and prejudices of the rightwing moral crusaders. The state should keep its nose out of the bedroom. Sex should be an entirely private matter. Helen Goddard committed an error of judgement, not a high crime against humanity.

Vicky Starr
Herts

Youth U-turn

Over recent years the Liberal Democrats have been attempting to present themselves as pro-youth.

Primarily, they have gone about this by getting involved with the so-called 'youth parliament', calling for votes at 16 (to give them an electoral edge) and the scrapping of tuition fees. However, at the Liberal Democrat conference this week, Nick Clegg announced that in order to be "realistic" the demand to end tuition fees will be dropped. In consolation, he said he would treat students like "grown-ups". Cheers. Clegg went on to say that the Liberal Democrats would have the most progressive policies "of any mainstream party" - but this is not exactly difficult, considering the policies of New Labour and the Tories.

This is a stab in the back for student activists who have been campaigning alongside the Liberal Democrats on this issue. However, it should not come as a surprise. The bourgeoisie and youth do not share the same interests; only through Marxism can youth liberation be achieved.

Callum Williamson
email

Written out

John Masters ('Battle of the ballot box', September 3) wrote the Militant Tendency out of history!

He claimed that "the last time the left achieved more than 1,000 votes per candidate was in 1966." Former MPs Dave Nellist and Terry Fields got 10,551 and 5,952 votes respectively, standing as independent socialists in the 1992 general election after being barred from standing again for Labour due to their links to Militant and their role in the anti-poll tax campaign. Tommy Sheridan got 6,287 votes for Scottish Militant Labour in the same election (and there was, incidentally, a rumour that he was criticised by the Militant leadership for mentioning that he was a revolutionary in an interview in his election literature).

The prospects for socialists in the upcoming general election are very good, even without such 'big names'. New Labour is now promising public spending cuts, like the Tories and Liberal Democrats. And, with £175 billion of predicted borrowing this year, excluding bank bailouts, getting anywhere near balancing the books would require savage cuts and big tax rises, despite Labour and Tory claims that they wouldn't damage frontline services. The leaked document containing Labour's plans for 10% cuts shows there's virtually no difference between them and the Tories.

There has been a £1.3 trillion bailout

of the banks in the UK alone, with \$15 trillion in Europe and North America. Moody's credit ratings agency predicts further losses by British banks of at least £130 billion on top of the £110 billion already written off in the credit crunch, so further bailouts may be necessary to maintain the capitalist system. And this will probably turn into a double-dip recession or depression, even if Labour clings onto power and makes cuts more slowly than the Tories would.

With the mainstream parties taking votes off each other, the left will have a great opportunity at the 2010 general election if we adopt a bold socialist programme (and unite in some sort of federation to avoid standing against each other).

So what demands should socialists put forward? Nationalise all the banks, with compensation only for pension schemes, and run them democratically with most control in the hands of borrowers and savers. That way the bailout money already spent can be used for the benefit of all rather than for bankers' profits and bonuses.

With the hatred of mainstream politicians and bankers, such a transitional demand could be a great vote-winner. Whereas I particularly advocate a democratic revolutionary socialist party putting forward the idea of socialism with proportional representation, as well as participatory democracy and online referenda (if nobody advocates a revolution, we'll never have one), I want more moderate left parties to do well too, and the above is also advice for them.

Finally, I should clarify that my last two letters (and this one) contained my personal views rather than those of the Democratic Socialist Alliance whose name appeared below mine. The DSA does support PR, however.

Steve Wallis
DSA (personal capacity)

What tactic?

Ben Lewis is wrong to claim that "One of the greatest poisons of the workers' movement of the 20th century was the so-called theory of socialism in one country" ('What sort of party and how to get it', August 27). Those who hold this view show that they are unable to distinguish between strategy and tactics in the struggle for socialism on an international scale. This places them in the camp of ultra-leftism. Why? Because defending socialism in one country was a tactical rather than strategic goal.

There were various factors which conspired to hold back revolutions in other countries, but this tactic, first illuminated by Lenin and followed by

Stalin - correctly in my view - is not one of them. The problem is that ultra-leftists want us to follow the same tactics in periods of counterrevolution as those which we follow in periods of revolution. The strategic goal is always international socialism, but this proceeds through tactical stages imposed by uneven development.

With the retreat of world revolution after 1924, and with the further delay of revolutions, particularly in the technically advanced countries for whatever reason, Ben should explain to us what tactic he would have argued for, in preference to the one argued for by the Stalinists.

Tony Clark
London

Doomed

Barry Curtis (Letters, September 17) misunderstands Jim Moody's meaning in his article 'Geoengineered for growth' (*Weekly Worker* September 10). Of course, communists believe that human ingenuity and engineering expertise are necessary in creating conditions for a balanced, sustainable Earth.

But patches across the sun and ocean bacteria that can eat all our excess carbon dioxide and bury it at the bottom of the ocean are not only more science fiction than science fact: they also reveal a mindset that has no intention of cutting back carbon emissions, but merely mopping them up. For defenders of capitalism, the Earth is a free resource to be exploited as far as they dare, not something to be cherished and cared for.

Capitalism's push for ever-increasing surplus value has turned the human species into an insatiable beast. It is a matter of principle for capital that human wants can never be satisfied. Every scientific invention or engineering breakthrough is negated in practice by the never-ending search for profit.

Carbon dioxide emissions are only one problem created by capitalist production. Capitalism is emptying the seas of fish, destroying the fertility of the soil, tearing down the forests, polluting water supplies, and is behind runaway population growth in the third world, not to mention the possible disasters that may be produced by the destruction of biodiversity.

All these problems have market solutions, of course, which only the wealthy can pay for. War, famine and disease can be left to sort out the rest of us and perhaps save the world for a little longer - but the logic of capitalist accumulation means that we can never be sure.

Phil Kent
Haringey

Fighting fund

Spellcheck

As we slowly rebuild our website, the number of visits have started to climb once again. Last week, we had 13,348 readers - about 1,000 up on what we have been getting in recent weeks. And - would you believe it? - three of those readers made an online donation. Thank you, TC, for your magnificent £50, not forgetting TB (£10) and WD (£5).

We also received several handy cheques - £30 from BK, £25 from PL and £10 each from VD and SF. Together with the £210 paid into our account last week thanks to our regular standing order donors, that comes to £350, taking our September fighting fund to £932 with the best part of a week still to go.

This is encouraging, of course, but not before time: we could really do with a big surplus this month both to

make up for deficits earlier in the year and to compensate us for the extra expenses incurred in our office move.

Comrade PL leads from the front when she writes: "Thanks for providing all that serious and stimulating debate. Which other paper gives you two pages of letters?" And, of course, she backs up her words with that £25 cheque.

It's actually a very good point - where else do leftwingers get enough space to put over what they want to say? And the editor corrects your spelling and grammar for free! If you want to show your appreciation, you know what to do ...

Robbie Rix

Fill in a standing order form (back page), or send cheques, payable to **Weekly Worker**

CUTS

Leeds workers on the front line



Rubbish piles up

David Cameron's Tories have been the most upfront in promising savage cuts should they form the next government. These are portrayed as being in the national interest, an antidote to Brown's profligate borrowing and necessary to balance the books. It is the Tories who are at the moment winning the battle of ideas - people have been fooled into genuinely worrying about the ballooning national debt - and they will almost certainly win next year's general election.

Earlier in the month shadow chancellor George Osborne made a point of praising those Conservative local authorities such as Hammersmith & Fulham, Barnet and Devon which, in his words, "are dealing with the constraints" a Conservative government "may face very soon" by cutting costs and rooting out waste. A Tory Whitehall "would have much to learn from Tory town halls", he said in his speech to Conservative councillors.

We should see the city of Leeds as a test-run - not only for what a Tory government would look like in the 'age of austerity', but a Labour or Liberal Democratic government too. All three mainstream parties are now proclaiming the need for urgent and deep cuts.

The Tory/Liberal Democrat coalition controlling Leeds council announced late last year that it would be slashing the basic wage by up to a third for those working in refuse collection, street cleansing and waste management. For the 600 workers within the council's Streetscene services, this means knocking as much as £6,000 off their current wage of around £18,000.

Liberal Democrat council leader Richard Brett, who received £45,800 in allowances and expenses last year, claims that refuse staff are well paid. Obviously too well paid, as far as he is concerned. Cynically, Brett and his allies have been blaming equality legislation dating back to 1975 for their decision to enforce pay cuts. With the enthusiastic agreement of trade unions, including Unison, TGWU and GMB, a regrading scheme was put in motion in April 2007. But what this meant in practice was not the levelling up of wages, but their levelling down.

Unison knew there would be losers, but hoped to minimise their numbers to a tiny handful. The council, however, deviously set out with a formula that would involve no additional costs and - as should have been expected - one that has resulted in not just a few losers, but thousands of them. Council bosses put workers' jobs through the assessment process four times without getting the outcome they wanted. Each time the result was 'no pay cut'. Incredibly, they got away with a fifth bite of the cherry. Only this time did a so-called independent panel produce the 'correct' outcome: an enormous reduction. Out of the 22,000 council workers evaluated so far, around 10% are being told they face a cut in pay. Unison has reported that some of its members have put their houses up for sale in anticipation.

Not surprisingly, the whole episode has provoked widespread anger, especially among the Streetscene service workers, who are by far the biggest losers. Under pressure, thankfully, trade union officials speedily backtracked. Negotiations with the council broke down in acrimony and in July a joint mass meeting of Streetscene workers, called by Unison, the GMB and Unite at Leeds Civic Hall, voted unanimously to hold a ballot for strike action. A clear majority followed and since September 7 the strike has been solid, with very few scabs crossing picket lines. The workers are determined to stay out until their demands are met, which basically boil down to scrapping the massive pay cuts.

Without doubt, if Leeds gets away with impoverishing this group of workers, it will be encouraged to take the hatchet to others. There are still another 11,000 to be 'evaluated'.

The council is bringing in private refuse collection companies in an attempt to break the strike. Despite this, they only expect to empty bins on alternate weeks. Moreover, according to Unison, the council is considering privatising the whole service. As the union says, "The reality is that Leeds city council taxpayers would be left with a substandard service, with the emphasis being on profit rather than service delivery to the citizens of Leeds" (www.leedsunisonlg.org.uk/news.html).

Needless to say, privatisation is premised on driving down workers' wages. The council is now preparing the groundwork for whichever company they happen to favour. So far, council representatives are refusing to negotiate while the strike continues, but their intransigence can be broken if picket lines are respected and other workers show solidarity.

On Tuesday September 22, as the strike entered its third week, the GMB executive put up £10,000 for a hardship fund for Leeds workers, as well as launching a nationwide appeal to all 3,000 GMB branches across the UK for financial and other support.

GMB general secretary Paul Kenny said the council was not doing its job properly: "The Lib Dem-Tory administration has failed the people of Leeds. Their negligence in not collecting nearly £17 million in unpaid council and non-domestic rates heaps financial misery on the rest of the taxpayers of Leeds. This is in stark contrast to their attacks on their own workers in the cleaning departments, on whom they seek to impose huge wage cuts. It is not only rubbish which is not being collected in Leeds."

So Kenny presumably wants more threatening letters, bailiffs and court orders to squeeze those who in general find it the hardest to pay - the poorest citizens of Leeds. Equally to the point, Kenny and the GMB want to see the re-election of Gordon Brown in 2010, which they know will mean a budget-cutting New Labour government.

Perhaps a charge of hypocrisy can also be levelled at Leeds council opposition leader, Keith Wakefield. Addressing a rally of strikers and their supporters on September 10 outside Leeds town hall, he offered the support of the Labour group and condemned the pay cuts as a vicious attack on some of the council's lowest-paid workers, saying: "I believe you have 100% support from the people of Leeds. We will do everything we can to help you win this dispute" (*Yorkshire Evening Post* September 11).

Would he promise to "do everything" if workers were resisting New Labour cuts? ●

Jim Moody

ACTION

Communist Forums

London: Sundays, 5pm. Study topic, plus weekly political report from Provisional Central Committee. Ring 07950 41 6922 for details.
September 28: August H Nimzt Jr *Marx, Tocqueville and race in America*. Subject: 'Overthrow of reconstruction'.
South Wales: Call Bob for details: 0781 6 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.
Manchester: Every Tuesday, 6pm, students union. manchestercmmuniststudents@googlemail.com.
Sheffield: Every Sunday, 7pm. 07949 763130; sabbagh1984@googlemail.com.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesdays, September 22-December 15, 6.45pm: Evening course, 'Introduction to anthropology', St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1. £95 per term (£65 concessions).
 Tuesday September 29: Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Mythologiques*. Speaker: Chris Knight.
www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Was Karl Marx right?

Thursday September 24, 5pm: Meeting, Oxford Road, Manchester M13. Organised by UMSU Communist Students: manchestercmmuniststudents@googlemail.com.

Convention of the Left

Saturday September 26, 10.30am to 5pm: Conference, Brighthelm Centre, North Road, Brighton. Speakers include John McDonnell MP, Caroline Lucas (Green Party), Robert Griffiths (Communist Party of Britain), Matt Wrack (Fire Brigades Union).
 Organised by Convention of the Left: www.conventionoftheleft.org.

For indigenous rights

Saturday September 26, 3pm to 7pm: Public meeting, Bolivar Hall, 56 Grafton Way, London W1 (Nearest tubes: Euston, Warren Street - Victoria line closed). Speakers include Aida Quilcué, Minga of Indigenous and Popular Resistance.
 Colombia Solidarity Campaign: www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk.

Class Wargames

Saturday September 26, Sunday September 27: Game of War Weekend, HTTP Gallery, Unit A2, Arena Design Centre, 71 Ashfield Road, London N4. Advance booking: ale@furtherfield.org www.classwargames.net.

Rage Against Labour

Sunday September 27, 12.30pm: Demonstration at Labour conference. Assemble Madeira Drive, Brighton.
 Organised by UCU and NUJ.

Reclaim the track

Sunday September 27, 4.30pm: Public meeting, Holiday Inn, King's Road, Brighton BN1. Labour Party fringe for a progressive rail policy.
 Organised by Aslef: www.aslef.org.uk.

Free Miami Five

Thursday October 1, 6pm: Vigil, US embassy, Grosvenor Square, London W1. Speakers include family of Miami Five.
 Organised by Cuba Solidarity Campaign: campaigns@cuba-solidarity.org.uk.

Principled demand or cul-de-sac?

Sunday September 11, 6pm: London Communist Forum, Lucas Arms, 245A Grays Inn Road, WC1 (Kings Cross tube). Single state Palestine? Speakers: Jack Conrad, Tony Greenstein, Moshé Machover.

Troops out of Afghanistan

Saturday October 24: National demonstration, central London, details to be announced.
 Organised by Stop the War Coalition, CND and British Muslim Initiative: 020 7801 2768; www.stopwar.org.uk.

For working class political representation

Saturday November 7, 11am to 3pm: Conference, Camden Centre, Bidborough Street, London WC1. Registration: info@rmt.org.uk; RMT, Unity House, 39 Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD.
 Organised by RMT: info@rmt.org.uk.

Labour Representation Committee

Saturday November 14, 10am to 5pm: Conference and AGM, Institute of Education, Bedford Way, London WC1 (nearest tube: Russell Square). Details and registration: <http://php.l-r-c.org.uk/events/detail/lrc-conference-agm>.

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.

MAINSTREAM POLITICS



Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Nick Clegg: nothing to choose between them

Establishment unity

As the last party conference season before the general election gets into full swing, all corners of bourgeois politics are singing from the same hymn sheet. And the music is troubling to the ears of all those hit by the economic crisis - 'Cuts, cuts, cuts,' runs the refrain - and the politicians seem only to be competing over the most convincing rendition.

The Tories, of course, were first to arrive at this particular public spending conclusion. Not only do they currently more or less monopolise the political initiative: slashing the budget is perfectly well amenable to their core support - particularly since the Thatcher era and the ascendancy of the new right. This week, however, we have seen first Gordon Brown and then Nick Clegg of the Liberal Democrats stake their claim.

Brown, after dodging the issue for what seemed like an age, finally conceded that the next Labour government would have to cut public spending, in an address to the Trades Union Congress. "Frontline services" would escape the axe, apparently, but since then schools minister and long-time Brown ally Ed Balls has come out for £2 billion-worth of cuts to the education budget. These, of course, are billed as "savings" on efficiency and so on - as all cuts will be until they are actually made, but they actually amount to teachers out of work and schools run down or even closed. Balls already concedes that senior school staff will face the chopping block - to the consternation of the unions.

Meanwhile, at the Liberal Democrats' annual conference in Bournemouth, Clegg advised his party in advance of his controversial intentions, declaring in an interview with *The Guardian* that cuts would have to be "savage" to deal with the public finance deficit (September 19). This, perhaps, was tactically inept on his part - he certainly had to spend the conference trying to claw back support

from a membership deeply divided along neoliberal/social-liberal lines. A notable concession to recalcitrant Lib Dem 'lefts' is the 'mansion tax', proposed by treasury spokesman Vince Cable, which would charge owners of homes worth £1 million or more an average of £4,000, in order to fund tax breaks for lower- and middle-income families (though this faced an ambivalent reception itself).

Clegg has also since called Balls' plans "absolute madness" - though, as a man extremely unlikely to actually form a government, he has the luxury of not having to lay out exactly what he would cut. We should not forget that, for all Clegg's crocodile tears over the present state of the public debt, both he and Cable have form in this area dating back many years. Both contributed to the infamous *Orange book*, a tome which laid out 'liberal' (read neoliberal) 'solutions' to various social problems and which became the flagship document of the party's right wing. It is still in print.

As for New Labour, what we have is more evidence of that project's death throes. Bereft of anything resembling a bright idea, Brown has been outmanoeuvred by David Cameron on the least likely of terrains; he once more looks indecisive and reactive. That Peter Mandelson has yet again been wheeled out to package the message (in an interview with *The Economist*) has raised further questions about Brown's apparently total reliance on that paradigmatic (and deeply unpopular) machine politician.

Reactions from the TUC are, incredibly, mixed - testament to the total lack of independence the unions enjoy from the far right of the Labour Party. Known 'awkward squad' voices have raised protests - Matt Wrack of the Fire Brigades Union frets that his members are to be targeted, Mark Serwotka threatened both industrial and legal action, and Bob Crow called the speech "a missed

opportunity on a massive scale".

On the other hand, apparently in the throes of delusional psychosis, Derek Simpson of Unite declared: "In off the bar in the last minute of the game. We are now in extra time - we can beat the Tories. Gordon's put clear water between Labour and the Tories by focusing on jobs, homes, equality and fairness at work" (*The Guardian* September 15). A remarkable statement - not just for its hyped up football analogy, but for its total lack of resemblance to the truth.

The obvious question, then, is - why? How have we come to this cross-party consensus? After all, for many years, official New Labour dogma has been for an upward curve in public investment, with the national health service budget in particular having grown significantly. New Labour's reputation as Thatcherites stems not from slashing and burning, but from handing over billions of pounds to private companies in lucrative contracts - PFI hospitals and so on.

Thatcher, of course, did not shrink the state budget either, privatisations actually being quite expensive, and so, while the ideological basis for massive cuts is strong in the Tory Party, the track record in the technical sense is not actually there. The Lib Dems, meanwhile, have long flirted with posing to the left of Labour, with flagship commitments on increasing the top tax rate and abolishing tuition fees (the latter has now been downgraded to an "aspiration", NUS-style).

On the other side of the equation is the objective situation. We remain in a period of recession. Many economists and commentators (including, of all people, Peter Mandelson) have warned that the apparent stabilisation of the economy could be a false dawn, and with the wrong policy could lurch back into free-fall - a so-called 'double dip' recession.

Imposing cuts - forget all this

sub-utopian bluster about 'efficiency savings' - necessarily means cutting the standard of living for the workers (particularly at a time of mass unemployment) and lower-middle classes. It means throwing public sector workers out of their jobs. There will thus be a sizeable hit to tax takings, and the public deficit will be no better off than before; meanwhile, any switch back to Keynesian stimulus strategies will be that much harder, as the initial aggregate demand will be lower. The wider this ecstasy of cuts takes hold internationally, the more likely that another crisis will set in. From the system's point of view, it makes sense to 'spend your way out' - with public works projects, with a war ...

Yet - apart from the awkward pussyfooting of Mandelson and other New Labour types - this perspective is utterly absent from bourgeois politics in this country. Part of it, no doubt, is due to contingent ideological commitments (or, for that matter, individual corruption). But the worrying truth is: cuts sell. A poll in *The Sunday Times* found that only 20% of respondents preferred tax rises to cuts as a way of balancing the budget (September 13). Another poll, commissioned by the Royal Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA), partly contradicts that assessment, suggesting broad support for 'efficiency savings', but not much else (www.thersa.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/220059/Ipsos-RSA-press-notice-210909.pdf).

There are many contradictory impulses at play here - certainly those who have escaped the brunt of the crisis will worry about tax increases sending them over the edge (particularly acutely among the petty bourgeoisie). Employees of struggling companies will worry that the public sector is saving itself at the expense of stimulating recovery in the private sector, and should 'take one for the team', as

the saying goes. The bourgeoisie, meanwhile, has never suffered public spending gladly: the construction of the European welfare states and the American 'new deal' before that were both in capitalism's interests but had to be politically forced on the ruling class, which has always had a rather childish and petulant approach to taking its medicine.

The fundamental problem is the dire weakness, political and organisational, of the workers' movement. Statements such as Derek Simpson's quoted above testify to the total control over the unions of a philistine bureaucracy - the critical voices - Serwotka, Crow, Wrack, etc - are fresh out of political alternatives as well (we can discount the idea that Crow's No2EU front has anything resembling a future). The political formations of the far left, meanwhile, are tiny, and wedded to failed strategies that subordinate the Marxist programme to that of Labourism.

So when groups of workers fight back against the cuts, they face an uphill battle. Struggles have already broken out - notably, the ongoing dispute in Leeds over the pay of rubbish collectors. These workers have embarked on sustained industrial action after the Lib Dem-led council slashed wages by £6,000 a year. Large sections of other workers are in the process of balloting for their own actions.

Yet last time a broad trade union offensive of this kind erupted, what we got was Thatcher. A powerful workers' movement needs to offer a real political lead in challenging the power of the capitalists - otherwise not only will we be defeated, but the defeat will be brutal and lasting. Communists support the defensive actions of sections of the working class - and of the class as a whole. Yet we must also fight to arm the masses with a programme that can meet these challenges effectively, one unencumbered by Labourism and other tools of the bourgeoisie ●

James Turley

INTERVIEW

Opposing the cuts consensus

Peter Manson spoke to Labour left MP **John McDonnell** about next week's Labour Party conference, the general election and beyond

How do you see the main issues at the Labour conference?

The New Labour leadership will be trying to use the conference for yet another relaunch of Gordon Brown. If it's anything like the public relations exercise of his TUC speech, it will be extremely dispiriting and disillusioning - it will hardly be successful in terms of launching the general election campaign.

What they will be trying to set out is some form of difference between themselves and the Tories and the Liberal Democrats, but they have all now reached a consensus on the key political issue - they expect working class people to pay for this crisis, not the bankers themselves, and they're not looking for any transformation of the system. They are now looking for a massive onslaught in terms of cuts in public services, attacks on trade unions and undermining any reaction against neoliberal policies and the restoration of market dominance. I don't think there's any discernible difference between New Labour's position and that of the other main parties.

It could be argued that the Tories are playing into Brown's hands by declaring their intention to make deeper and further cuts with relish, whereas Brown will make the same cuts with tender, loving care.

That might have been the case a week ago, but the scene has changed so dramatically. We've just had Ed Balls announcing education cuts on a scale we haven't seen for years - there seems to be a Dutch auction going on about who can be more brutal in their attacks on the working class in terms of cutbacks in public expenditure and, inevitably, assaults on people's pensions and welfare benefits.

It is possibly the most disillusioning exercise we've seen in politics in recent generations. Not only will people say, 'There's no difference between you': there is no difference between them in the content of their attacks on working people.

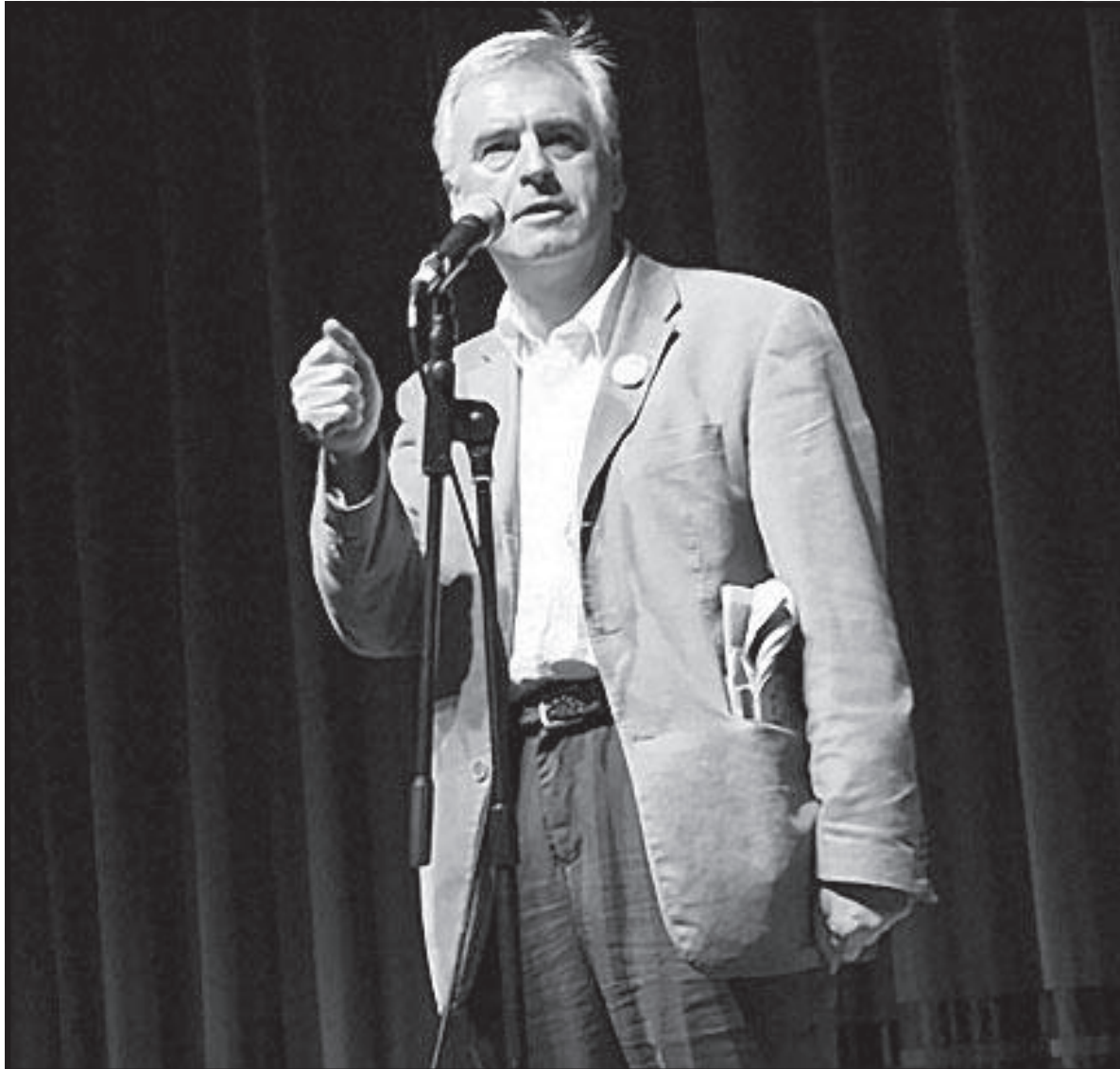
It reminds me of Tony Blair's first election victory in 1997, when he promised to keep in place the Tory cuts for two years. People voted Labour on the grounds that they couldn't be any worse than the Tories and that seems to be the basis on which trade union leaders are recommending a Labour vote.

Some trade union leaders. They are working on the basis that you might as well have the devil you know rather than risk the Tories.

Remember, in 97 what happened was that people marched to get rid of the Tories. It wasn't that they had any confidence in Blair - the electorate didn't really have a clue as to what the ramifications of his victory would be.

When you are in the situation where all the parties are virtually presenting the same programme, people react according to what they are actually experiencing at the time - they will march again to get rid of the incumbent government. New Labour is seen as pursuing the same policies of attacking working people as the Tories and, despite the savage cuts proposed by the Liberal Democrats last week, I think people will want to take it out on the government.

What happened to Keynes? I thought we had to spend our way out of the crisis, but all of a sudden, with a general election



John McDonnell: New Labour indistinguishable

looming, that seems to have gone by the board.

There are three examples of Labour being in power when a crisis like this has hit - two were under Ramsay MacDonald and Jim Callaghan. You could argue that Keynes was a competing economic theory in the 30s, but you couldn't argue that about Callaghan's time. Both MacDonald and Callaghan rejected Keynesianism, let alone any form of socialist practice. What happened to them? They turned on their own class, cut welfare benefits, increased unemployment and slashed public expenditure. The reaction was absolute opposition from working people and the removal of Labour from power for a decade.

The third example was Attlee, who came to power in a crisis, when the country was bankrupt, and successfully used taxation and public ownership to redistribute wealth and establish the welfare state. What is interesting is the ignoring of the Attlee experience and New Labour's seizing upon Ramsay MacDonald and Jim Callaghan, with Keynesianism going out of the window. Not that I think Keynesianism is the solution, but even in their own terms New Labour has rejected an alternative. It's panic, absolute panic, that is setting in. Every policy is aimed above all at trying to secure a continuation of power.

Just as the media and many commentators were urging Ramsay MacDonald and Jim Callaghan to be 'responsible' and look after the 'national interest', exactly the same has been pouring out of the pages of *The Guardian*, *The Times*, the *FT* and the rest. They are all urging 'responsibility', which means cuts.

It is almost as though the world has

lost its senses, even on Keynesian terms. They are introducing massive cuts during a recession, which will produce more unemployment and keep the economy on a downward spiral.

You are convener of the Trade Union Coordinating Group. What is the TUCG's role?

We established the TUCG at the TUC congress in 2008. Initially there were four unions which had worked together in a few individual campaigns such as Public Services Not Private Profit, and they felt a more consistent alliance was needed. They were advocating similar policies and looking for further coordination and campaigning, whether that be public meetings, organising demonstrations or even coordinating action in the future. The TUCG has now doubled in size to eight unions.

It was quite clear what divisions there were within the TUC this year. TUCG trade unions are calling for a much more aggressive approach in terms of industrial relations, so that people don't have to pay for this crisis in terms of cuts in wages or conditions or their jobs. They have a much more independent line - it is just not acceptable to expect people to support a government which has turned on its own class.

What unions are involved?

The original four were the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, Public and Commercial Services Union, Fire Brigades Union and National Union of Journalists. Now there are also the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union, National Association of Probation Officers, Prison Officers Association and United Road Transport Union. Only the Bakers Union is affiliated to Labour.

How do you see the TUCG in

relation to, for example, the Labour Representation Committee?

Well, to be honest, the TUCG is a trade union grouping, which addresses a whole range of issues from a trade union perspective and will prove increasingly effective, I think, as we go into this next period, whoever is in government. Whoever it is, they are clearly going to come for people's jobs, working conditions and pensions, and the trade unions are the only organisations that can play a leading role in protecting them.

There is also a role for the TUCG in the discussion about future representation as well as future action. It will be convening a conference aiming for February, looking at a strategy for the unions in the run-up to the general election and beyond it.

There is no formal link between that and the LRC, which is a separate political organisation. But the TUCG is one of many initiatives being undertaken at the moment, whereby people are feeling their way forward on how they can make alliances across industrial, economic and political struggles, and what structures best suit those struggles at any one point in time.

Just as the LRC is an attempt to form alliances of the left both within and outside the Labour Party, here you have a group of trade unions that are allying to make themselves stronger and more effective, but that are also looking to work with others in the promotion of political objectives as well. So the TUCG unions came behind the People's Charter, and will want to work with groups like the LRC in campaigning on issues they agree upon.

In the general election you will be

a Labour candidate, but the message you are putting over is that there is no difference between the three main parties. So on what basis will you be campaigning for a Labour vote?

It's interesting how many individual Labour candidates in the general election will be standing on policies that they'll be advocating locally and will have no reflection on what's happening nationally. They will be pursuing policies that a number of us have been advocating for a period of time.

Those candidates will be opposed to working people having to pay for this crisis and, calling for the redistribution of wealth and power, advocating public ownership, arguing for peace, opposing the war in Iraq and calling for troops out of Afghanistan. That will be a fairly common platform for which a number of Labour candidates will be campaigning, because it's the only way in which they'll be able to save their seats. I expect that there will be quite a large number of Labour candidates who will be distancing themselves from the policies they've even voted for over recent years.

Unfortunately, however, a tiny percentage of the electorate vote on the basis of what the local candidate, as opposed to their party, is saying.

That's why if there isn't any change in Labour policy nationally there's a good chance of a wipe-out. The only thing that will save Labour - not as a government, but from being wiped out - will be the incompetence of the Tories and the Liberal Democrats.

Some of the TUCG unions may well give at least tacit support to non-Labour candidates. How do you view their position?

Well, I'm a Labour MP, so I'll be standing on a Labour platform. I'll be putting forward policies I've been advocating for a number of years.

Individual unions will make their own decisions, but I think the recommendation of TUCG unions to their members on how to vote will be based on a critique of the record of the particular candidates and the policies they're pursuing. I think you'll see a number of unions supporting candidates based on a realistic assessment of their track record.

Even some of the most New Labour-loyal union leaders - Dave Prentis, general secretary of Unison, for example - are arguing that members should only vote for candidates who support union policies. We'll see whether that translates into reality, but I think TUCG unions will take such a position.

Do you think any substantial left-of-Labour groups will stand?

Various discussions are going on, I'm sure, as reported in your own newspaper. I'm sure there will be non-Labour left candidates, but there seems to be an increasing awareness that they shouldn't be running against Labour left candidates.

At the same time I'm hoping that, in the general election campaign, from somewhere there will be a political debate. If that comes from left candidates in the Labour Party, and from left candidates outside, at least working people will be able to see that some people are arguing for an alternative.

We'll see what happens in the general election. However, the main debate about the future of the left will come afterwards ●

IRELAND

Looking to Lisbon to end the crisis

In June the International Monetary Fund issued an ominous warning that Ireland faced "a deeper recession than any advanced economy". It predicted dire consequences from the collapse in the grossly inflated property market and foresaw no recovery before 2014.

It certainly does not seem to have exaggerated the scale of the meltdown. Unemployment figures continue to climb, thousands of businesses have closed and many are facing real poverty. For the first time since 1995, the past year has seen more people leaving Ireland than coming here. The Celtic tiger is well and truly dead.

But the main governing party, Fianna Fáil, is determined to save Irish capitalism through deep cuts. Plans are afoot to introduce a savage budget in December. Healthcare and social welfare benefits are to be slashed and major cuts in public sector pay and conditions are certain. Private sector workers are being subjected to sackings, redundancies and pay reductions of up to 40%. In this atmosphere of insecurity and fear it is easy to stoke up resentment towards those still in permanent, pensionable jobs.

Not coincidentally, the Economic and Social Research Institute has just published a report claiming that public sector workers earn up to 25% more than those in the private sector. It should also be noted that public sector workers are currently the most unionised and militant. Efforts to discipline the working class will therefore concentrate on attacking and undermining this section. Isolating them is key to that task in the race to the bottom.

The *Financial Times* recently applauded the efforts of the Irish government to deal with the crisis and argued that the pain was inevitable and necessary. Weeping crocodile tears, it declared: "The next few years will be harsh and the burden of the adjustment will be borne by those least able to cope. Dealing with the fiscal crisis will mean it will be difficult to protect the country's most vulnerable people. But, as the wreckage of the boom is washed away, older, safer sources of growth will be uncovered" (August 10).

That obviously gives courage to a government hell-bent on a collision course with the working class. Its three stated aims in the coming months are: to rescue the banks (again); to make sure the Lisbon treaty is passed this time round; and to push through a draconian budget. Legislation to implement the first of these is currently going through the Dáil. The National Asset Management Agency (Nama) is a state body that will be set up to relieve the banks of "toxic loans" clogging up their balance sheets. €54 billion is to be paid for loans said by the government to be worth €47 billion. The extra €7 billion is to be added in to allow for an "upturn in property prices". But everybody knows that talk of an upturn at this point is not credible - it is more about massaging bank balances to camouflage their bankruptcy. Even €47 billion is a gross overvaluation, as property prices have plummeted by around 25% compared with 2007.

The cash, of course, will have to be borrowed, adding to an existing national debt of almost €100 billion. Banks will then be looking for injections to allow



Ireland needs euros

them to start lending again. As usual the government will be on hand to help out. And despite its encouragement of government efforts, even the *FT* describes Nama as badly thought out and fraught with risk.

Certainly, given the inexorable decline in the economy, the scale of the national debt is grim. And that is even if Nama does not turn out to be the disaster that many predict. Massive interest repayments will be funded by cuts in public spending. And, at the risk of being repetitive, that equals inevitable misery for the working class.

It is an extremely serious and worrying time for many. There is anger at a government so obviously in the pay of property developers and the banks. But this has not - as yet - translated into a new round of mass demonstrations of the like we saw in 2008. Both the Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party have expressed confidence that the class will fight back. But, as well as resentment and bitterness, there is anxiety and demoralisation. There seems to be no real alternative to the government's agenda. Fine Gael and Labour also insist that there must be pain. Sinn Féin poses left, but has shown in the Stormont government that it too is a party committed to running capitalism.

Evidently what is urgently needed is a party that puts forward a principled programme based on Marxism. It is obvious to all that capitalism is dramatically failing. There is no point in

calling on trade union bureaucrats to call a general strike to bring down the government, as the Socialist Party does, if there is nothing to put in its place. In any case, David Begg, secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, has made clear his commitment to accept cuts on behalf of his membership. Social partnership is alive and well and working to the advantage of the bourgeoisie. Nor can the left depend on spontaneity - it must take up the challenge of creating a working class party.

Within the left talks of unity are again in the air. The SP produced an article after the European and local elections calling for discussion between itself and the SWP. It was critical of the politics of the People Before Profit Alliance (the SWP-dominated platform which won a number of council seats), with its lowest-common-denominator policies. It said that it would be using all its energies in campaigning for a "new mass working class party" and would not enter into any alliance unless it has "a programme that opposes the capitalist market" (www.socialistparty.net). It was also critical of the fact that some members of the SWP - in particular councilor Richard Boyd Barrett, its most well known member - have been calling for 'left unity' with Sinn Féin and the Labour Party.

The SWP replied by welcoming the renewed call for debate, but asserting that any coalition formed should make room for both reformists and revolutionaries. It wants a "broad left

alliance" to be formed now, not for the general election. In other words, the SP only wants an electoral alliance, but to the left of the type of organisation the SWP is proposing.

Neither option deals with the need to form a party based on Marxism. That project, rather than some electoral lash-up or yet another populist bloc, is the burning question. You would have thought the SWP comrades might have learned a lesson from the Respect debacle over the water. And the SP appears to be as determined as ever that its 'mass party' is a project for itself alone! At least there is talk of some kind of political unity once again.

Another public meeting is being held this weekend by a number of smaller groups including the Irish Socialist Network, Workers Solidarity Movement and Socialist Democracy. This is to discuss united political opposition to Nama. Hopefully comrades can be won over to the need for principled revolutionary unity in the face of attacks - an initiative for a party - rather than another anti-cuts campaign. As we have seen from the poor turnout on recent anti-Nama demonstrations, campaigns on their own are not going to inspire our class or provide the critical alternative.

Referendum

In the meantime the Lisbon treaty is again being put to a referendum - just 15 months after a resounding rejection. This time, however, the 'yes' campaign

is in a far stronger position.

Some of the nationalist objections raised last time have been answered. Reassurances have been given that Ireland will retain a commissioner and will not be pressurised into introducing abortion or have to compromise its 'neutrality'. Crucial, however, is the changed environment. EU president José Manuel Barroso recently arrived in Ireland with a warning that a 'no' vote on October 2 would not go down well in terms of any future assistance from Europe.

Given the level of indebtedness to the European Central Bank and the scale of projected borrowing, this message struck home. The 'yes' camp, with its key slogan, 'Vote yes for recovery', also argues that Europe will help to bring jobs to Ireland. In the absence of an alternative, it will be hard for working class people to reject the treaty.

Socialist Party MEP Joe Higgins leads the 'no' campaign for the left. Both he and Kieran Allen of the SWP make cogent arguments about the acceleration of privatisation and militarism under Lisbon. The SP also points to the increasing practice in Europe of 'social dumping': ie, bringing in workers from another member-state at lower rates of pay to undermine local labour. But neither organisation raises the need for working class unity across Europe to defy these attacks. Instead their slogans and propaganda are principally confined to defeating Lisbon from an Irish perspective. Comrade Allen considers that a positive outcome of a 'no' vote would be the redrafting of the treaty - the same position as Sinn Féin, which has a 'For a better deal in Europe' slogan. Higgins believes that a 'no' vote could kick-start a revival in militancy within the 26 counties.

There are also problems within the rightwing 'no' campaign. Coir, a catholic organisation, has organised a major propaganda campaign. It does not have the backing of the bishops, though, who have stated that they are satisfied with the guarantees on abortion and recommend a 'yes'.

Interestingly, the UK Independence Party has entered the fray, using EU money to fund a leaflet drop to every door and a poster campaign. This has done little to improve the credentials of the conservative 'no' campaign, as Ukip is not exactly popular among Irish nationalists, understandably enough.

And the trade union movement is divided, with the ICTU calling for a 'yes' vote and Blair Horan of the civil service union, CPSA, confronting Joe Higgins in a war of words about workers' rights in Europe. Unite, one of the country's largest unions, has called for all its members to vote 'no', however.

It is hard to guess the outcome. But the most important aim for the left should be to use the referendum as a platform to call for working class unity in Europe. We must oppose efforts by the bourgeoisie to unite Europe in its own image and according to its own agenda. But we need to come up with inspirational ideas - that of unity with the militant and class-conscious workers in France and Germany and right across the EU.

That, rather than a defensive and potentially nationalist campaign, is the answer ●

Anne Mc Shane

IRAN

Mass protests re-ignite

If anyone was in any doubt about the continuation of the political crisis in Iran, demonstrations on Friday September 18 in Tehran, Tabriz, Mashad, Shiraz, Isfahan and elsewhere put an end to that.

Tens of thousands of Iranians, ignoring repeated warnings by the security forces, used the state-sponsored demonstrations for 'Qods day' (Jerusalem day) on the last Friday of Ramadan to voice their opposition to the government and the clerical regime's supreme leader. Undeterred by two months of executions, arrests and show trials, the opposition used the opportunity to fill the streets and voice their protests.

Earlier, president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had once again done harm to the Palestinian cause by repeating his abhorrent holocaust-denial claims: "The holocaust was a false pretext for the establishment of Israel in 1948. It is a lie based on an unprovable and mythical claim ... Why shouldn't we be allowed to research this? ... All western governments are victims of a Zionist conspiracy that dictates their foreign policy." Never mind capitalism or imperialism - it is all to do with conspiracies. Many will remember anti-Semites making similar remarks in the 20th century.

But it is not just this anti-Semitic message that helps the Zionists. A section of Iranian youth who have heard nothing but empty rhetoric about Palestine, all mouthed by a reactionary dictatorship, are not as supportive of the Palestinian cause as older generations. In a country where the majority of the population live in poverty, those who are foolish enough to believe the Shia state's exaggerated claims relating to financial support for Hezbollah or Hamas blame such largesse in 'foreign aid' for their own destitution.

However, last Friday was mainly about opposition to Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader, and Ahmadinejad. The demonstrators were shouting for the Iranian government to go, with slogans such as: "Death to the dictator. We will revenge our dead. Death to Khamenei. Coup d'etat government, resign, resign! Dictator, dictator, have shame; the Iranian people are ready to revolt - this is our last warning." A number of slogans were addressed to the *bassij* (Islamic militia) - some calling on them to stop siding with the oppressors and join the people, others warning them of the consequences of killing protesters.

A minority were shouting a reactionary, nationalist slogan: "No to Gaza, no to Lebanon. My life for my country." This was a reference to the regime's support for Palestinians in Gaza and Shias in Lebanon, and it was promoted mainly by rightwing forces. This slogan had been rejected out of hand the week before the demonstration by sections of the left.

A statement by the Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran (Rahe Kargar), distributed last week, reminded Iranians of their shared destiny with the oppressed in Palestine and Lebanon. Saying that Palestine should not be equated with Hamas. Rahe Kargar pointed to the unprecedented solidarity shown by people throughout the world for the protest movement in Iran. The leaflet called on demonstrators to reciprocate this internationalism and proposed the slogan, "Wake up - Iran has become Palestine".

This was a timely reminder for sections of the Iranian left, many of whom are increasingly tailing bourgeois liberal politics rather than coming up with a leftwing alternative. The Iranian working class cannot struggle for power in one country; if we are serious about ditching



Unofficial protests erupt on Qods day

the Stalinist idiocy of socialism in one country, the tasks of the Iranian working class cannot be limited to the borders of Iran. More importantly, whether Iranian rightwing nationalists like it or not, it is the US and western powers who in recent months have associated the two issues of Iran and Palestine more than ever before.

Obama

In late August news from the Middle East was dominated by claims that Barack Obama had managed to convince Israel to freeze its construction of new West Bank settlements in exchange for the US adopting more stringent policies regarding the Iranian nuclear plan. Soon afterwards, especially following the visit of Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu to Europe, leaders in London, Paris and Berlin were singing from the same song sheet. We were 'reliably' informed that US special envoy to the Middle East George Mitchell was preparing to announce the resumption of peace talks by the end of September. The American promise to take a firmer line against the Iranian nuclear plan was supposed to convince Jerusalem it needed to get on board the initiative. The US, Britain and France plan to pressure the UN security council to expand sanctions against the Islamic Republic, including sanctions on its gas and petrol industries - a move that is claimed will destroy Iran's already collapsing economy.

Less than a week after these pronouncements it became clear that Israel had officially approved the construction of more than 500 new homes in the occupied West Bank. This is in addition to Netanyahu's refusal to apply any freeze at all to the colonisation of Greater Jerusalem, or to stop construction projects that have already been started. The new homes will be built in six settlements - all of which are included in the blocs Israel wants to retain under any peace agreement, according to Israel's *Ha'aretz* newspaper.

On the other hand, despite news of direct talks to be held in early October, threats of military action against Iran are increasing. An editorial in *The Wall Street Journal* in early September warned Obama that the United States must quickly put a stop to the Iranian nuclear programme, otherwise Israel will bomb the facilities: "An Israeli strike on Iran would be the most dangerous foreign policy issue Obama could face," the paper declared. Another Republican hawk, former ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton, maintains that additional sanctions alone will not be

enough to make the Iranians abandon their nuclear ambitions. William Cohen, who served as defence secretary during the Bill Clinton presidency, says that "there is a countdown taking place" and that Israel "is not going to sit indifferently on the sidelines and watch Iran continue on its way toward becoming a nuclear power."

Netanyahu has skilfully used the huge general onslaught against Obama by the forces of the US right, with whom the Israeli PM is allied. Together they have managed to deflect the pressure on Israel to freeze colonisation of the occupied territories, and divert attention to the Iranian 'threat'. At the moment it seems that the US right and their Israeli ally are ahead. George Mitchell's trip to the Middle East got nowhere, and it is unlikely that Obama will make any progress in talks with Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas.

We in Hands Off the People of Iran have always maintained that threats of further sanctions and war have nothing to do with the alleged development of Iranian nuclear weapons. All the evidence suggests that the Iranian regime's plan is (eventually) to achieve nuclear weapons capability, rather than actually produce nuclear weapons.

However, we are witnessing a conflict between two alternative US strategies regarding Iran's future role in the region. During his election campaign Obama seemed prepared for some accommodation, allowing the Islamic regime limited regional influence in exchange for better cooperation with the US. But the US right and Israel preferred to continue the Bush policy of no accommodation, tighter sanctions, regime change from the outside and the threat of military action. The American promise to take a firmer line against the Iranian nuclear plan was supposed to convince Jerusalem to get on board the initiative, yet less than a year into the Obama presidency, pressure from Israel and the US right - at a time of political uncertainty in Iran, combined with Ahmadinejad's holocaust denial - has ensured there is no progress in this area. The threat of an Israeli military strike against Iran, as well as the possibility of new sanctions, is today as serious as ever before.

Whichever way one looks at the problem, the issues of Palestine and Iran cannot be separated. Yet an oppressive regime in Iran cannot be a genuine ally of the Palestinians; and the liberation of the Iranian people cannot be achieved while the region continues to suffer war, occupation and repression.

On September 18, prompted by the

left, some demonstrators in Tehran had the right slogans: "Whether in Gaza or in Iran, stop killing people; Iran has become like Palestine." The dominance of this slogan in the Tehran demonstration showed the presence and effective role of the left. The demonstration was also unique in a number of other ways. As many commentators have said, it marked a new phase in the continuing struggle between the government and the Iranian people. The massive turnout almost two months after the protests of June and July prove the vulnerability of the unpopular president and government.

New phase

The composition of the protest differed from earlier demonstrations, in that protesters in Tehran and in other major cities were almost uniquely from the poorer districts. The middle classes only came out mid-afternoon, when reports of the size of the demonstrations assured them of safety. It was the first real nationwide protest - tens of thousands came out in Isfahan, Shiraz, Mashad, Tabriz, Rasht, etc. Older women were present in large numbers, probably for the first time since the recent wave of demonstrations started. According to many accounts, Iranians had left their homes in the morning of September 18 fearful that they would be in a small protest surrounded by vicious *bassij* militia. Only when they reached the agreed assembly places did they become aware of how large the protests were.

Many recount with joy the fleeing of the state's 'Hezbollahis' and their oversized speakers, once they realised how big the opposition protests were going to be. In many of the films on the internet, the faint voices of pro-government demonstrators are being drowned out by slogans from the much larger and more militant opposition. Before the demonstration, it had become clear that Ahmadinejad and his government favoured using the full might of the state to frighten the population. However, the supreme leader and his allies in the conservative faction of the regime, increasingly worried that further repression might challenge the very existence of the Islamic regime, tried to portray the Qods demonstration as a day of 'national unity'. In the end, of course, the day exposed the deep divisions in Iranian society for all to see.

Although tear gas was used and a number of people were arrested, the level of force use against the demonstrators was less than on previous demonstrations and certainly less than threatened. It will be interesting to see how the protesters will react to this clear retreat of the supreme leader.

Another important factor regarding the September 18 protest was the continuation of the protests at an important football match in the evening. The spectators' anti-government slogans could be heard for miles around the stadium, but the national radio and television company was forced to abandon live coverage of this rather crucial game between Estghlal and Steel Azin, blaming faulty cameras in the stadium! Foolishly the match was broadcast live on radio, so very few people in Iran are in any doubt about the nature of the state broadcasting authority's 'technical' difficulties. In another victory for the demonstrators on the same day, Ahmadinejad was forced to cut short an interview on national TV, as shouts of "Death to the dictator" could clearly be heard during the broadcast.

No doubt the events that day will shape the coming weeks and months. Schools and universities are opening this week, although many campuses

will remain shut until November. The experiences of the demonstration and the football match clearly show that, as soon as a crowd gathers, political opposition to the regime will be voiced. On the other hand, short of calling for a curfew and direct military rule, how can the government avoid public gatherings? And, if it does go towards a curfew, how will reformist opponents within its own ranks react? Are they going to ban football matches? Will they close down universities and high schools?

In a clear sign of retreat, Khamenei's speech at the end of Ramadan continued a theme taken up earlier in September, in an attempt to pacify sections of the opposition. Khamenei had earlier rejected the idea that foreign powers were involved in the country's post-election demonstrations: "I do not accuse leaders of the recent events of being stooges of aliens, including the US and Britain, since it was not proved for me. We should not proceed in dealing with those behind the protests on the basis of rumours and guesswork." On September 20, with 'reformist' ex-president Ali Akbar Rafsanjani standing a couple of metres from him, he warned government supporters against accusing opposition members of wrongdoing without proof: "While a suspect's own confession was admissible, his testimony or accusations could not be used to implicate others." A clear dismissal of the show trials which have dominated the government's agenda in the last few weeks, where 'reformist' prisoners accused Rafsanjani and fellow reformists Mohammad Khatami and Mir Hossein Mousavi of collaborating with foreign enemies.

Khamenei's speech has pacified leaders of the 'reformist' movement, as shown by Rafsanjani's conciliatory tone in a speech to the council of experts on September 22. But it is clearly too little too late as far as the protesters are concerned.

In another development, ayatollah Hosein-Ali Montazeri (once the designated successor to Iran's first supreme leader, Ruhollah Khomeini), has replied to a letter from Mousavi, who was seeking guidance, in this way on September 22: "The path to reforming the current system is a very difficult one: the entire regime has lost credibility ... A government that was supposed to be the pride of Shias throughout the world has turned the youth and the masses in our country against Islam and religion."

The September 18 protests came after three weeks of intensified workers' protests. In Pars Wagon (train carriage makers), workers angry at non-payment of wages smashed tables and chairs in the canteen. In the Iran Khodro car plant, workers commemorated the death of a fellow worker who collapsed after working three successive shifts. Similar workers' protests took place in Arj (manufacturer of electrical household goods), Arak Aluminium and many other workplaces. Although most of these protests started off in support of economic demands and against closures, whenever the security forces appeared this prompted the use of the now familiar slogan of "Death to the dictator" - an echo of "Death to the shah", which dominated the workers' protests of 1978-79.

Workers in Iran need our support and solidarity - against both imperialist threats and the repressive religious state ●

Notes

1. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/8223606.stm.
2. Associated Press, September 20.
3. www.alalam.ir/english/detail.aspx?id=80499.
4. www.amontazeri.com.

ANTHROPOLOGY

Sex and the human revolution

Chris Knight of the Radical Anthropology Group looks at the transition from ape to human and quantity into quality, plus the importance of language, counter-dominance and sex in the human story. This is an edited version of the speech he gave to the CPGB's Communist University in August

The way I distinguish science from ideology is quite simple. If the knowledge gives certain people power but not others, it is ideology. So all kinds of racism, sexism and crap bourgeois ideology might give certain people power, but at the expense of the rest of us.

If it is science, it is empowering. Full stop. It does not matter who you are - you can be rich, poor; male, female. Science is knowledge that gives humans power. But in order to put the big picture together we cannot merely be scientists in the bourgeois sense of controlling bits and bobs of nature for particular purposes. We must be dialecticians - able to resolve and transcend contradictions rather than being gripped by those contradictions.

When it comes to looking at human origins, the standard Darwinian, 'naked ape' view - that humans evolved and we got a little cleverer than other apes, but essentially we are animals - has a lot going for it. It solves a lot of problems because you can just use simple Darwinism to explain many things. But in making the problem of human origins simple you are hitting a brick wall. Although Darwinism works to a huge extent, there is no Darwinian explanation for the main thing that marks humans out from apes: a particular form of consciousness we have, expressed in *language*.

Many people do not realise this. People tend to think language must have evolved. After all, all animals have a means of communication. If you have a look at Chris Harman's book *A people's history of the world*, it starts out with the story that language evolved because humans became more cooperative. Actually, no Darwinian thinks that this is sufficient as an explanation. If that were the case, the more cooperative a species, the more linguistic capacity it would have.

The thing about language is that it is not like that: it is either there or it is not. It is not about chimpanzees having communication systems more language-like than cats. In fact if you look at the natural world, the species that has got the closest to a communication system like language is bees, in the sense that they have displaced reference. But bees have very small brains, so the idea that a larger brain is more likely to produce language just does not work.

However, the Darwinians have no theory for the origins of language, and if you cannot explain the origins of language then you cannot explain a whole lot of other things about humans either.

Evolution has always been a question of incremental, cumulative change. But at certain moments in human evolution something very different happens, when there is a build-up of contradictions. Then at a certain point quantitative changes reach a tipping point and a qualitative change emerges, as all the contradictions are resolved.

There is a wonderful book called *The major transitions in evolution* written by someone who was sarcastically called god in Darwinian circles, John Maynard



Ochre: lady in red

Smith. He is almost a fundamentalist Darwinian. He points out that the evolution of life on earth goes through major transitions that are quite sudden, quite extraordinary moments, like the origin of life itself, the origin of multicellular organisms. He treats the origin of human society and language as one of these major transitions. My position that language emerged in the process of a revolution is a variant of that 'major transitions' theory.

Perhaps I will just quote Trotsky on this: "Every educated person since Darwin has labelled himself an evolutionist, but a real evolutionist must apply the idea of evolution to his own forms of thinking. Elementary logic, founded in a period when the idea of evolution itself did not exist, is evidently insignificant for the analysis of evolutionary processes. Hegel's logic is the logic of evolution."

"Only one must not forget that the concept of evolution itself has been completely corrupted and emasculated by university professors and liberal writers to mean peaceful progress. Whoever has come to understand that evolution proceeds through the struggle of antagonistic forces, of a slow accumulation of changes that at a certain moment explodes the old shell and brings about a catastrophe, a revolution, he has learnt finally to apply to the general laws of evolution to thinking itself; he is a dialectician: that is, to be distinguished

from vulgar evolutionists."

So if you are a Marxist you expect the transition from ape to man to be revolutionary because we are qualitatively different from the rest of nature. Which would mean, of course, that prior to that revolution you would expect a build-up of contradictions. So the question is, what could those contradictions have been? As soon as you look at ape social organisation it becomes pretty obvious. You get major conflicts over resources and over sex.

Sexual conflict

There is an odd thing about Marxists who write about human origins, including the Socialist Workers Party and Chris Harman. There appears to be some peculiar blockage when it comes to talking about sex, even if you are talking about monkeys and apes.

It is not just that people who think of themselves as Marxists, and therefore are inspired by Marx and Engels, do not agree with Engels and Marx - that would be legitimate. It could well be that Engels was wrong to think in terms of sexual conflict as the build-up of contradictions which led to the establishment of human society. And Engels could have been wrong to think of the matrilineal clan being the central institution of early society, primitive communism. As we have to be scientists rather than starting out from preconceived political positions, we cannot say something is

right because Engels said it was right.

In fact this is what Engels himself said on science: "The more ruthless and disinterestedly science proceeds, the more it finds itself in harmony with the interests of the workers." In other words, we have to put science first. Rather than tailoring it to a perception we have of working class needs, we must go with the science and that itself will be the most revolutionary thing to do. Therefore it could be that Engels was completely wrong and it would be our duty - and Engels would agree - to affirm that we were right and he was wrong.

What amazes me, though, is that people who call themselves Marxists do not even try to find out. When I first became interested in anthropology in the late 60s, I noticed there were a few people who called themselves Marxist anthropologists. Yet they did not even ask any of the questions Marx and Engels asked.

Putting that aside, Engels had this to say (and Marx said much the same thing in his early writings): "According to the materialist conception, the determining fact in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of the immediate essentials of life. This appears in a twofold character. On the one side, the production of the means of existence, particles of food and clothing, dwellings and of the tools necessary for their production. On the other side, the production of human

beings themselves, the proliferation of the species. The social organisation under which the people of a particular historic epoch and a particular country live is determined by both kinds of production: on the stage of the development of labour, on the one hand; and of the family, on the other."

So for Marx and for Engels there was a concept of species-life, and by that they meant life which reproduces itself. In animals the species reproduces itself through sex. In human society we do that, but also on another level: that of labour process. If we are looking at the evolution of human society and thinking about the origins of labour, we at the same time have to bear in mind that sexual reproduction is underlying that. The actual production of the people engaged in the labour is, of course, a crucial factor. So, according to Engels, we have to keep both these two forms of labour in mind: reproduction and labour in the more narrow sense.

When thinking about the origin of human consciousness and human life we have to turn to the kind of labour which our ancestors, apes and monkeys, were involved in. With apes or monkeys, although they may make the odd tool, or fish for termites, something immeasurably more prominent is their reproductive process, and that is the process which generates conflicts. There is a rather horrible book called *Demonic males*, written by climatologist Richard Wrangam, which describes the kind of chaos produced within chimpanzee society by the way males occasionally rampage. In the chimpanzee community, when a female is fertile, the males get very excited by this and try to grab hold of her. Terrible violence breaks out. The females run for cover. Often someone dies, perhaps a baby. All very unpleasant.

When I first read about that kind of thing I began to realise how correct Engels was to see the male versus female conflict as some sort of premonition, analogous to another kind of conflict: namely, class conflict. I am sure most are familiar with Engels' formulation in *The origins of the family, private property and the state* that the first form of class oppression is the oppression of the female by the male in monogamous marriage. When you read Engels, especially the introduction to *The origins of the family*, you will see how that idea of sex and class in some ways converging informs all his thinking.

Upon learning about the nature of chimpanzee society this seemed obvious to me. You have the sex that gets pregnant, rears the offspring, does all the work of reproducing the species; and then you have the other sex - in a way the leisured sex, the sex which gets someone else to do all the work, gets a female pregnant then goes off to get another female pregnant. All the conflicts in primate society are around that struggle - the struggle by the males for access to fertile females.

What Engels says is that something like that conflict built up and built up, until it reached a point of contradiction where, if it did not get resolved, it would lead to

the extinction of the species. But in one particular case - namely, that of our ancestors - it led to a revolution, and according to Engels this revolution established not just the equality and solidarity of women, but in some respects the primacy of women embodied in the matrilineal clan.

As I was mentioning earlier, Marxists today just seem uninterested in the whole subject. It is as if they have just accepted what bourgeois anthropology says: that this fundamental idea of a matrilineal clan has been disproven as romantic nonsense. So I will just say that there is a book that has come out quite recently, *Early human kinship: from sex to social reproduction*, published by the Royal Anthropological Institute, and it has a chapter in it called 'Early human kinship was matrilineal'. Now, I will admit that this chapter was written by me, but the whole book more or less converges around this same basic argument: early human kinship was matrilineal. I will come back to that and give you the evidence for it.

Similarly there is a fantastic, maybe even better, book by Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Mothers and others*. Hrdy, a major figure in Darwinian theory, has also written a book called *Mother nature*, and again this is standard stuff now, accepted by nearly everyone in the field. She argues that the crucial thing that distinguishes humans from apes is that an ape female will hold onto her baby and will not let anyone else have that baby, or even touch it. Quite rightly due to the kind of violence evident in chimpanzee society. With humans the baby is so demanding and slow to mature that a human mother could not possibly have coped alone.

In hunter-gatherer society the babies are shared around. The mother has to trust those other people, including male kin, enormously. Without that cooperative effort there is no way that humans, over the course of evolution, could have afforded to give birth to such demanding babies. The whole of *Mothers and others* is about the evolution of collective childcare, exactly as Engels wrote.

Of course, you might say, 'So what that early human kinship was matrilineal. Does that matter too much?' As I say, I do not think we should simply agree because Engels wrote this, but it is interesting to assess to what extent Engels thought this was important. He writes in *The origins of the family*: "The rediscovery of the original mother-right gens ... has the same significance for the history of primitive society as the theory of evolution had for biology, and Marx's theory of surplus value had for political economy. It enabled Morgan to outline for the first time the history of the family ... Clearly this opens a new era in the treatment of the history of primitive society."

Engels even goes as far as to say that mother right has become the pivot around which his entire science turns - he thought it was absolutely central. If you are a scientist, you will come to the conclusion that the form of society, the form of kinship, which emerged out of the human revolution stood the logic of primate dominance on its head. In other words what came out of the revolution was the opposite of what was going on before - which is, of course, what you would expect from a revolution.

Well, the logic of primate society is dominance. Dominance is defined as the ability to displace a rival from a valued spot. That may be a hunting or breeding spot. If you can elbow out those occupying that place you have dominance, and monkey and ape social life is based on that.

Reverse dominance

Christopher Boehm's *Hierarchy in the forest* - an absolutely lovely, and relatively simple read - argues that wherever you have dominance you will get counter-dominance. In other words, if you are a monkey and someone is pushing you out of the way, you are not going to be too happy about it and you

will push back.

What Boehm argues is that counter-dominance is necessarily collective. If you have a dominant ape or monkey - usually male, of course - pushing others around, those that are being pushed around, in resisting, are going to need each other, to need more solidarity. And what this book argues is brilliant: that at a certain point in the course of human evolution counter-dominance arrived at a tipping point where it became what Boehm calls "reverse dominance".

The first hunter-gatherers live by reverse dominance. This means there is something dominant, but it is the collective. Only the collective is allowed to use violence. This is the only approved form of violence in the hunter-gatherer community, and it is used to counter individual violence. So counter-dominance culminates in reverse dominance, where everyone is striving, in a kind of competitive system, to prove how useful they are to the collective. Boehm argues that this hunter-gatherer reverse dominance can only come out of a revolution.

The arguments around the emergence of early human society all gravitate around the idea of the minimisation of violence, and increasing cooperation. But the establishment of human levels of cooperation meant overthrowing the previous dominance of the individual by the use of violence against everybody else.

Let me quote from Engels, when he talks about how early human societies must have evolved and emerged. He looks at monkey and ape social systems to get some idea of a society before the transition to human society took place: "... animal societies have, to be sure, a certain value in drawing conclusions regarding human societies, but only in a negative sense. As far as we have ascertained, the higher vertebrates know only two forms of the family: polygamy or the single pair. In both cases only one adult male is permissible. The jealousy of the male, representing both tie and limits of the family, brings the animal family into conflict with the horde" - that is, the collective.

"The horde, the higher social form, is rendered impossible here, loosened there or dissolved altogether during the mating season; at best, its continued development is hindered by the jealousy of the male. This alone suffices to prove that the animal family and primitive human society are incompatible things; that primitive man, working his way up out of the animal stage, either knew no family whatsoever, or at the most knew a family that is non-existent among animals."

So what Engels is saying is that - instead of doing what the Darwinians do when looking at ape society to find intimations of human society - we must look for the negation of human society, since human society emerged out of the consistent negation of what was there previously. He more or less goes on to say what I am advocating here: "For evolution out of the animal stage, for the accomplishment of the greatest advance known to nature, an additional element was needed: the replacement of the individual's inadequate power of defence by the united strength and joint effort of the horde."

For Engels sexual jealousy of the male prevented that from developing. Therefore that jealousy had to be transcended, broken, prevented: "Mutual toleration among the adult males, freedom from jealousy, was, however, the first condition for the building of those large and enduring groups in the midst of which alone the transition from animal to man could be achieved. And indeed, what do we find as the oldest, most primitive form of the family, of which undeniable evidence can be found in history, and which even today can be studied here and there? Group marriage, the form in which whole groups of men and whole groups of women belong to one another, and which leaves but little

scope for jealousy."

People's hair stand on end when you talk of "group marriage", particularly in the west. There are immediately thoughts of the brothel and that image is the thing which stops people even conceptualising that group marriage could be a very civilised way of living. Group marriage is about a legal contract. It does not mean everyone is partying and having sex with everyone else. It means that the group of men would legally call the collective of women their wives. Obviously whether you have sex with them is up to the participants to decide. But the actual legal contract is between one group and another group.

And actually that is what happened with hunter-gatherers. The contracts are built, not around weddings, but instead around initiation rights. In the book I mentioned earlier, *Early human kinship*, all that is made absolutely clear. The idea of private individual marriage is very recent. It is not what hunter-gatherers do. The actual sexual relationships may be, to a point, fairly intimate and private, but every now and again what happens with hunter-gatherers is, as soon as they get the chance, the women take advantage of their legal rights. There are very explicit descriptions by anthropologists of women taking advantage of their legal rights with a number of different husbands.

What happens with many South American native groups is that a woman will believe that her baby will do best if it has lots of dads. So when she is pregnant she will choose extra males to father her baby. The argument is that sperm from one man does not make a very strong foetus. What my colleague at the University of East London, Paul Valentine, has done is to test out whether this theory is scientific or not. Believe it or not, it is a very good scientific theory.

If you believe Trotsky and Engels that the proof of the pudding is in the eating, that science is knowledge that gives us power, the theory that having more than one father is good for the baby is true. They have measured it. They have got the statistics and found that a child with just one dad has less likelihood of surviving to adulthood than a child that has two. If a child has four or five dads that is probably too much of a good thing, but twofold definitely a lot better than one and three is not bad either. That is simply a single father can go wandering off or get killed in the hunt, but if you have several dads, you have several providers of meat.

Also the men all think of themselves as having a share in several children. So the child will regard a number of different men as fathers, and a number of different men will be tolerant of each other's children. That is exactly what Engels was saying: for us to escape the primate system, where one male jealously guards his female and his offspring, you need mutual toleration between the males. Exactly what has been described as the basic underlying system in South America completely vindicates Engels.

Human revolution

In a way, everyone who believes in the human revolution - and that includes most archaeologists - kind of got it wrong, as I did. We got the dates and also the place wrong. We all thought the human revolution happened in Europe about 40,000 years ago. The reason for that was the earliest evidence we had for art, personal imitation, etc came from Europe in what was called the upper paleolithic revolution, which culminated about 30,000 years ago. The human revolution was identified with that distinctively European explosion.

In my book *Blood relations* I was to some extent escaping from that by suggesting that these events in Europe must have been preceded by events in Africa, but I linked the human revolution with those events to too great an extent. That is the only thing I got wrong in the book, I believe. I made a prediction which was that the evidence for the revolution, wherever it was found,

would take the form of cosmetics, of red ochre. I wrote a lot about that in *Blood relations*.

What happened was, my student and colleague, Ian Watts, challenged the timing. He said I had got it all wrong and that it all happened much earlier, in Africa. I remember saying to Ian, 'OK then, go to Africa, do some digging, and find out about it.' But I predicted that there would be plenty of red ochre as the signature of the revolution. So Ian went to South Africa, to the Blombos cave, and discovered evidence of the world's earliest art.

Some people think that art is something you put on a wall. That is a bourgeois concept. If hunter-gatherers are going to imitate animals they are going to dance as those animals, so they will paint their bodies. Thus art takes the form of singing, dancing, moving art, as well as the two-dimensional variety. If you have colours you will put them on your body and be the giraffe, or antelope, or whatever. The art discovered at the Blombos cave by the team Ian is a part of the earliest evidence we have. It dates to somewhere around 70,000 or 80,000 years ago. So now we think the human revolution could go back much earlier.

Why red ochre? It is about solidarity. Essentially, as I mentioned earlier, in the chimpanzee social system, as soon as the female shows indications that she may be fertile all the males go on a rampage, fighting for access to her. In the course of human evolution ovulation has been concealed. Why is that? What is the point? If you are the pope, and think sex is only for reproduction, it does not make any sense to conceal the correct time for getting pregnant. Well, the human female hides that moment. Why?

Because in the case of the human female there was no desire to save time on sex, to have it quickly in order to get pregnant and get on with other things. Instead they aimed to spend time on sex, because if the male is spending time on sex maybe he will do other useful things as well. The more you can 'waste time' on sex, the more energy can be extracted from the male.

The human female is living in larger and larger groups, with lots of social complexity. Needing to give birth to burdensome babies requires two things: first to get support in childcare from other females, but also to make the males earn their keep. Instead of having sex and going off the females aimed to get something out of them in terms of investment. And the more the female concealed ovulation, the more it forced the male to hang around if he was to have any chance of making her pregnant. So concealed ovulation made a lot of sense.

But there is one signal that gives the game away and threatens complete disaster, and that is menstruation. Males looking for a female among the group who can be got pregnant will target anyone who shows signs of being on her menstrual cycle. That will be at the expense of other females, resulting in complete chaos. So somehow, very late in evolution, that problem had to be dealt with.

And it was dealt with through the use of cosmetics. If every time the female menstruates the other females supervise and bond with her, and everyone paints up with brilliant red cosmetics as if all the females are fertile - if you want one of us, you have got to have all of us - that potential vice, where only the females undergoing menstruation are sought after, could be avoided.

Ian's discovery of red ochre in Africa - some pieces carefully shaped like lipstick, clearly designed with the intention of being applied to the body - was evidence that my prediction had been correct.

The 2007 book, *Rethinking the human revolution*, by Paul Mellars, Chris Stringer and others, was all about recognising that the revolution was not just something which happened in Europe 40,000 years ago, but was a much

more gradual thing that began in Africa. Because it was more gradual a school of thought has emerged which has tried to get rid of the revolution altogether. So there is a chapter in this book called H: 'Down with the revolution', which argues that, because the change was gradual and earlier, maybe it was not a revolution at all.

Mostly, however, this book argues that it was a revolution. Of course, it was not a sudden, overnight thing, there had been a build-up and it would have taken a long time for the new, revolutionary social order, based on the matrilineal clan, to take root. When it did become stable, there was a fairly sudden movement of human beings from Africa across the globe.

Spiral

I started from the proposition that we need to put science first. I then said that putting science first means putting the big picture together. The bourgeoisie cannot do this, as they are part of the problem, and as soon as you start asking questions about why they have their power and whether it is legitimate and so forth they will crack down on extending science into that domain. But Marxists can put science first because we stand outside society as it is currently organised.

The dialectic is the method you have to use to put the blueprint together and solve all the different contradictions. The dialectic is little more than saying, change happens through the build-up and then resolution of contradictions. It is also saying that, because change happens that way, there is a logic where, in a sense, the overall shape of evolutionary change is not a straight line, but is much better thought of as a spiral - every now and again you are back where you started except on a higher level.

Some people think of that as some kind of analogy. Maybe communism of the future will be a little like primitive communism. Maybe we can learn something from hunter-gatherers to teach us what communism in the future will be like. But I do not see it that way. I see the dialectic as deep. It is the underlying logic of evolutionary change, as Trotsky said. So the establishment of communism will be, if that is accepted, a repeat, on a higher level, of the revolution that made us human. So we can find out how hunter-gatherers looked after their kids, communicated and managed their landscape. We can learn from them about future communism.

In other words, although the technology is different, the social logic of future communism will be egalitarian, just as hunter-gatherers maintained egalitarianism through reverse dominance. More than that - and this is the extra step which Engels takes, but perhaps does not elaborate fully - actually getting to communism will need a revolution that in a sense we have won already.

I firmly believe that the best way to know in detail how the revolution is going to be won is to understand the whole picture, much as Marx and Engels were trying to do. But to understand in particular that in a sense we have already won the revolution: the fact that we have language, we have culture, we can see ourselves as others see us, we have self-consciousness - all this proves that the revolution worked.

You can argue that the results of the English or French Revolution did not quite match up to the ideals that the revolutionaries had. The same can be said of the Russian Revolution. Well, the revolution which worked is the biggest revolution of all. It was the human revolution. And the difference between how we were as early hunter-gatherers and how we were before the revolution is a massive, qualitative difference.

Using the same logic, when we win a communist revolution, we will be as different from the way we are now under capitalism as the first fully human creatures were from the animal they had been before they managed to win the human revolution ●

FAR RIGHT

English Defence League stunts and the real lessons of the 1930s

Calls for state, local government and BBC censorship and bans will inevitably backfire against the workers' movement, argues **Ben Lewis**



Out on the streets of Luton

Doubtless bolstered by the British National Party's recent electoral success, there has been a rise in far-right street mobilisations, leading to tussles with the police, Muslim youth and left activists, including those from Unite Against Fascism. On top of pickets and demonstrations in Birmingham, Luton and Harrow, a further rightwing provocation is planned for Manchester on October 10. At the heart of this sudden increase in activity has been the English Defence League.

However, the only EDL stunt that has gained any noticeable support so far has been in Luton last March. Its counter-demonstration was called against alleged al Muhajiroun Islamists, who marked the return of the Royal East Anglian

regiment from a tour of duty in Afghanistan by jeering their parade and called for more troops to be brought home in body bags.

The EDF counter-demo tapped into the respectable nationalism of the mainstream and united it with football 'Casuals' and skinhead racists. British-Asian businesses were attacked by breakaway groups. Since then subsequent EDF actions have involved negligible numbers, but likewise serve to massively increase social tensions.

Formed by a motley crew of confused lumpenproletarians, convicted football hooligans and seasoned far-rightist lunatics, the EDL has ridden on the growing wave of anti-Muslim sentiment in the wider population. The EDL has,

though, no coherent political platform or ideology and is organisationally loose, shadowy and prone to splinter at any point. It organises in so-called divisions and mainly by using blogs and Facebook.

Not irrelevantly, especially given the stupid and often hysterical leftwing commentary, the BNP is at pains to distance itself. The BNP insists that it does not engage in the sort of street provocations the EDL has become known for. It says it is now thoroughly committed to elections, not conquering the streets or sparking a premature race war. To underline the point, the BNP's national organiser, Eddy Butler, publicly announced on September 4 that the EDL is a "proscribed organisation".

Henceforth it will be a "disciplinary offence" for any BNP member to be involved with EDL activities.¹

In turn, the EDL says it disavows racism and 'extremism' and denies any links with the BNP. Despite that, the EDL's numerous supporters have been photographed giving Nazi salutes on demonstrations and heard shouting slogans about hating 'Pakis' and keeping 'Britain for the Brits'. True, there have been known BNPers and ex-BNPers operating in the EDL. Its website, for example, was constructed by BNP activist Chris Renton. However, it is quite clear that the BNP wants nothing to do with organising EDL street protests or to be associated with it in any other way. Nick Griffin craves respectability,

votes and political power gained through the ballot box.

The EDL hypocritically blames the left, UAF and Muslims for the street violence. Apparently they are the planners and perpetrators of clashes which threaten "democracy" and "free speech". Playing the anti-establishment card, it accuses UAF of being a "government-backed organisation with supporters including David Cameron, leader of the Conservative Party".² Whatever the spin, the EDL aim is quite clearly to whip up British chauvinist hysteria and divide working class communities.

The EDL has incurred the wrath of sections of the political establishment as well as the BNP and the far left.

Communities secretary John Denham drew an analogy with the 1930s by linking the aims and approach of groups like the EDL to Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists, although he admits the EDL does not possess the BUF's "potency, organisation or threat". Leading Socialist Workers Party member and UAF convenor Weyman Bennett agrees: Denham is "right to compare anti-Muslim hate groups such as the English Defence League (EDL) to the fascists that marched against Jews in the 1930s".³

In 1930s Germany, Leon Trotsky correctly judged that the bourgeois parties had injected the workers' movement with poison that would slowly kill it, but that the Nazis were more akin to a man approaching with an axe. This then informed strategic perspectives - Trotsky advised the workers' movement as a whole to defend itself against the immediate threat so as to be able to deal with the slow poison.

However, in 2009, far-right groups like the EDL and BNP, in terms of their size, influence and the threat they pose to the working class movement, bear no comparison even to the *Daily Mail*-backed British Union of Fascists under Oswald Mosley, let alone Adolf Hitler and the Nazis.

Of course, especially given the current economic downturn and the austerity that lies ahead, that could quickly change. So the real point about looking back to the 1930s is to draw from them strategic lessons. Comrade Bennett likes to highlight some of the inspiring events of the 30s in the fight against the far right. The CPGB mobilisation to beat the BUF at Cable Street and the struggles in the workplaces and in communities are undoubtedly inspiring. But there is another side to the coin.

The CPGB embraced popular frontism in the mid-1930s, which meant lining up with trade union officials, Labour left, liberals, churchmen and film stars in a classless defence of democracy. The fight for working class political independence and socialism was effectively abandoned. And despite the SWP's pretensions about UAF being a 'united front' in the spirit of Leon Trotsky, it is clearly a classic popular front, albeit of the unpopular kind. UAF cannot even advise a class vote in elections. Instead it just says: 'Use your vote to stop the Nazi BNP!'

Not only is this reactive approach (what exactly are we for?) based on an overestimation of the far right's current influence: it encapsulates the archetypal popular frontist distinction between the 'respectable', mainstream parties like New Labour, the Tories and even the United Kingdom Independence Party on the one hand, and the 'illegitimate' BNP and EDL on the other. Despite the EDL's fantasies about David Cameron as a UAF supporter, the leader of a party whose history is synonymous with imperialist slaughter, national chauvinism, racism, gay-baiting and sexism would *not* be unwelcome on a UAF platform.

Ban them!

Alongside the left's popular frontist approach is its increasing tendency to call for state bans, censorship and proscriptions.

The CPGB of the 1930s learnt the meaning of such measures the hard way. It campaigned for the banning of the BUF, using similar arguments about respectability and legitimacy to those of UAF/SWP. When the Public Order Act was passed in 1936, the CPGB soon found that the legislation was employed against *its* demonstrations, rallies and mobilisations. Indeed, whenever the going gets tough, the parties of the establishment ('respectable' ones, remember) are more than willing to bring down the full weight of state repression on the organised workers' movement - we saw a glimpse of this during the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85.

But whether for reasons of historical illiteracy or naked class-collaborationism, some will never learn. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the 'official communist' *Morning Star* implores her majesty's constabulary to "ban tonight's planned 'anti-Muslim protest' outside Harrow Central Mosque in the same way they would do if a church, synagogue, chapel or temple was targeted."⁴

Our friends in the SWP are no better. 'Turn the BNP into HMP'⁵ has now become its mantra. After all, what would be a more effective means of denying Nick Griffin and co the "oxygen of publicity"

than being locked up?

The problem with this approach, however, is that it fails to recognise that the main enemy - both in the immediate and the long-term sense - is precisely the capitalist state, upon which these comrades would bestow greater powers to deal with the 'Nazis'. It is not actually illegal to stage a demonstration outside any religious establishment, nor should it be. After all, it is not inconceivable that the workers' movement might wish to protest against the reactionary actions of a pro-establishment church, so why call on the state to adopt powers to prevent us from doing so? Similarly, it is not exactly unknown for working class fighters to be jailed for giving voice to unacceptable views.

Gag them!

Which brings us to the controversy over the BBC television programme, *Question time*. As the reader will be aware, the corporation has stated that it intends to invite a BNP leader to debate current politics with representatives of the main parties on a forthcoming edition - a decision that has not exactly pleased the SWP.

Writing in *Socialist Worker*, Michael Rosen states: "Like the street, the BBC is a public place and is indirectly publicly owned. The BBC has a responsibility to represent everyone. It has no responsibility to represent those who attack sections of the population and demand that they leave the country."⁶

The mind boggles. If the BBC has a responsibility to represent *everyone*, then there is the obvious point to be made - the BNP, by tapping into the discontent amongst backward workers, is winning votes and getting elected. The appearance of a BNP leader on *Question time* would provide this minority with a form of representation. Moreover, if one's criterion for a place on the show is that no panellist should "attack sections of the population and demand that they leave the country", then this would see the number of invited speakers dwindle to virtually zero. After all, every one of the mainstream, 'respectable' parties supports immigration controls, which certainly involves attacking sections of the population and forcing them out of the country.

Implicit in Rosen's moralism is something else - elitism. As soon as the 'ordinary workers' sitting at home see Nick Griffin mouth off some nonsense on *Question time* they will be won over to Hitlerism and holocaust denial!

Now, this is not to say that any of those likely to challenge Griffin on *Question time* would be able to mount any kind of principled working class argument against him. That would require a champion of genuine socialism - not tailing the establishment consensus of the Denhams, Camerons *et al*.

And this is the point. What our comrades in the SWP, CPB and UAF seem unable to come to terms with is that the BNP's relative electoral success will increasingly mean pressure to appear on various platforms, political debates, radio shows and more. It should be blindingly obvious that the tasks of Marxists now should not consist in appealing to the BBC to ban the BNP, but to start articulating *our* solutions and *our* programme, build our own electoral base, see our own councillors and MEPs elected, and force the establishment to start taking *us* seriously!

Unfortunately, even if the left were strong enough to be invited onto a programme like *Question time*, then our current 'common sense' would dictate such an appearance to be beyond the pale if it meant sharing a platform with a 'Nazi'. In fact comrade Bennett *et al* would very likely 'no platform' themselves rather than make use of the opportunity to promote independent working class politics. They would rather hand the banner of decency, respectability and democracy to the stalwarts of the bourgeoisie!

Sack them!

The reaction to the BBC decision to invite the BNP onto *Question time* is just one example of the left's elitism, lack of self-confidence and disdain for democracy.

Last week's Trade Union Congress in Liverpool unanimously backed a call for urgent talks with the government to address the need to extend the ban on BNP members in the police and prison services across the whole of the public sector. This time it was Janice Godrich - deputy general secretary of the Public and Commercial Services Union and a member of Socialist Party in England and

Wales - calling for more state powers.

Despite making noises about the "mainstream parties" needing to "urgently address the serious gaps in the policies that allow the BNP and far right to exploit division to suit their own ends", she was quite clear that the ban should be extended. The "BNP's message of hate and fear" stood in stark contrast to the values of equality and access for all on which public services are based.⁸ *Socialist Worker* carries exactly the same message: "It is absolutely right that BNP members should be banned from public sector jobs".⁹

These comrades seem incapable of learning from history how such measures end up being used against our class. The *Berufsverbot* law passed against communists and fascists in post-World War II Germany had a disastrous impact. Anybody suspected of being a member of, or sympathetic to, the German Communist Party was hounded out of teaching in the name of defending the 'public interest' and upholding 'democracy' and 'legitimacy'. Always it is the bourgeois establishment that decides who and what is legitimate.

We communists disdain to conceal our views as a party of intransigent, uncompromising and irreconcilable hostility to the capitalist system, its sham democracy and coercive state apparatus. In this we are an 'extreme' party like the BNP or the EDL - and are therefore just as vulnerable to 'anti-extremist' witch-hunt legislation. That is why the left calling for the state to arm itself with yet more powers is like turkeys voting for Christmas.

Once again, though, the ghost of the popular frontist 1930s is back to haunt us - only this time on a much smaller scale: first time tragedy, second time farce. Instead of opting for no confidence in the bourgeois state and fighting for the divestment of state powers, the left is acting as cheerleader for British 'democracy' and the values of 'equality and access for all' that are at the heart of good old British institutions like the BBC.

In the last decade the BNP has gone from being an utterly marginal group to one that now commands a modestly healthy vote, has dozens of councillors and two MEPs. By contrast, the left is nowhere. Yet, to state the obvious, while the BNP can offer nothing but divisive dead ends, we have the only viable solutions for millions of people at a time when the capitalist system is so obviously failing humanity.

For communists, the various political tactics we can employ are not predetermined in some sort of religious manner. But this is unfortunately what they have become. Let us repeat: it is tactically as legitimate to organise physical defence against groups like the EDL or the BNP (including pre-emptively) as it is to ruthlessly expose their rotten ideas on a shared platform. As we have shown in previous articles, the best parts of our movement have always employed such a wide array of tactical weapons.

If we were actually making headway in rolling back the influence of the BNP, while simultaneously making new inroads for working class politics, then it might well be argued that we need to continue on the same course and perhaps pursue it with greater energy.

But facts can be stubborn things, and even a cursory glance at the relative strength of the far left in relation to the far right should at least pose some questions, if not necessarily the answers ●

Notes

1. <http://bnp.org.uk/2009/09/the-english-defence-league-a-statement-from-the-bnp%e2%80%99s-national-organiser>.
2. See: www.englishdefenceleague.org/uaf-spark-near-race-riots-in-birmingham-080809.html.
3. www.uaf.org.
4. Editorial, *Morning Star* September 11.
5. This phrase was coined by Weyman Bennett (then UAF convenor) when Nick Griffin was charged in 2006 with inciting racial hatred.
6. *Socialist Worker* September 26.
7. *Weekly Worker* correspondent Bob Potter exposes such a narrow outlook very well: "Are the arguments for racism really so dangerous, so contagious, so convincing? Given free expression, would fascism really win the battle for the human mind? Are the arguments for a libertarian society so unconvincing? If the answer to these questions is 'yes', our hopes for the socialist future are best forgotten, because, while people, given all the facts to make a rational judgement, choose an authoritarian solution, there will be no progress towards the classless society" (Letters *Weekly Worker* September 23).
8. *The Guardian* September 11.
9. *Socialist Worker* September 26.

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 the US-UK occupation of Iraq and stand against all imperialist wars but 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. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally. All forms of nationalist socialism are reactionary and anti-working class.**

■ **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 ready 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

Son of Star Wars ditched for anti-Iran alliance

Expensive bunch of nothing

Son of Star Wars is dead - or at least its European scion is. Representing a shift in US foreign policy, Barack Obama announced last week that he has decided to ditch plans to station an anti-ballistic (or 'interceptor') missile system in Poland and the Czech Republic - that is, right on Russia's doorstep.

Of course, Obama's decision hardly came as a stunning bolt from the blue, given the proposal's self-evident technological and military flaws - not to mention the political hornet's nest it stirred up. Though this hardly means that US imperialism has turned peacenik on us - far from it - it nevertheless represents a partial retreat from the out-and-out military and strategic belligerency of the George Bush years.

Under the original scheme hatched by Bush, there were to have been 130 ship-based interceptor missiles - plus 44 more ground-based ones in Alaska (40) and California (4). No doubt using super-sophisticated radar technology beamed to them from Alaska, California, Greenland and the UK (Fylingdales), at the mere touch of a button (if that) these incredibly advanced weapons would in a split second majestically glide into the air and 'knock out' the incoming enemy missiles.

Leave aside the extraordinarily remote chances of a successful hit: there was a slight problem - or so the reasoning went - what about the European theatre? A strike or threat from North Korea could supposedly be 'neutralised' by these various sea-based missiles. However, we were informed there was another potential threat from sudden attack by a 'rogue' state like Iran, whose Shahab-3 missiles were believed to have a range of up to 2,000 kilometres.

Therefore to help plug this 'gap' that allegedly existed in US imperialism's 'defence' strategy, Bush and his minions wanted to install 10 more interceptor silos in Poland and move a radar station currently based in the Micronesian Republic (Marshall Islands) to Brdy in the Czech Republic. In this way, the Bushites claimed, US imperialism could sleep safely at night - and so a deal was signed with both Poland and the Czech Republic in August 2008, both of which were eager to receive US largesse. For its part the US was eager to lock in Poland and the Czech Republic into Nato - not only against Russia, but against the German-French axis too.

But upon his inauguration this January, Obama immediately ordered a defence review - as do all US presidents, of course. The report-back stated Iran had not concentrated on developing long-range ballistic missiles, "as had been expected", but was instead focusing its energies on building shorter-range ones. Thus the review concluded that there was now "no need" to deploy an interceptor system in Europe, but rather to use the current naval and land-based systems already close to the Persian Gulf in order to counter any possible menace from the mullahs in Tehran.

In other words, Bush's military and strategic orientation was totally cock-eyed, if not semi-fraudulent - and represented a colossal misdirection of military expenditure. Money and resources which US imperialism, no doubt, could be wasting elsewhere.



Iran's missiles are no threat to Europe

Obama has strenuously denied that his shelving of the European anti-missile missile proposals had anything to do with violent Russian objections - to the effect that the placing of US-controlled missiles on Polish soil would be tantamount to an "act of war" and dealt with accordingly. Thus he told CBS television that the Russians "don't make determinations about what our defence posture is" - absolutely not. But perchance, he added, if it just so happened that a "by-product" of his announcement was that it made the Russians "feel a little less paranoid" - then this would be a "bonus", especially if the Russians suddenly found themselves "willing to work more effectively with us to deal with threats like ballistic missiles from Iran or nuclear development in Iran".

Writing in the *Telegraph online*, rightwing blogger Nils Gardiner declared that Obama must think that the US public "were born yesterday" if he believes they will buy into his "claim that last week's missile defence surrender had nothing to do with Russian pressure". Gardiner may have a point here. He also luridly writes that upon hearing Obama talk, he felt as "if the ghost of Neville Chamberlain had reappeared" - seeing how the president's "shameful betrayal" of his American allies in central and eastern Europe was "appeasement on a

grand scale", the likes of which "have not been witnessed" since the late 1930s. "Little wonder", Gardiner bitterly concludes, that Vladimir Putin "has been smiling like a Cheshire cat ever since".

Predictably then, certain conservative or neo-con circles in the United States, as well as coldwar warriors like Gardiner, sniff betrayal. First Obama's 'socialistic' putative healthcare reforms; now a backsliding from the hawkish unilateralism - and yearning for 'full spectrum dominance' - that so characterised the Bush administration. In a reference to such elements, US defence secretary Robert Gates - who also served under Bush during his final years - has stated that the decision to drop the European plan was a purely "pragmatic" one, criticising those having a "view bordering on theology" with regards to certain missile defence systems that were "unworkable, prohibitively expensive and could never be practically deployed."

So we can see that the US ruling class is divided amongst itself as to the immediate way forward for American imperialism - a fact communists welcome and a process we hope to see intensified over the coming years. But, on the other hand, the dropping of the European interceptor system and the moves towards some sort of détente with Russia - if indeed that is what it is - come at a

price: the steady tightening of the military noose around Iran, which is being encircled by US imperialism.

Furthermore, the dreams of a missile 'shield' live on - even if not perched over Europe any more. But in fact the very idea of such a shield is tantamount to madness on just about whatever ground you care to name - technologically, military, economically.

Of course, such fantasies have their origins in Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, as first outlined in 1983. Reagan wanted - or at least claimed he did - to use ground and space-based systems to protect the US from attack by strategic nuclear ballistic missiles. In terms of formal military doctrine, the SDI's focus on strategic defence marked a divergence from the previous long-standing strategic concept of 'mutually assured destruction', or MAD.

Reagan's SDI quickly became dubbed 'Star Wars' by its legion of critics - as it was obviously based on a combination of totally bogus science, delusional ideas picked up from a certain type of populist science fiction and a good dose of imperial hubris. In response, the American Physics Society in 1987 flatly declared that the notion of a Star Wars global shield was "impossible" with existing technology, perhaps with any level of vaguely feasible technological development - and, of course, prohibitively expensive as well, outside of intervention by generously minded extraterrestrials. A sentiment amply reflected in the song 'Star Wars won't work' by the American musician/composer, Frank Zappa, who tells us: "Star Wars won't work/ The gas still gets through/ It can get right on you / And what about those germs now/ Star Wars won't work/ It's a piece of shit/ Why are they even talkin' about it any more/ It's just an expensive bunch of nothing".

But, of course, none of that prevented the US 'military-industrial complex' from spending well over \$100 billion on Star Wars and similar follow-on programmes (not including the classified off-budget 'black projects'). It goes without saying that US imperialism holds a totally dominating lead over all current or potential future adversaries in the realm of space technology/warfare. Forget

China. The vast majority of this expenditure has been ploughed into basic research conducted by all manner of laboratories and universities, and to this day these programmes continue to be a key source of funding for research scientists in the fields of high-energy physics, supercomputing/computation, advanced materials, etc. Funding, of course, which feeds into the economy as a whole and acts as an indirect subsidy to many sections of US capital.

By such an invidious process, militarism - thanks to the power of the cash nexus - spreads into every nook and cranny of US public life, and into the minds and culture of the society. Yes, "an expensive bunch of nothing" - but one that serves a very useful function for US capitalism and imperialism.

Naturally, under certain carefully controlled and highly optimised experimental conditions - or using various computer simulations and models - one can imagine, or invent, a scenario where interceptor missiles have some sort of operational effectiveness. But if it came to the *reality* of war, as anyone with even a slither of scientific, technological or military knowledge knows full well, such anti-missile technology would prove to be as good as useless - you would be lucky to 'intercept' one percent of the incoming enemy missiles.

No, the straightforward, brutal fact remains that to win a major war or conflagration - whether it be regional, continental or worldwide - there is only one way to effectively and efficiently proceed: bomb the crap out of them. Better still, of course, nuke them - it's cheap, easy and *guaranteed* to work. Unlike the costly fantasies of Star Wars and interceptor defence/military systems. In this way, imperialism - with the US being the absolute hegemon - threatens to annihilate civilisation and bring barbarism to the planet ●

Eddie Ford

Notes

1. <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/nilegardiner/100010610/don%E2%80%99t-mention-the-russian-barack-obama%E2%80%99s-missile-defence-claims-are-ridiculous>
2. http://wiki.killuglyradio.com/wiki/Star_Wars_Won%27t_Work

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