

weekly worker



Bob Crow, No2EU, RMT, SPEW, SWP, CPB, Respect . . . disunity continues in run-up to general election

- French Resistance
- German general election
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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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LETTERS



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

Confused?

If SKS sought to identify confusion on the question of sexual consent, he certainly didn't do much other than add to it (Letters, September 17). SKS correctly states that it is the wish of the 'child' which is crucial here (in quote marks because clearly we are not talking necessarily about actual children, only state-designated 'children'). The state and SKS ignore the actions and wishes of the 'child' themselves on sexual matters.

The law insists that whatever voluntary or clearly consensual action the 'child' has taken must be held to be a non-action and non-consensual, by virtue of the fact that they are 'children'. The whole tone of SKS's letter is that 'children' are all helpless little victims who can't make their own decisions, so any sexual engagement they make, especially with an adult, must be non-consensual.

All this mumbo-jumbo about unequal parties denies the fact that an unequal party - in age, size, wealth, weight, height or whatever - *can* still actually consent to have sex with the older, richer or whatever party. The case has to be judged on its specific merits and not prejudged simply on dogma. Yes, a poorer, younger, less strong person could be coerced into sex - that is properly called rape. However, likewise an unequal party on any scale can in many cases voluntarily consent and that isn't rape: it's consent.

The big danger here, however, is not the question of actual children, but young adults, as in the Helen Goddard case, that the state has *deemed* children and thereby denied them their freedom and sexual liberty. In Britain, the age of consent is ostensibly 16, though everywhere under attack. The law and the government have since the advent of Blair/Brown deemed everyone under 18 a 'child' and there are a whole range of restrictions now on what a 16-year-old can do ... including, incidentally, leaving school and starting work. The law as it applies to partners from abroad lays down that anyone under 21 is not legally entitled to consent to marriage or allowed to come and live here with their wife or husband. Is the 20-year-old from outside this isle now a child too?

It will take one stroke of pen to make sex with anyone under 18 illegal because they are children in the eyes of the law and state. Will SKS then start trotting out the same justification about power relationships, unequal parties and abuse when looking at cases where adults have sex with 16 or 17-year-olds? If so we can see then that he is ready to concede that the state can deny sexual freedom to anyone it wishes, no matter how irrationally, simply by extending 'childhood' to anyone. We surely aren't that confused, are we?

Willie Hunter

Berwick Upon Tweed

Sex security

I have read with interest the responses (September 24) to my original letter (September 17).

I thank Arthur Lawrence for not assuming gender in this case, and see this as a good thing. That said, I do not understand what he finds confusing about my previous letter: I stated that due to space limitations I was not going to provide an in-depth analysis. I did touch upon some of the issues and Mr Lawrence seemed not to have been confused about them at all. He disagrees with some, and agrees with others, but is not misrepresenting them.

I did, however, omit to take sides in the debate on what the age of consent should be, as correctly pointed out by both Mr Lawrence and Vicky Starr, and

I didn't elaborate on a concrete proposal of my own. For this I apologise. I agree that these are complex questions with no easy answers - and that the simplification of the topic in the public discourse is worrying.

In my view, a draconian age of consent law is one that doesn't provide for context and treats all cases as criminal and with criminal consequences. In particular, a law that emphasises punishment and maximum sentences, and that ties the hands of judges and juries to see each case in context. I also find it draconian that all violations of age of consent laws are automatically considered for the sex offenders register (which I do not consider in itself draconian - I have exactly zero sympathy for rapists and recognise the protective value of the register in allowing potential victims to organise self-defence). I also think arbitrary definitions of age of consent, like a line in the sand, are draconian.

I advocate the following: the creation of four age zones: pre-pubescent, pubescent, young adult and adult. These should be based not upon chronological age, but scientific examination of given criteria, which include psychological and physical examination. To avoid issues of legal wrangling, the criteria would be specific and clinical, and age *guidelines*, rather than hard lines, would be included (a recognition of the reality of the borders not being hard ones in real life). Sex between members of a given group would be legal. Sex within adjacent groups would be subjected to review using the criteria set forth, with all sex between non-adjacent groups banned and subjected to criminal prosecution. An exception would be sex between adults and young adults, which would be based on mutual consent as the sole criteria, as they are adults.

I agree that mutual consent is the best regulator of human relationships. Of course, this being among equals in equal conditions: adults in situations where there is no power or coercion certainly deserve to be left alone with their sexual choices. Let adults consent to engage in whatever permutation of consensual sex they want. No legal limits should exist - legally enforced monogamy and straight-only marriage should be abolished - and let everyone decide freely how to organise their love life. No quarrel there.

Yet this is a red herring: the issue is not consent among equals, but 'consent' among unequals. In other situations outside of sex, such as labour, we have laws that regulate and mediate behaviour among unequals. Free marketeers argue that mutual consent is enough to mediate the contractual relationship between employer and employee, and see workplace laws as attempts to undermine this freedom. I see many problems with labour laws under the capitalist state, but I defend each one as gains: minimum wage laws, workday limitations laws, health and security laws, and so on. All represent great advances over what the mutual-consent labour regime offered, which was starvation wages and Dickensian working hours and health conditions. Mutual consent fails when the mutuality is compromised by a power relationship that is inherently unequal, such as the relationship between employer and employee, between a teacher and a student, or between a child and an adult.

As I pointed out in my previous letter, only under a singular - and rather convenient for some - definition of children as full equals with adults can we argue with a clear conscience that mutual consent is a fit umpire of sex between children and adults. The fact that children and adults are not equal is scientific, not moral. To claim otherwise is like claiming that the sky is green and we breathe carbon dioxide.

In the case of Helen Goddard, both Mr

Lawrence and Ms Starr are confusing the need to reform consent laws with her separate crime of breaking the trust and responsibility inherent in being a teacher and an adult responsible for the well-being of her student. She betrayed this trust - to her students, to the educational system and to society in general. As such, I do support banning her from teaching a child again. A life-ban is perhaps a little harsh, but it is less arbitrary than, say, a one-year suspension.

I do agree, however, that under a consent system that was rational, being branded a sex offender and jailed for such a long time for what appears to be non-violent and non-coercive (beyond the circumstance of her being a teacher) sexual contacts seems draconian. We need to reform consent laws, but this is not the best example: someone who used her job as a teacher as a dating opportunity has no space teaching anyone anything and deserves not our approval, but our unequivocal condemnation.

Ms Starr admits that Ms Goddard made an error of judgment. Well, so have all of those who violate any law, no matter how horrible their crimes. And, in particular, the one thing we should demand from all teachers is to possess the self-restraint and sound judgement not to have sex with their students, regardless of age. The power issues are simply too strong to control even in the most well-intentioned situation.

Ms Starr also surveys the wide array of age of consent laws worldwide. This is useful to illustrate the arbitrary nature of these laws, and I thank her for it. We agree that sex between youth, even what is currently criminalised, should be allowed in the context of comprehensive sexual education and free access to contraceptives and healthcare related to their sexual activities.

Yet her claim that age of consent issues as discussed are part of "the communist programme" is ludicrously reductionist. In any case, there are many communist programmes, not just one. She might be arguing for one that I have not seen, but certainly not for the communist programme to which I, as a communist, subscribe. This totalitarian reductionism stands in sharp contrast with the 'empowerment' being claimed for the youth as part of a "comprehensive set of demands". Surely, demands are organically developed by youth themselves, taking into account their actual aspirations and needs, and in no way 'guided' by adults, with their views on what is correct or incorrect for such a programme.

The day I see thousands of children marching on the streets and fighting the police for their right to have sex with adults will be the day I believe such programmes are not thinly-veiled tools for adult oppression of children. Empowerment always comes from within; it never comes from without. It is the basis of self-determination, the most important of all freedoms.

My youth is not that far away for me not to remember with disgust how we were treated by lecherous adults, how we viewed them as 'creepy' and how those of us who had such relationships felt somehow coerced into them. Not to mention the pain, impotence and alienation of seeing friends in abusive situations far from any semblance of consent, sometimes on the part of the very authorities we were told to trust, such as teachers, counsellors and police. And as a young communist, also seeing how our budding political views, however immature, were shaped by earnest cadre who knew what we as youth needed for our 'empowerment'.

Communists should defend the oppressed from oppression as defined by the oppressed, not come to the oppressed with ready-made programmes for their liberation. We should talk less and listen more. Any

ready-made programme for youth empowerment that includes sex with adults was not written with any input from youth. It is at best an earnest portrayal of what adults view youth wanting (an exercise of age oppression); at worst a justification of the prurient fetish of certain adults with certain power dynamics in place that disallow them from engaging in consensual sex with other adults (a "paedophiles' charter", to use Ms Starr's own formulation).

Ms Starr goes on to claim that "Sections of the left, it seems, share the irrational, anti-sex attitudes and prejudices of the rightwing moral crusaders." This is facile, degenerated, moralistic crap. I am as sex-positive as they come - the type of person who rather than laughing at people's fetishes, celebrates them as a great part of the human experience. Yet, this recognition cannot be had without a profound analysis of how gender, power relations, race, class and age affect our sexualities. The struggle against "rightwing moral crusaders" cannot be countered by the "leftwing moral crusaders" who uphold abstract points on supposed liberty, while in reality promoting the oppression of children on the part of adults, of women on the part of men, and of students on the part of teachers. Freedom in the abstract includes the 'freedom' to oppress.

As a communist, I would push for a plan that emphasises community control, the involvement of the unions, and provision for a system of check and balances, rather than one that relies solely on the repressive apparatus of the state. The security of children in the public sphere is not only a criminal matter, but an educational and labour matter as well.

SKS

New York

Vetting vaccine

Lawrie Coombs admits not having "studied in detail the recent plans to vet the approximately 11 million adults who work with children" (Letters, September 24).

If he had, he would know that people who work with children already are vetted. The latest proposal goes far further and seeks to vet anyone who comes into casual, voluntary contact with children - people who volunteer to drive their own kids and their friends' kids to the local youth club or organisation, people who arrange to deliver kids to the baths or whatever.

Just this week we have seen two female police officers charged with having broken 'child protection laws' because they had an arrangement to look after each other's children whilst on anti-social shifts. They aren't 'authorised' to take charge of children, even though it is with complete and mutual consent.

This is not 'work'; it is just human activity that takes them into contact with young people. The decision to put them all through a records check is a truly draconian step down an already authoritarian road. It might surprise Lawrie to know that parents are quite capable of judging for themselves whether or not they trust their neighbours and friends with their kids. We don't need a state vetting 'service' to make the judgement for us.

Incidentally, people who are caught in such checks are not those previously found guilty of some law they have broken either. One only needs to be accused of having done something they didn't like, whether there was a charge or not, and never mind whether you were ever found guilty or not. So, having never been convicted or even charged with any offence doesn't mean you are then clear. Not likely. You're still on that list and would still be banned from work or free activity with children. So you're guilty if you're guilty and you're still

guilty even if you're not guilty.

Aside from everything else, this is a mini-version of the identity card scheme. If you can run a regular extensive check on a quarter of the population as a first start to further checks down the road, you already have your surveillance of the population on file, on record - logged and recorded without the need for actual cards. But don't be too surprised if those checked are given a card to establish if they are 'clean' or not.

How long before adults visiting a park, baths or beach where there are children will have to surrender to such checks too? I'm waiting for the new law on 'unauthorised contact with a child', which will allow only those 'authorised' by the state to play, talk or be with a child on pain of prosecution. It's a short step from banning unvetted guest speakers and authors from schools, banning volunteers from driving their neighbours' kids or their children's friends to activities, and banning all associations and friendships between adults and children.

I'd like to see all the shadowy characters that come up with this paranoid terrorism - the vetting authorities, the social work departments and government think-tanks - put through a vetting procedure themselves. I seriously consider many of them are quite dangerously mad and suffering some form of inverted sexual repression-induced paranoia. The added danger is that, with the help of the panic-driven press, it seems to be highly contagious. The only vaccine would seem to be solid working class common sense and scepticism.

Malcolm Stace

email

Quiet life

Tony Clark says that 'socialism in one country' was not a mistake because it was to be employed as a tactic under conditions when international revolution was impossible, and not as a strategy (Letters, September 24).

But this is the whole point: 'socialism in one country' was employed as a strategy! The whole objection is that the interests of the world working class movement were made subsidiary to the building of 'socialism' in the USSR. Instead of being the means by which, under difficult conditions, international solidarity and world revolution could be fought for, the Third International was turned instead to being simply border guards of the USSR.

Time and again the interests of workers in class struggle around the globe were subordinated to that end. In its support for Chiang Kai-shek, in its attacks on socialists in Spain and so on, Stalinism demonstrated that it would act as the hangman of the workers in order to maintain the favour of the bourgeoisie, in the hope of staving off an attack by imperialism on the USSR. The most blatant examples of that were the Hitler-Stalin pact, and the agreements between Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt at the end of World War II.

Of course, no socialist objects to the idea propounded by Lenin, that they could not just sit still and wait for imperialism to overwhelm them, that they had to hold on to the gains as long as possible and attempt to develop the productive forces within the USSR as rapidly as they could.

But it was never a part of Lenin's view that socialism could be built in one country. He argued vociferously against it. In fact, even as late as 1924, Stalin himself dismissed the idea as utopian and reactionary. The arguments were straightforward. For a Marxist, socialism is about taking the productive forces at their highest capitalist development and developing them further. In Russia, the productive forces were far from being at the highest level that capitalist development could achieve. Only by

utilising the support of more advanced capitalist states could those productive forces then be developed, and that required revolutions in those states. Moreover, it is the division of labour that enables the productive forces under capitalism to develop so much. In an age of imperialism, and an international division of labour, it is impossible to rise above that level of productive forces by going backwards into national rather than international economic development.

Secondly, even though the existence of a workers' state, nationalised property and planning enabled some sectors of the economy to grow more rapidly than would have been the case under capitalism (though by no means all, hence the New Economic Policy, Lenin's attempt to encourage foreign investment, and also the eventual collapse of the economy due to its inability to meet consumer needs or to plan), the initial low level of production meant that the USSR could not grow fast enough to be able to out-produce the west in any kind of time span that would give it the breathing space to avoid both internal degeneration and external intervention. Whilst the USSR's heroic feats in World War II have to be applauded, this was a manifestation of that fact because, although the war did not result in the overthrow of the property relations, it did have a serious effect on the USSR's potential, which placed it at a severe disadvantage as against US imperialism in particular.

I think, however, that many 'Trotskyists' have a wrong conception of 'socialism in one country' as simply an invention of Stalinism. It's likely that such a strategy was welcomed by the Russian working class - just as many workers welcome protectionism in the west. It is an easier option to look after what appear to be your own immediate interests, even if as Marxists we know that such action is in fact detrimental to workers' interests and divisive. That Russian workers in particular, given their experiences from 1914 and before, should simply want a quiet life is to be understood. Stalinism was able to push forward its programme on precisely that weariness of the Russian workers.

Arthur Bough
email

Eco-obsession

I agree with Phil Kent that capitalism's large CO₂ emissions are a big problem facing humanity (Letters, September 24).

The way I see it, the ruling class have made a big mistake by instigating a system that is unplanned and therefore can easily create unforeseen consequences. In a society where the economy was consciously planned, environmental problems would surely be less. However, production would still need to take place, as over six billion people's needs have to be met. Capitalism only feebly meets these needs, if at all.

This might suggest production ought to be increased, which might entail an increase in the 'carbon footprint'. Therefore, geoengineering will surely be necessary to - yes - 'mop up' the mess. Of course, carbon neutral technologies like nuclear power are a possible way to minimise the initial damage, but strong economies are required to get to this stage.

My fear is that the ecological outlook, which has more in common with rightwing clerics than modernist Marxism, criticises capitalism for the wrong reasons. We have to concede that capitalism raises technological levels - albeit not in order to meet human need more efficiently, but so that individual capitalists can temporarily gain the market edge over their rivals.

Capital does have to manage the environment to the degree that it can continue to be utilised in production - hence soil erosion in the US is six times lower than in Africa, fish stocks get regulated by the state, and even forests regrow. I agree that short-termism

is often at play, which can create environmental problems, but capitalism does sort that out too. This is why, for example, every oil spillage gets cleaned up. The system manufactures but then solves its own problems.

Environmentalism expresses the anxiety that occurs in between, but it is a false critique. I think capitalism should be chastised only for its human failures; its eco-crimes (as some people call them) are a red herring. Finally, if you get too obsessed with the ecological view, it leads to viewing humanity as a plague on the planet - something that amplifies the already anti-human character of the system.

Barry Curtis
Chelmsford

Left out

Steve Wallis believes that I have written off the two Militant candidates in the 1992 general election, Dave Nellist and Terry Fields (Letters, September 24).

The candidates mentioned stood in fact as 'Independent Labour' candidates, and not under the name of a political party, be it Militant Labour or the Labour Party. I concede that, if we were to include their vote in 1992, the average vote for the left in that election would jump to an impressive 1,370 per candidate.

In compiling the data, I was at pains to make sure that the candidates included were standing for identifiable and recognisable political parties, and not under the vague term 'Independent Labour', which could cover any disaffected Labourite - left, right or centre. It was, though, clearly a mistake not to include Nellist and Fields.

John Masters
Hertfordshire

Illuminating

Ben Lewis's 'English Defence League stunts and the real lessons of the 1930s' (September 24) was a really illuminating article - with some persuasive arguments I will be employing in the future!

Manjit Dhillon
email

Afghanistan

You rightly struggle for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan.

However, as the Taliban are medieval-minded reactionaries, withdrawal would lead to a bloody civil war. Do you think that the freedom-loving people of the world could ethically watch such a horrible scenario?

Danial
email

Language tool

Much of Chris Knight's article revolves around the origins and development of human thought, consciousness and language ('Sex and the human revolution' September 24).

So I was surprised Chris makes no mention of Vygotsky and his colleagues, which to me seems a cardinal sin. It fails to take account of the extensive contributions from Marxist neuroscientists and psychologists in the young Soviet Union, prior to their work being suppressed by Stalin in the 1930s - inexcusable from one purporting to present a Marxist overview. (Vygotsky's texts, many readily available on the internet, are littered with quotations from Plekhanov, Bukharin and Trotsky - no surprise they were to fall foul of the Stalinist dictatorship!)

Vygotsky published books on psychology and art, together with more than 180 papers devoted to reformulating psychology around Marxist methodology. He focused on questions of human development and learning, always relating his work to developing concrete ways for dealing with the pedagogical tasks facing the young Soviet Union. Throughout his

work, he stressed the importance of social context - based *not* on Marxist theory, but on observations of children learning language and interacting with adults.

He claimed originally children only use speech for social reasons, but eventually 'internalise' it; the newly developed 'inner speech' not only improves thought processes, but 'abstract thought' becomes a natural acquisition. In Vygotsky's day, these ideas were revolutionary - today they are broadly accepted by the majority of those working in the field.

Perhaps his major contribution concerned the importance of culturally devised tools - counting systems, measuring tools, navigational aids (and today computers), Vygotsky's argument being that these tools, whether practical or symbolic, are initially 'external': used outwardly on nature or in communicating with others. But tools affect their users: language, used first as a communicative tool, finally shapes the minds of those who adapt to its use. *Our language becomes a tool for our thinking*. Marxists generally agree that the invention of primitive tools marked the onset of human history and triggered a whole set of biological and psychological developments, such as a more thumb-dominated hand and the expansion of the human brain.

However, concurrent with these developments came the development of external sign systems - and here the early humans had (by chance) developed a more appropriate physiological structure, allowing the articulation required for a more varied speech function. For those like Vygotsky, seeking to reconcile the Darwinian account of human evolution with the image of man central to Marxist philosophy - as the self-conscious creator of his own destiny - his developing theory neatly fitted the required bill. To Vygotsky, the human mind is literally created through the participation in and internalisation of social-cultural-historical forms of activity - our language being an essential tool used in this process:

In an earlier letter to the *Weekly Worker*, I reminded readers of the Marxian paragraph (from *Capital*), distinguishing the "worst architect from the best of bees" in that the architect imagines his creation before he 'actualises' it. This well known quotation delineates (rather badly!) what Marx took to be the distinguishing characteristic of human as opposed to animal labour - the danger being Marx can be erroneously perceived as arguing that labour *per se* distinguishes mankind from the animal kingdom.

If the structure is 'raised in imagination' before it is 'erected in reality' (ie, it's a linear process), where is the dialectic in this human process? If, as Marx teaches, 'life precedes consciousness', how is it that imagination precedes an actualisation? To be fair to Marx, I am misrepresenting what he believed (my queries are answered by Marx on many occasions elsewhere!), but this provides a good illustration of Vygotsky's *revolutionary* understanding of thought, language and meaning as *revolutionary activities*.

The uniqueness of human labour is not in the realisation of preconceived purpose, but in the meaningfulness of human activity. Possibly, the bee has something 'in mind' before it commences work, while today's human worker, operating a computer, may have nothing in mind. But the bee knows and cares nothing about meaning. For humans, however, meaning can be located in the human capacity to alter historical totality - making meaning is a fundamental expression of revolutionary activity.

We are, to plagiarise Vygotsky, the 'tool makers', using tools (including language, as we write letters such as this!) ... and the 'tools of mind', to organise revolt.

Bob Potter
email

ACTION

Communist Forums

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

October 4: August H Nimzt Jr *Marx, Tocqueville and race in America*. Subject: 'Were Marx and Engels derelict?'

South Wales: Call Bob for details: 07816 480679.

CPGB podcasts

Every Monday, we upload a podcast of commentary on the current political situation. In addition, the site will feature voice files of public meetings and other events. <http://cpgb.podbean.com>.

Communist Students meetings

Central London: Every Wednesday, 7pm. 07792 282830; ben@communiststudents.org.uk.

Manchester: Every Tuesday, 6pm, students union. manchestercommuniststudents@googlemail.com.

Sheffield: Every Sunday, 7pm. 07730 682193; sheffield@communiststudents.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesdays, September 22 to 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 October 6: 'The revolutionary origins of society'. Speaker: Chris Knight.

www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

London Socialist Film Co-op

October to June, second Sunday of the month, 10:30am for 11am start: Renoir Cinema, Brunswick Square, London WC1 (Russell Square tube). Admission £9/£7 concessions (no advance booking, no card payments).

October 11: *Folk America - this land is your land* (Jill Nicholls) and *Jack Firestein - only a bookseller* (Chris Reeves).

www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com Tel: 020 7278 5764.

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.

Stop deportations

Saturday October 3, 7pm: Benefit, 15 -17 Rampart Street, London E1. Acts include Hackney Colliery Band and Kasai Masai.

Organised by London No Borders: stopdeportation@riseup.net.

Love Music Hate Racism

Sunday October 4, 7.30pm: Benefit, Cross Street, Nelson, Lancashire. Acts include Sanity Clause and Sinner Men.

Organised by LMHR: www.lovemusicateracism.org.uk.

Principled demand or cul-de-sac?

Sunday October 11, 6.30-9.30pm: 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

Thursday October 15, 7.30pm: Public meeting: Space2, Willesden Green Library Centre, 95 High Road, London NW10.

Speakers include Anas al-Tikriti and Jane Shallice.

Organised by Brent Stop the War: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Fighting for Marxism on campus

Saturday October 17, 10am: Day school - 'The economic crisis, imperialism and organising for the future'. University of Manchester Students Union Meeting Room 1, Oxford Road, Manchester M13.

Organised by Communist Students: www.comuniststudents.org.uk.

National demonstration

Saturday October 24: Assemble 12 noon, Hyde Park. March to Trafalgar Square. Troops out of Afghanistan.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition, CND and British Muslim Initiative: 020 7801 2768; www.stopwar.org.uk.

London Anarchist Bookfair

Saturday October 24, 11am to 6pm: Stalls, music, meetings, Queen Mary and Westfield College, Mile End Road, London E1.

www.anarchistbookfair.org.

Israel-Palestine, the socialist solution

Wednesday November 4, 4pm. Meeting, University of Manchester Students Union, Oxford Road, Manchester M13.

Speaker: Israeli socialist Moshé Machover.

Organised by Manchester Communist Students: www.comuniststudents.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.

STRATEGY

Anti-BNP class-collaboration

The left's spluttering response to Nick Griffin's invitation to appear on *Question time* reveals a floundering political strategy, argues James Turley

On October 22, yet one more edition of the BBC's long-running politics show *Question time* will, barring some act of god, be broadcast. On that date, joining toadyish and cynical members of the three main parties will be, for the first time, Nick Griffin of the British National Party.

This follows a long period of coquetry on the part of the BBC. The corporation apparently decided in February that, should the BNP achieve an electoral breakthrough in June's European elections, topical coverage would have to start treating it 'seriously', in line with BBC 'impartiality' guidelines. Thus, in early September, the possibility of a BNP appearance on *Question time* was first floated, and after much eyelash-fluttering back and forth, the invitation was formally issued last week.¹

In reality, the June elections did not represent any explosion of support for the BNP - particularly considering the immediate context of the MPs' expenses crisis. Yet this time, its burgeoning support was distributed more kindly for it, gaining the BNP two MEPs - and underlining that, despite the protestations of official politics, over the past decade or so the BNP has transcended the cults and groupuscules of the far right to become a force in British politics.

While an invite to *Question time* is unlikely to help the BNP reach its core target audience directly - at the moment, atomised proletarians and lumpen elements - it does represent a coup for Nick Griffin, whose strategy since assuming leadership 10 years ago has been to remould the BNP into a vehicle for respectable, electoral politics, based around a programme of quasi-racialised populism.

Griffin's perspective has been presented by many as a 'quest for legitimacy', but this is not strictly true - rather it is a quest for ingratiation into the political establishment, in order to build over a long period of time a stronger base for extreme-right politics - what Gramsci would have called a 'war of position'. The BNP's painstaking work at the grassroots (at a time when mainstream bourgeois politics is utterly decimated at the local level) has created 'legitimacy' on the doorstep already. The BBC, and others involved in the affair, are merely recognising what is a *fait accompli*.

And it is not just the BBC. The Labour Party has now dropped its policy of not sharing a platform with the BNP, and will send Jack Straw to the *Question time* debate. This seems to have more to do with the foxhole Gordon Brown has found himself in. Sending along Straw amounts to broadcasting a message to alienated Labour voters who have turned to Griffin - 'I understand your concerns, so turn out for Labour'. Of course, whether he actually *does* understand what alienates such people is debatable - that all he has to offer these layers is the insubstantial reactionary bluster of the likes of immigration minister Phil Woolas is plain.

Other Labourites are not happy, of course - Peter Hain, oleaginous stalwart of official anti-fascism, decried the decision to allow an "avowedly racist and fascist" organisation equal footing (even for a poxy hour of television programming) with the mainstream parties. (It seems to have escaped the honourable member for Neath that, even under stiff-arm-saluting former leader John Tyndall, the BNP did not identify itself as



UAF: uniting with pro-capitalist mainstream

fascist - let alone under the Le Pen-worshipping Griffin.) Hain offered his support for any legal challenges against the BBC.²

Cretinism

Hain is not alone - to pay heed to the typically millenarian response of the 'anti-fascist' left, you would think that an act of god really *was* in the offing on October 22 - perhaps the onset of the Book of Revelation, or at least a plague of locusts. Unite Against Fascism, as usual, gets the wooden spoon for abject political cretinism. "Shame on the BBC," squeals a press release, for inviting Griffin onto the programme - "a man with a criminal conviction for denying Hitler's holocaust."³

UAF chair Weyman Bennett, a member of the Socialist Workers Party central committee, is on hand to lay down the line: "The BNP is not a normal, democratic party. It is a Nazi party whose political agenda is to destroy democracy and wipe out ethnic minorities in Britain. By granting Griffin a prime-time platform the BBC is in practice helping to legitimise the BNP and its politics of race hatred."⁴ Of course, the Labour Party and the Tories do not exactly have a sterling record on democracy (nor, for that matter, does the SWP) - but such things are of little relevance to the delusional crusaders that staff UAF.

Open up a copy of last week's *Socialist Worker*,⁴ and things - astonishingly - get worse. Michael Rosen, SWP member, poet and sometime broadcaster, pens an extended argument for 'disinviting' the BNP. Ben Lewis referred to it briefly last week,⁵ but it deserves to be quoted at greater length. The BBC is "a public space" and is "indirectly publicly owned". Therefore, "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."

Anyone with a basic grasp of logic will already be left floundering at that extraordinary couplet, but the comrade trundles on regardless. Griffin, despite his nice-and-respectable PR makeover, can only achieve his aims through "terror, internment, deportation and murder" (just as true of Phil Woolas or Frank Field, of course). We - the proud, if indirect, owners of the BBC - are by no means obliged to allow such political programmes, "open or hidden", the oxygen of publicity.

Rosen draws two analogies, both telling: "The BBC doesn't have to broadcast what anti-social people say and do. It doesn't have to give a platform to people who advocate burglary as a way of life ... when it does [feature such a person] it will always be surrounded by commentary and context that make clear that this is anti-social and that it is a 'problem' that this person is saying such a thing."

Secondly, though it "may seem too trivial" a comparison, the Jonathan Ross/Russell Brand scandal is cited in a flurry of scare-quotes: it "broke 'compliance' and 'trust'. The BBC's contract with the public was deemed to be broken because it 'offended' 'us', and 'we' couldn't 'trust' it any more." Surely inviting a Nazi thug onto television is far more offensive than jabbering about a sexual tryst on a voicemail?

His final argument is the most telling of all - the BBC should defend itself against "a political party that wants to use the BBC in order to smash the very political system that is putting that party on air". This, let us remember, appeared in a newspaper whose 'Where we stand' column argues that "the present system cannot be patched

up - it has to be completely transformed. The structures of the parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working people."⁶

To recap, then, the BBC is 'ours' because we pay for it (but not the BNP's - perhaps, along with all their other criminal activities, they aren't renewing their TV licences?). The BNP's programme is "anti-social", equivalent to burglary. Therefore we should demand that the BBC's bureaucratically cooked up 'trust agenda' be wielded against these thugs. There is no difference acknowledged between thought (the BNP's politics) and action (racist thuggery); there is no difference acknowledged even between the anti-immigrant nativist rhetoric of the BNP and blood-and-soil Nazism.

The only distinction Rosen appears to admit is between the 'bad guys' in the BNP, in the name of whose defeat literally anything can be advocated, and the 'good guys' - the BBC and, by implication, everyone whose presence on *Question time* is not decried: the Tories (who have a long history of overt racism and low-level thuggery), the Labour Party (whose reactionary stances on immigration are in our faces every day), the Liberal Democrats (who have intermittently played the race card themselves, notably in the background to the BNP's first council election victory in Millwall).

Trotsky

It is perfectly plain that Rosen's article - in line with virtually every pronouncement on fascism to emanate from his leaders on the SWP CC - is miserable, moralistic guff. Its unseemly cringing before the bourgeois state and its pet ideological apparatuses is systematically incompatible with anything resembling a revolutionary perspective. If the BBC is 'indirectly' ours, what about the police? We fund their activities far more 'directly' through tax takings. Perhaps they do not need to be got rid of after all ... It is also obvious that the perspective is deeply anti-democratic - the masses, apparently, are so dense that even to be exposed for an hour to the 'wrong' views will turn them into Nazi boot boys.

Yet it should be noted that the *basic error* here is one of class analysis - that is, the UAF perspective flows perfectly naturally from the axiom that anti-fascist activity is a persistent and overriding duty of the workers' movement. This necessarily implies that the struggle against fascism is parcelled off from the struggle against bourgeois rule - reified, in the jargon of Hegelian Marxism. Therefore, the view develops that there is a consistent division in the bourgeoisie between a (more) democratic section and a fascist, authoritarian section, and that the latter is always a bigger threat to the workers' movement. It is almost to the SWP-UAF's credit that they follow this logic as far as it will go - to naked class-collaboration and defence of the bureaucratic state apparatus against the fascist pathogen.

The major perspective against this within anti-fascism is the militant no-platform strategy - confronting fascists in the streets, attacking their demonstrations. They are not so far down the road to class collaboration as UAF, but their distance from the latter is basically moral - while Weyman Bennett jumped into the arms of *Searchlight* and sundry Labour

grandees, militant anti-fascists walked the line. They remain wedded to the idea that anti-fascism is an autonomous and permanent fixture of political activity, and so are crippled in much the same way.

Trotsky is cited by both (although not by the anarchist elements of the latter or the outright Stalinists of the former) as a predecessor - in practice or in 'spirit'. Yet this dramatically misunderstands Trotsky's writings on fascism, which are among his best directly political texts - the argument for a united front against fascism is based on the *immediate* situation of 1930s Europe, with Mussolini in power and Hitler on the cusp, and many millions of black and brown shirts on the streets, breaking up strikes and demonstrations. In *this situation*, argues Trotsky, the very existence of the workers' movement needs to be defended. Even so, he derides the idea that the fascists are 'worse' than the reactionary government, offering an illustration for the "feeble-minded":

"When one of my enemies sets before me small daily portions of poison and the second, on the other hand, is about to shoot straight at me, then I will first knock the revolver out of the hand of my second enemy, for this gives me an opportunity to get rid of my first enemy. But that does not at all mean that the poison is a 'lesser evil' in comparison with the revolver."⁷

Any Marxist approach to a given political problem has to start from the elements of Marxist strategy - that the working class needs to take power, and that it can only do that by expropriating the *political* power of the bourgeoisie, which is located in the *state*. No, comrade Rosen, the BBC is *not* ours, any more than the worker owns the means of production because it is their unpaid labour that has 'indirectly' bought it.

In certain situations, fascist groupings are a direct and physical threat to our capacity to challenge state power, and must be confronted directly. If our working class organisations, meetings and demonstrations are being directly threatened in a given locality, then socialists, trade-unionists and others should take whatever steps are necessary to defend them. But this is *not* true of the situation in British politics at large. We are not witnessing the rise of a 'British Hitler'. The capitalist state's need for national borders to regulate the movement of labour and working conditions through immigration controls ensures that there will *always* be esoteric far-right groups of a racist character. The BNP's relatively sudden rise is merely a symptom of the present situation - the decline both of 'official' bourgeois politics and of the left, vacating space for the far right.

If the left wants seriously to defeat Nick Griffin and his dismal crew, it needs to take seriously the task of building a *political* alternative - not to the BNP or 'fascism', but to *capitalism*. We should not demand the BBC ditch Nick Griffin on October 22 - but that the establishment make room for the Marxist left on its platforms ●

Notes

1. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/8240206.stm.
2. *The Observer* September 27.
3. www.uaf.org.uk/news.asp?choice=90927.
4. September 26.
5. 'English Defence League stunts and the real lessons of the 1930s' *Weekly Worker* Sept 24.
6. <http://swp.org.uk/where.php>.
7. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1931/311208.htm.

You couldn't make it up

With the general election now, at most, seven months away, what is happening with left unity projects? **Peter Manson** surveys recent developments

While both the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party in England and Wales have talked about a conference or convention of the left "in the autumn", with a view to standing joint candidates next May, nothing at all has been arranged.

What there is so far is an SWP-organised meeting on October 31 to which SPEW, Respect, the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain and the Barrow People's Party (!) are invited (two representatives each); to be followed the next weekend by the RMT union's so-called 'conference' entitled 'Crisis in working class representation' on November 7.

I understand that the October 31 meeting will see the first face-to-face formal discussion on the general election between the SWP and the other groups - although there has been email correspondence, not to mention a rather unproductive SWP-SPEW public exchange. It seems the SWP had hoped to time an announcement of a 'unity conference' to coincide with last weekend's Brighton demonstration outside the Labour Party conference, but it has just not been able to garner enough backing from other organisations or union leaders for its June "open letter to the left".

Meanwhile, the 'core groups' involved in the 'No to the European Union, Yes to Democracy' platform to contest the June 4 European Union elections - SPEW, CPB, RMT and the Alliance for Green Socialism - have been meeting monthly (apparently Pete McLaren's Socialist Alliance is considered not quite 'core' enough to get an invite). In August they agreed that a "convention" would indeed be organised, but mysteriously nothing further has been heard about this at all.

Well, perhaps it is not so mysterious really. The closer the general election, the more the CPB backtracks. In July, its general secretary Robert Griffiths talked optimistically about the need to "develop forms of left unity" that will include "an agreed approach to the coming election", including the possibility of joint candidates.

Admittedly, "Trying to prevent a Tory victory will require a vote for hundreds of Labour candidates", and comrade Griffiths expected there would be "wide-scale agreement on the left" on support for those who "opposed New Labour's imperialist wars and backed the Trade Union Freedom Bill". Moreover, "In other seats, the Labour candidate may be best placed to keep out the Tories".

All in all, then, the message was: vote Labour - "except for the worst of New Labour's privatising war criminals", against whom the CPB, RMT and others would hopefully stand candidates. Mind you, comrade Griffiths warned "those sects which specialise in ultra-leftist posturing" (including the SWP?) that they "have nothing to offer the process of left unity which needs to proceed" (*Morning Star* July 9)

A few weeks later, however, he was stressing even more the central need to defeat the Tories by voting Labour: "The Communist Party of Britain is clear that a Tory victory will ensure that the ruling class offensive will be released with full force. In many constituencies the labour movement and the left will therefore have to campaign for Labour candidates - keenly so for social democratic and socialist rather than New Labour ones."

And another condition was added for when, in other seats, "the left and non-Labour-affiliated unions" might "unite around socialist and progressive candidates": in addition to standing only



Aping about

"where Labour is being misrepresented by a warmongering, police-state privatiser", they should also only contest "where there is no danger of a Tory victory" (August 25). In other words, the CPB favours a handful of token protest candidates in prominent safe Labour seats, but in reality will be wholeheartedly urging a Labour victory - including for every "warmongering, police-state privatiser".

In fact the September 30 *Morning Star* comes very close to praising Gordon Brown for his conference speech: "It was one of your better speeches," the *Star* editorial tells him, and the leader-writer resorts to the kind of pleas to the Labour right we have come to expect in the run-up to elections from Britain's 'official communists' (who then go on to urge an unconditional vote for the Labour right, of course): "Mr Brown, if you are serious that the people 'won't have to pay for the banks', stop trying to make them cough up via attacks on public services and wages."

The front-page report of the prime minister's speech, headlined "Brown rolls dice for the last time", contains not a word of criticism, but is full of quotes from Brownite union leaders extolling its merits.

Stark contrast

This is hardly the message that SPEW wants to put across. For it, Labour ceased to be a bourgeois workers' party with Neil Kinnock and certainly with Tony Blair and there is no point voting for a capitalist party just because it promises to implement anti-working class cuts with less enthusiasm. What is needed is ... a real Labour Party!

Looking to Germany and the success of Die Linke, an unsigned article declares: "In Britain a trade union-backed left coalition would mark a significant step forward in the struggle to create an independent voice for working class people. It could stand candidates that argue for a socialist programme and demand that working class people do not pay the price of the capitalist crisis."

"Such candidates would stand in stark contrast to all the establishment parties, and would play an important role in giving confidence to the struggle to defend public services, which will be crucial after the general election, whichever of the axemen is prime

minister" (*The Socialist* September 22).

And this, of course, is in "stark contrast" to the CPB's clear preference for one of the "axemen": "It is certainly true that what Labour has achieved is far beyond what the Tories would have attempted" (*Morning Star* editorial, September 30).

No wonder, then, that all talk of a left convention to discuss a joint electoral challenge by the No2EU components has stopped - a bit embarrassing for SPEW, which had insisted that No2EU, and not any coalition dreamt up by those SWP Johnny-come-latelys, must form the basis of any general election alliance. But the CPB wants none of it (and may not turn up to the October 31 meeting with the SWP either).

It now seems perfectly evident that Bob Crow is not going to call anything approaching a democratic, decision-making conference. He much prefers a combination of behind-the-scenes committee meetings, where the real decisions are taken, and impotent talking shops, like the RMT's November 7 'conference' on 'The crisis in working class representation'.

Comrade Crow is not exactly going all out to build for this event. Look carefully on the RMT website and you will find the details hidden away under 'Events diary': "The conference will be non-binding and non-resolution-based to discuss with like-minded socialists and trade unionists how best to defend and promote working class interests."

So, as was the case with previous such gatherings mandated by RMT annual conferences, November 7 will decide precisely nothing. This meeting (which the SWP has so far failed to mention, by the way) cannot even be viewed as a step towards an electoral coalition. SPEW is clearly making the best of a bad job when it calls on everyone to build for this "representative conference" (*The Socialist* September 22).

There is no doubt, however, that comrade Crow wants some kind of leftwing challenge in May. In an interview in *The Times*, he talked of a "workers' alliance" to contest the general election. He said he had been in discussions with union leaders, socialists, greens and other campaigners with a view to drawing up a joint manifesto (September 19).

Meanwhile, *Socialist Worker* is still talking about the "urgent need" for "a

political alternative to Labour that can unite the left". Editor Chris Bambery calls for a debate "over the necessity of creating an alternative electoral force for working people" ("This is how to beat their cuts", September 26).

The CPGB, for one, has responded positively to the SWP's open letter, but we have not as yet received a response to our proposal for a meeting to discuss it. We, like other left groups that replied to the SWP in the same vein, have not been invited to the October 31 discussions.

Musical chairs

No wonder some on the left seem to have given up all hope of an electoral coalition. For example, former Labour left Liz Davies does not even think it worthy of a mention in her *Morning Star* article of September 24. Comrade Davies provides us with a useful résumé of the attempts made over the last decade to build a left alternative to Labour.

In the Socialist Alliance, which she joined in 2001, she watched "the so-called revolutionary political parties destroy any chance of effective left cooperation". First SPEW "was terrified when the Socialist Workers Party joined the alliance. The SP formally walked out ...". Then the SWP, "having promised that it would not use its members to dominate the alliance, reneged on that promise and started to use the Socialist Alliance entirely in its own interests and to flout principles of democracy and accountability". (Not that comrade Davies attempted any kind of principled fight - she simply walked out herself in 2002).

Afterwards, the SWP "wound up the alliance because it had found a new project - setting up Respect with George Galloway. The Socialist Alliance had failed to provide the SWP with instant electoral success and so it was to be abandoned."

Following this there was the whole Respect debacle, with the SWP splitting with Galloway, just as the Scottish Socialist Party "split in appalling circumstances", when Tommy Sheridan abandoned the SSP to set up Solidarity.

So what are we left with? SPEW's stillborn Campaign for a New Workers' Party is referred to, as is the AGS, CPB and Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party, which is "still around" - the last three sometimes stand in elections, after

all. Comrade Davies confesses she did not support or vote for No2EU - she "didn't agree with the slogan". Instead she voted for the "best of a very bad choice" in the EU elections, casting her vote for the Green Party in a vain attempt to keep out the British National Party. But "Sadly the Green Party does not offer the way forward either".

Comrade Davies sums up the whole farcical situation with the comment: "You couldn't make it up. It's deeply tragic." As for next year's general election, we "simply won't have any realistic socialist or even social democratic party to vote for. We'll vote Green, or one of the various small left parties, or tactically vote Labour with gritted teeth to keep out the Tories, or stay at home."

Comrade Davies does, however, urge those within reach of Hayes and Harlington to "do whatever it takes to re-elect John McDonnell". She names no other Labour candidate worthy of support and clearly believes there will be no serious left electoral alliance either.

As I say, this is, by and large, a useful summary, but comrade Davies's conclusion is absolutely dire: The Convention of the Left ... has the grace to recognise and try to avoid many of the previous pitfalls ... It has insisted that no-one ... has the absolute right to speak and has abolished platforms. Everyone sits around in a circle."

Well, if the COL (which met last Saturday in Brighton) is prepared to rearrange the chairs in such a revolutionary fashion, it must be an organisation with a future. Especially as it "doesn't hold national meetings in London" and "doesn't have a constitution or policy-making structure. If it did, it would be immediately bogged down in sectarian rows."

I suppose if such an 'organisation' does not actually take any decisions, and does not actually do anything, then its constituent parts will be less likely to fall out. I do wonder, though, if comrade Davies realises how ridiculous she appears by holding up the COL as some kind of model.

At the convention, by the way, SWP national secretary Martin Smith called for an electoral coalition in order to "build an alternative to Labour". But the CPB's comrade Griffiths contemptuously rejected any such notion of "a new party". Instead we should all go out campaigning for the People's Charter.

Ironically, that was more or less what the SWP was saying last year, when it was claiming there was no electoral space for the left - only it proposed gathering signatures for a different document: the ever so inspiring People Before Profit Charter. But now that the SWP pretends to think the left can make a serious electoral intervention, it has quietly dropped the PBPC.

Comrade Davies is right: the revolutionary left is not serious. Either it runs around pulling stunts or it chases those to its right. Even when all the main revolutionary groups did come together in the Socialist Alliance, every one of them apart from the CPGB thought we should keep our own Marxist politics under wraps.

But she is dead wrong in rejecting any "policy-making structure" 'at this stage'. At what stage would it become possible or desirable, without provoking "sectarian rows"?

It is perfectly possible for the left to unite. But the organisation we need is a democratic centralist Marxist party, not a top-down, reformist dictatorship or Labourite halfway house ●

OUR HISTORY

Lions led by donkeys

Matthew Cobb, dubbed an anti-communist by the *Morning Star*, examines the contradictory role of the French Communist Party during World War II

In June 1940, the Nazi blitzkrieg led to the occupation of France. A puppet government was set up in Vichy and France began to be transformed into an exploited colony. Virtually straightaway, ordinary people took action. They produced leaflets, cut telephone cables and eventually set up underground organisations.

Alongside members of the various non-communist Resistance groups, thousands of Parti Communiste Français militants were executed, while tens of thousands were imprisoned or deported to the death camps of Hitler's Germany. Their bravery and determination contributed to the eventual defeat of the Nazis, and to the PCF's massive influence after the war. But this also raises the question of the class content of the PCF's action during the war - what was this sacrifice for?

The Resistance groups - including de Gaulle's Free French - had varying political outlooks and class compositions, but they were united in their aim of driving the Nazis out of France. A revolutionary organisation involved in such united action had to maintain political independence, and be prepared to break the alliance with other class forces in order to fight for working class power when the moment came. But in the tumultuous events after D-Day, the PCF accepted the re-creation of an independent French imperialist state.

This was an expression of the party's reformism, which had already been demonstrated during the massive strike wave of June 1936, when the PCF had argued for an end to the strikes and occupations, in order to support the Popular Front government. Although the party eventually fought arms in hand in the Resistance, its leadership was pursuing the same policies as it had for the previous decade - searching for forces within the French ruling class which could be allies for the USSR, while using its influence within the working class as a way of bargaining with those potential cross-class partners.

From Hitler-Stalin pact to German attack

Up until a few days before war broke out in September 1939, the PCF had been implacably hostile to the Nazi regime, arguing for France to prepare itself for war. One source of this pro-war stance was the 1935 Franco-Soviet mutual defence pact: the PCF sought to defend the USSR by limiting the aggressive appetites of the German fascist government, even at the price of supporting the more bellicose sectors of the French bourgeoisie.

Then, at the end of August 1939, there was a bombshell - the announcement of the Hitler-Stalin pact. Loyalty to Moscow now obliged the PCF to make a 180° turn and to oppose the war against the USSR's new ally. Tens of thousands of PCF members ripped up their party cards in disgust and the terms 'Nazi' and 'fascist' disappeared from the party's publications. Immediately, the French government banned the PCF, arrested its deputies and suspended its local councillors. By the end of May 1940, around 5,500 communist militants had been locked up. The PCF was fragmented, weakened and marginalised. Its leadership was either in jail, in hiding or in exile; its policies were not understood by any but the most pliable members.

Things got even worse after the fall of France. At the suggestion of Moscow,



Power was winnable

the PCF tried to get the Nazis to legalise its newspaper, *L'Humanité*. Using anti-semitic arguments in their secret discussions with the Nazis, they pointed out that the party had supported the Stalin-Hitler pact and had not been beaten by the "Jewish dictatorship" of the previous interior minister, Georges Mandel - indeed, they argued that the party's intransigence had hastened Nazi victory. Finally, the PCF leaders promised the Nazis to do nothing for them, but nothing against them. Despite the Nazis refusing to play ball, the Communist Party leadership more or less kept this promise until June 1941.¹

Unable to produce a legal paper, the PCF published an underground, illegal version of *L'Humanité*, at great personal risk to the militants concerned. The paper initially focused its attention on trade union struggles, denounced the Vichy government, made propaganda for socialism, and opposed the "imperialist war" ... waged by the British. As public hostility to collaboration grew, *L'Humanité* became increasingly anti-German, calling for united action for the independence of France.

During this period the PCF eventually accepted that the French working class was now subject to both class and national oppression, but it did not yet call for the Nazis to be driven out of France, nor was it organising workers to fight the occupier.

Against Nazi occupation

The decisive change came on June 22 1941, when Hitler finally launched his attack on the USSR - the Nazis were once more the enemy.

Even before the German offensive, tensions between the USSR and Nazi Germany had grown and, in parallel, subtle shifts began to appear in the policies of the underground communist parties. By May 1941, *L'Humanité* was calling on the French people to fight for "national liberation" and argued for the creation of "a national front for the independence of France" which would group together all classes, while rightly remaining deeply suspicious of general de Gaulle, who was supported by the British and surrounded by a gaggle of far-right officers.²

Despite the collapse in its working class support caused by the Stalin-Hitler pact, in some regions the party retained its authority. Many of its rank and file members were still determined class fighters. For example, in May 1940, PCF members played a key role in organising a massive coal miners' strike that swept through the Nord-Pas-de-Calais. The strike began over low pay, and within a week, over 100,000 miners were refusing to obey the managers and their Nazi masters. Local ceramic and engineering factories came out in solidarity, together with thousands of women textile workers and workers in the railway workshops. Eventually, hunger drove the strikers back to work, but, as miners' leader Julien Hapiot wrote in an underground union paper, "From now on, the occupier knows that workers who suffer in misery will not always accept the yoke of national oppression."³

As German troops made deep advances into Soviet territory in the summer of 1941, Moscow encouraged the communist parties to do all they could to disrupt the Nazi war effort. *L'Humanité* wrote: "What is required

to help the USSR and Britain crush Hitler? To hasten the liberation of France? Sabotage, again sabotage and once again sabotage. Sabotage in the factories, in the stations, in the countryside, sabotage to stop the enemy from taking anything from our country."⁴

Most French communists found this hard to swallow. There was a long anarchist tradition of sabotaging machines and killing policemen, which the communists had always fiercely opposed. The key thing, they argued, was the mass class struggle, not individual actions. Now the party was proposing exactly the tactics they had argued against for so long. The leadership therefore turned to the party's youth section, the Jeunesses Communistes (JC) - untrained in Marxist traditions, eager to take action, a few dozen Paris teenagers would show the older members of the party how to fight the Nazi occupation.

One morning in August 1941, two JC members - 21-year-old Pierre Georges ('Fabien') and Gilbert Brustlein - assassinated a German naval quartermaster on the platform of the Barbès-Rochechouart metro station. A few weeks later, Brustlein and another JC member were sent to Nantes to carry out sabotage. Early in the morning of October 20, they came across a Nazi officer and shot him. Completely by chance, they had killed lieutenant-colonel Karl Hotz, the military commander of Nantes. This changed everything. Two days afterwards, on Hitler's personal orders, the Germans executed 48 French hostages in retaliation, most of them communists (two of them were Trotskyists, but for

decades this was hidden by the PCF). The most heart-rending of these deaths was that of Guy Moquet, only 17-year-old, who had been arrested for giving out Communist Party leaflets.

The urban guerrilla campaign was not a success. Fewer than 15 German soldiers were assassinated in the first year of armed struggle, while sabotage, which was supposed to be at the heart of the PCF campaign, was a near failure, with the notable exception of two derailments near Caen. Given that at this time the battles of the eastern front were killing thousands of men each day, destroying military vehicles and equipment at a terrifying rate, the events in France were simply irrelevant from a strategic point of view, no matter how irritating they might have been to the German high command.

On the other hand, fascist repression in France was extremely vicious. Waves of arrests, executions and deportations ripped the heart out of the Communist Party. In the non-occupied zone in the last six weeks of 1941 alone, 12,850 communists were arrested; 814 hostages were executed in the year following October 1941, most of them communists - among the victims was leading communist deputy Gabriel Péri, who had opposed the attempt to legalise *L'Humanité* in June 1940.⁵

In 1942, PCF leader Georges Beaufils appeared cynical about the effect of Nazi executions: "As soon as the news is given out that five or 10 of our men have been shot, we get 50 or 100 new recruits."⁶ Not only was this figure an exaggeration: what happened to those recruits was awful. The armed wing of the party had an incredibly high turnover, as the new recruits were killed. On average, a member of the Bataillons lived a mere seven months after taking up the armed struggle. Twenty of these brave young people survived less than three months. Faced with this appalling loss of life, the armed youth groups were wound up by the end of 1942.

As urban guerrilla action by the JC faded, their role was taken over by the Franc-Tireurs et Partisans (FTP), the armed wing of the Front National, the party's front organisation. The FN was intended to rival the non-communist Resistance groups, and - like them - had a clear cross-class outlook. Although the FN never became a truly independent or national organisation, the FTP acquired a pivotal role.

The FTP groups in Paris, Lyon, Toulouse, Marseille and Grenoble were entirely composed of members of the Main d'Oeuvre Immigrée (MOI - Immigrant Workforce), many of them young Jews from eastern Europe. Although there were never more than a few dozen active FTP-MOI members in Paris, in the first half of 1943 they carried out 92 armed actions, including the assassination of SS general Julius Ritter.

In the middle of 1943, an Armenian, Missak Manouchian, became leader of the MOI. Within months he was arrested, along with virtually all the FTP-MOI members in Paris. The Nazis celebrated by publishing a poster with a lurid red background - the *Affiche rouge* - featuring photos of 10 MOI members, each carefully described as "Polish Jew", "Hungarian Jew" or simply "Armenian", together with pictures of derailed trains and dead bodies, and collectively labelled the "army of crime". In February 1944, Manouchian and 22 of his comrades were subject to a show trial in Paris and were executed.

Although the *Affiche rouge*'s

portrayal of the Resistance as foreign Jewish criminals satisfied the Nazis and comforted the Vichy collaborators in their anti-Semitism and xenophobia, the sacrifice made by these immigrants touched the French, who did not consider the MOI terrorists. Instead they agreed with Manouchian, who in his farewell letter to his wife, written the day before his execution, proclaimed that he was "a volunteer soldier in the Army of Liberation".

The rise of the maquis

The great change in the fortunes of the Resistance as a whole came in 1943. The Nazi war machine needed more and more workers, so the Vichy collaborators agreed to send French men and women to Germany as part of a labour conscription scheme, the Service de Travail Obligatoire (STO). Faced with the threat of working in fascist Germany, thousands of young people simply took to the hills, to join what soon became known as the *maquis* - a Corsican word for mountainous scrubland.

This wave of recruits raised the fundamental political question of what these young men were to do. De Gaulle wanted all military action in France - including by the Communist Party - to be under his control. As a bourgeois military man, the last thing he wanted was armed civilians taking independent action. The task of de Gaulle's representative in France, Jean Moulin, was not only to unify the Resistance groups - including the PCF - but above all to ensure that armed action would be controlled by London, not by the Resistance. The young men in the *maquis* were understandably impatient to fight, but the Free French wanted them to sit and wait for the Allied invasion. As PCF leader Charles Tillon later put it, the choice was whether the *maquis* should be "drops of mercury or tin soldiers".⁷

Urban guerrilla warfare can have only a limited political and military impact, which is why the PCF had opposed the anarchists who had advocated this tactic. The armed fighters cannot appear openly in front of the working class, and their individual actions have no immediate link to the ultimate aim - armed insurrection by the masses. Things can be different in the countryside, however, as shown by the work of one of the earliest communist *maquis*, set up around Limoges by Georges Guingouin.

From the very beginning of the occupation, Guingouin had run into difficulties with the party high-ups because of his determination to fight the fascists. Supplied with weapons by the British Special Operations Executive (who did not realise with whom they were dealing), Guingouin's *maquis* organised sabotage and resistance throughout the region. They not only destroyed factories; they also prevented the requisitioning of animals and crops, and set food prices. Guingouin's actions enjoyed the overwhelming political and material support of the population and formed the embryo of an alternative state in the Limousin. In March 1944 Vichy declared Guingouin's region to be a no-go area, implicitly accepting *maquis* control.⁸

What kind of liberation?

The tensions between the Free French and the Resistance grew after the Allied invasion of France on D-Day - June 6 1944. The British and Americans did not want to see the French control their own country at all after the liberation. Instead, they planned to impose AMGOT (Allied Military Government of Occupied Territories), replacing one military occupation with another. The Allies and de Gaulle both wanted to ensure the population did not take any initiatives, and that included the Resistance and its idea of a national insurrection. The outcome of the three-way struggle between the Resistance, the Free French and the Allies, which opened up after D-

Day, would decide the future of France, and of the whole of Europe.

To ensure the stability of the French imperialist state, de Gaulle and the Free French had prepared a kind of shadow administration, which would take over after D-Day. Resistance forces - including the Communist Party - were involved, but they also supported the creation of local committees of liberation. Together with the armed Resistance organisations (now called the French Forces of the Interior - FFI), these committees could potentially form an alternative power base in the country, directly representing the interests of the population.

Despite this, neither the PCF nor the non-communist Resistance was preparing for revolution. Both were clearly committed to the creation of a democratised imperialist state that incorporated the local liberation committees, with increased rights for workers, but no fundamental shift in the balance of class power. The PCF had demonstrated this in autumn 1943, when Corsica had been liberated by a workers' insurrection supported by Free French troops. Despite the existence of armed workers' militia and of local liberation committees representing the population, the party meekly accepted that de Gaulle's representative should take control of the island.⁹

This was the final fruit of the dual pressure that affected the PCF. The strategic interests of the USSR led Stalin to accept capitalist domination in western Europe, in return for capitalist acceptance of Soviet domination of the east. For Moscow, the role of the PCF was to ensure that French imperialism would be friendly towards the USSR. At the same time, the PCF's working class base was pressing for change. The outcome was that the French communists would be loyal participants in the Gaullist-led liberation of the country, so long as they were accorded some recognition and positions of power and there were some minor reforms.

The leadership of the Communist Party, following Moscow's strategic calculations, therefore accepted that its ambitions should be limited to the creation of a national army and a purge of traitors and collaborators from the state apparatus. Maurice Thorez made this clear in January 1944, when he stated: "The communists are not thinking of taking power, either now, or after the liberation."¹⁰ Revolution might have been the dream of rank and file Communist Party members and the nightmare of the right wing of the Resistance, but Stalin and his loyal followers would have none of it.

On August 15 1944 the Allied armies in Normandy finally opened the road eastwards, while the long-awaited Mediterranean landings took place near Saint-Tropez. Hitler immediately ordered his commanders to withdraw all German troops to the east of Paris. Over the next four weeks, Nazi rule in France collapsed. As the Allied invasion forces headed eastwards from Normandy and north from Provence, the whole south and western part of France - around half the country - was left to its own devices and the Resistance simply took power. But in over 30 major cities there were insurrections - the most symbolic took place in Paris, where the communists took the lead.

On August 15, the Parisian police, furious that their colleagues in the Parisian suburbs had been disarmed by the Germans, went on strike. The same policemen who had rounded up Jews and *résistants* and handed them over to the Nazis, now decided to act, just in time to save their reputation - and their skins. With food and energy supplies running low, the Parisian Liberation Committee - led by communists - launched an insurrection, and warfare broke out on the streets of the capital. Earlier in the war the PCF had carried out brave internationalist work by producing a German language bulletin, *Soldat im Westen* ('Soldier in the west'), which

called on German soldiers to support the Resistance. Now they gave full vent to crude nationalism, adopting the un-internationalist slogan "*A chacun son boche*" - 'Everyone get a Hun'.

Although the crack German forces had left Paris, there were still 20,000 troops, including around 80 tanks and 60 pieces of artillery in the capital. The 20,000 *résistants* had only 600 hand guns between them. For communist Resistance leader Rol-Tanguy, the arrival of Allied troops was the only solution. His orders finished with this instruction to all FFI forces in the region: "*Open the road to Paris for the victorious Allied armies and welcome them here.*"¹¹

As this showed, there was never any threat of a second Paris Commune. The PCF had already accepted that the outcome of the Paris insurrection would be the return of de Gaulle. This duly happened when Free French troops entered Paris on August 25 and the German garrison surrendered. The next day de Gaulle held a triumphant march down the Champs Elysées, surrounded by hundreds of thousands of delirious Parisians. For the Free French leader, the outcome could not have been better: he was able to enter Paris as a hero, surfing on the wave of a popular uprising, but firmly based on the traditional power of the army.

Potential for workers' power

For the working class, however, the liberation of France contained a very different potential. In Toulouse, liberation committees took over all the major workplaces of the region - arsenals, engineering companies, banks and even prisons, but above all the whole of the massive aeronautical industry. The director of one factory complained that the committee in his company was "slowly transforming itself into a soviet. It asks for information on stocks, on the state of supplies, on what remains, etc. It also asks for the keys to all the offices."¹²

There should be no illusions about the political outlook of these committees, however. A local communist leader declared they would "ensure the correct functioning of the factories and increased production. If people speak about the 'soviets' of Toulouse, it is a lie. These people are patriots, all patriots, who have made this agreement to win the war."¹³

Nevertheless, even this glimmer of workers' control was too much for de Gaulle, who was determined that there would be no revolution, in Toulouse or anywhere else. On August 28, when the hangovers from the liberation of Paris had barely faded and half the country had yet to be liberated, he ordered the dissolution of the national leadership of the FFI and of the military leadership of the Resistance. Hundreds of thousands of FFI fighters were instructed to join the Free French army, under the order of Free French officers, not their Resistance leaders. This represented a huge step towards the consolidation of de Gaulle's imperialist state machine.

On September 9, de Gaulle appointed communist FTP leader Charles Tillon as minister of aviation. This was not only a recognition of the PCF's role in the Resistance: it was also a way of getting the party to deal with the problem of the movement for workers' control, which had now spread to the Paris region. Tillon did his job. The workplace liberation committees were dissolved in return for the creation of toothless 'mixed production committees' that would supposedly improve production "in the interest of the whole nation", but would have no executive role. The embryonic class conflict was finally extinguished when the government enacted some of the demands of the Resistance Action Programme - nationalising sectors of the economy and creating toothless workers' committees in every company. Minor reform headed off the promise of

revolution.¹⁴

De Gaulle's final challenge was to consolidate state power in the regions. All over the country Resistance-led liberation committees organised food, water and electricity supplies, and kept order through their armed Patriotic Militias. First, the government banned the Patriotic Militias from carrying arms. Although the PCF organised a series of protests, they did not withdraw Charles Tillon from the government. Being in office was more important than building independent workers' organisations.¹⁵

All this went over the heads of most of the population, who were not interested in who controlled the weapons. They wanted to know where the food, heat and light was coming from, and could not see a connection between the two issues. There was a link, however - both were connected to the question of state power; but to demonstrate this the PCF would have to break its alliance with de Gaulle, threatening the stability of the pro-capitalist government that Moscow had instructed it to support.

The final act of this conflict came at the end of 1944, when the PCF accepted the dissolution of the Patriotic Militias. In return de Gaulle amnestied communist leader Maurice Thorez, who had spent the war in Moscow. In January 1945 Thorez thundered the communists' commitment to "one army, one police, one administration".¹⁶ Just as the PCF accepted the existence of de Gaulle's capitalist state, it also made clear its commitment to rebuilding the capitalist economy - "Above all, produce!" it told workers, denouncing strikes as "the weapon of big business".¹⁷ De Gaulle had won.

In September 1944, US spy and Harvard professor of history Crane Brinton described these events in what is probably one of the few references to Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* to be found in the files of US intelligence: "It is clear that Trotsky's classic analysis of the 'dual power' applies very well here ... what is happening here is a process in part revolutionary - the taking over of power by 'new' men long carefully organised for just this aim."¹⁸

"Dual power" refers to the temporary, unstable period in a revolution when contending class forces each have partial control of the key structures in society (army, economy and state apparatus). Brinton did not think that France was on the brink of a proletarian revolution - he was certain that the PCF was following Moscow's line and merely sought to gain influence. But the disputes over the armed strength of the Resistance convinced him there was "dual power".

The Soviet chargé d'affaires in Paris agreed, although he did not mention Trotsky: "In the liberated regions of the country and in Paris there is dual power. This is particularly the case in the provinces, where, alongside the regional commissars named by de Gaulle, there are local commissars appointed by the committees of liberation. As a result, real power is in the hands of the organs of the Resistance movement."¹⁹

In reality, the elements of dual power were extremely embryonic, and the two sides did not clearly represent the interests of two different classes, because the PCF was not in favour of revolution, and the mass of the population was unsure, waiting for leadership. The PCF was following its own reformist appetites for working with the representatives of the ruling class rather than destroying their power. Happily for them - but not for the working class, this outlook coincided with Moscow's long-held view that there should be no revolution in the west.

In 1952, PCF leader Jacques Duclos defended his party's record in 1944, saying that, had it acted differently, de Gaulle and the USA would have used workers' action as "a pretext" to smash the working class. "The wise and far-seeing policy of our party would not

let this happen," he argued. "We are revolutionaries, not adventurers."²⁰ In fact, a truly revolutionary leadership would have used the myriad opportunities posed by the embryonic dual power situation to build workers' independent organisation, and to fan the sparks of workers' control. The PCF did neither.

After the war, the PCF was the single most powerful party in France - a position it held for the next 40 years. Its prestige and cultural influence were unparalleled, and for decades even the slightest questioning of its wartime record produced a torrent of criticism. As in the USSR, the party falsified its history, distorting reality to meet the needs of the day. At the same time, Resistance leaders like Georges Guingouin or Charles Tillon were hounded from the party because of their ideas, while Georges Marchais, a talentless nobody who had *volunteered* to go and work in fascist Germany, was propelled into the leadership.

This reformist routinism was a far cry from the bravery shown by so many communist *résistants* during the war, but it drove the policies of the PCF leadership. The tragedy of the communist Resistance was that, no matter how courageous and determined the rank and file may have been, the PCF leadership was wedded to a policy that inevitably led to the reconstruction of French imperialism. The Allies kicked the Nazis out of France - no small gain! - but the French capitalists remained in place, and French imperialism continued its bloody wars of exploitation and oppression in Africa and Asia.

With a revolutionary programme based on the armed power of the population, the Resistance as a whole - communist and non-communist - could have put an end to that terrible record, and changed the course of history. That it did not is at least partly due to the politics of the PCF leadership ●

Matthew Cobb's new book is out now: *The Resistance: the French fight against the Nazis* Simon and Schuster, 2009, pp403, £17.99.

Notes

1. For full archival details of events in this paragraph see J-P Besse, C Pennetier *Juin 40: La négociation secrète* Paris 2006.
2. S Courtois *Le PCF dans la guerre: De Gaulle, la Résistance, Staline...* Paris 1980.
3. For a full description of the strike, written by one of its leaders who was subsequently expelled from the PCF, see A Lecoeur *Croix de guerre pour une grève: cent mille mineurs contre l'occupant, 27 mai - 10 juin 1941* Paris 1971.
4. *L'Humanité* July 29 1941.
5. See J-M Berlière, F Liaigre *Le sang des communistes: les Bataillons de la jeunesse dans la lutte armée automne 1941* Paris 2004. See also the memoir by Maroussia Naitchenko *Une jeune fille en guerre: la lutte antifasciste d'une génération* Paris 2003.
6. Rémy *Memoirs of a secret agent of France* New York 1948, p328. Beaufils's own subsequent version of that conversation, expressed less emphatically but with the same content, can be found in P Durand *Joseph et les hommes de Londres* Paris 1994, pp97-98.
7. C Tillon *Les FTP* Geneva 1972, p88.
8. For Guingouin's description of his action, see G Guingouin *Quatre ans de lutte sur le sol limousin* Paris 1974.
9. See General Gambiez, 'La libération de la Corse' in Comité d'Histoire de la 2e Guerre Mondiale *La libération de la France: actes du Colloque International tenu à Paris du 28 au 31 octobre 1974* Paris 1976, pp137-162; and P Buton *Les lendemains qui déchantent: Le Parti communiste français à la libération* Paris 1993.
10. J-L Crémieux-Brilhac *La France libre: de l'appel du 18 juin à la libération* Vols 1 and 2, Paris 2001, pp947, 1122.
11. R Bourderon *Rol-Tanguy* Paris 2004, p382.
12. R Trémpé, 'Aux origines des comités mixtes à la production: les comités d'entreprise dans la région toulousaine' *Revue d'histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale* Paris 1983.
13. *Ibid.*
14. For a rich discussion of the political and military situation at the liberation, see G Madjarian *Conflits, pouvoirs et société à la libération* Paris 1980.
15. For the situation of the PCF during this period, see P Buton *op cit*.
16. P Buton *op cit* p195.
17. P Buton *op cit* p196, and G Madjarian *op cit* p336.
18. C Brinton, 'Letters from liberated France' *French Historical Studies* 2:1-27, 1961.
19. P Buton *op cit* p142.
20. Cited in *La Vérité des Travailleurs* October 1952: www.association-radar.org/spip.php?article218.

IRAN

Threats over uranium enrichment aid regime

Ahmadinejad uses the 'enemy without' to justify increased repression, arrests and the torture of the 'enemy within', writes Yassamine Mather

The dramatic statements by Obama, Brown and Sarkozy about Iran's undisclosed nuclear enrichment plant, made in a 'breaking news'-style press conference on the first day of the G20 gathering in Pittsburgh, were clearly intended to prepare the world for a new conflict in the Middle East. The presentation of the 'news' and the language used in delivering the threats were reminiscent of the warnings about Iraq's '45-minute' strike capability.

According to Obama, "Iran is on notice that when we meet with them on October 1 they are going to have to come clean, and they will have to make a choice." The alternative to sticking to 'international rules' on Iran's nuclear development, would be "a path that is going to lead to confrontation".

Yet in some ways the existence of a second uranium enrichment plant is old news. By all accounts US and UK secret services had known about this plant for at least three years - Israel and France also knew about it for some time and had delivered their finding to the International Atomic Energy Agency earlier this year. The 'dramatic' disclosures came at a time when Russia was already on board regarding further sanctions. Given its billion-dollar trade with Iran, China - one of Iran's major commercial partners - is unlikely to change its opposition to further sanctions.

So what was the main purpose of the Obama-Sarkozy-Brown show on September 25? Could it be it was directed mainly to audiences in the US, UK and France, to convince them that, at a time of economic uncertainty, western leaders have to deal with a 'major external threat' posed by Iran's nuclear development?

But the elephant in that press conference room was the Israeli nuclear programme. While Iran might be approaching nuclear military capability by 2010-15 (no-one is claiming it has such capability now), another 'religious' state in the Middle East is exempt from IAEA regulations and possesses between 100 and 200 nuclear warheads (this according to US estimates), yet it maintains a policy of 'deliberate ambiguity' on whether it has nuclear weapons.

Former IAEA director general Mohamed El Baradei regarded Israel as a state possessing nuclear weapons, but there has been no IAEA inspection, hence the ambiguity over the number of warheads it possesses. Strictly speaking, as a beneficiary of the largest cumulative recipient of US foreign assistance since World War II, Israel is not supposed to have any. Yet every year the US congress approves billions of dollars of US military aid to Israel. For the fiscal year 2010, Obama is requesting \$2.775 billion.

The Symington and Glenn amendments to foreign aid law specifically prohibit US aid to nuclear states outside the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). Iran has signed the NPT. Israel has not.

Of course, none of this justifies the Iranian rulers' obsession with reaching a stage where they can produce nuclear weapons. Unlike middle class



'We don't want nuclear power. We work so that we can live.'

nationalist Iranians, who even in their opposition to the regime, favour the government's nuclear programme, the Iranian working class has been clear on this issue, as shown by placards on recent demonstrations: "We don't want nuclear power - we don't want huge salaries. We work so that we can live - we don't live to work."

Millions of Iranian workers have not been paid for months, while capitalists and the religious government keep telling them of Iran's economic crisis and shortfalls in both the state and private funds, yet the Islamic regime seems to have sufficient funds to equip one more nuclear enrichment plant, paying billions - presumably to dubious sources - for black market equipment. The current escalation of the conflict also exposes the stupidity of the Iranian rulers who only admitted to the existence of this 'secret' plant after its existence was 'exposed'.

Of course, Iranians have become so used to hearing total lies from the leaders of all factions of the Islamic regime that the revelation of the existence of this facility, hidden not far from the capital, did not come as a surprise. After all, this is the same government that used Photoshop to pretend a failed rocket did successfully launch, the same government that cheated in the presidential elections, then lied about the number of people killed in the subsequent protests, and the same government whose president claims to have seen a white light descending from another world while he was addressing the UN assembly in 2007.

Further sanctions will bring more poverty for Iranian workers and it will be the Iranian people who will pay the price for the foolishness of the very leaders they have been protesting against for over two months. The US is keen on sanctions against companies exporting refined oil to Iran (which imports 60% of its requirements). It now looks like France and Germany are sceptical about such sanctions. They refer to the Iraq experience and the ease with which petrol can be smuggled across land borders.

The Iranian government has already indicated that it will cut petrol subsidies. It is blaming the west and hopes such a move will unite the country against

the 'foreign enemy'. Contrary to the pessimism of sections of the Iranian left in exile who 'despair' of the growth of the 'Green' movement or who have joined the bandwagon behind 'reformist' presidential candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi, workers in oil refineries in Iran are well aware of the historic role of their class in the current situation and there have been discussions regarding strikes in this industry for the last few weeks. These workers have two valid concerns: (1) that their strike should not benefit Mousavi (he is hated by these workers, some of whom remember his time in power); and (2) that their strike should not help US efforts for regime change from above.

Western countries are also considering options including an embargo on investment in Iran's oil and gas sector, an end to loan guarantees to all companies investing in Iran, a ban on Iranian businesses trading in euros, and a ban on foreign companies insuring Iranian shipping and air transport. All of these measures will target the Iranian people, the majority of whom hate the clerical state.

UN lies

If the Iranian government lied about its nuclear installations, Ahmadinejad's speech last week at the UN was also full of deceit. His holocaust-denial comments, repeated in every interview he gave while in the US, were a deliberate attempt to divert attention from mass protests at home and to heighten the tension with the rest of the world. This regime and this president rely on foreign crises to survive - he desperately needs enemies abroad to divert attention from problems at home, and the Obama-Brown-Sarkozy trio gave him that.

However, his speech contained other lies. The man who has printed money in an attempt to solve Iran's economic problems told the world: "It is no longer possible to inject thousands of billions of dollars of unreal wealth into the world economy simply by printing worthless paper assets, or transfer inflation as well as social and economic problems to others through creating severe budget deficits." He also criticised "liberal capitalism" (as opposed to clerical capitalism?). After all, this is the president of a government that is busy privatising

every industry in Iran, from services in the oil industry to car plants and Iran's national telecommunications. The telecom company was privatised and sold to the 'revolutionary guards' in the last week of September, although Iran's 'monopoly regulatory commission' is now said to be investigating this.

However, such actions by Iran's Sepah Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guards) do not imply that the country is under military capitalist rule: they are controlled by the most conservative sections of Iran's clerical elite. The Pasdaran ownership of the telecommunication services is only another success for supreme leader Ali Khamenei, his son and the clerics around him, as this ideological military force has no life and no significance without clerical rule.

The few delegates in the UN assembly hall who heard Ahmadinejad condemn the excesses of "liberal capitalism" might have thought Iran is an egalitarian religious society. Nothing could be further from reality. After 30 years in power Iran's Islamic regime has created one of the most unequal, corrupt societies of the region, where the gap between the rich and the poor is amongst the highest in the world. As Ahmadinejad was speaking, Iran's car workers (amongst the best paid sections of the working class) were protesting at long shifts causing ill health and workers throughout Iran were on strike or demonstrating against non-payment of wages. While factory closures due to privatisation continue, Aryaman Motors, a Tehran-based company specialising in reproducing classic cars, launched a new series of replica vehicles based on the original design of the earliest Rolls Royce models at \$120,000 each - wealthy Iranians have already pre-paid for the first models that will be finished later this year.

In his speech Ahmadinejad also referred to the disastrous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, failing to mention Iran's role in support of US aggression in both - as leaders of the Campaign Against Sanctions and Military Intervention in Iran keep reminding us! The Iranian president then referred to breaches of human rights in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib. Of course, it is inevitable that abuse of human rights by the 'torch holders' of liberal democracy in the US and the UK will be used by every tinpot leader in Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere to justify the torture and execution of opponents. The Iranian president is the leader of a government that has killed at least 72 civilians and tortured hundreds in the last two months alone, yet the actions of western governments allow him to stand up in New York and give moral lectures about 'human right abuses'. We truly live in irrational times.

Protests and divisions

The first days of the new university term in Iran saw major protests on campuses throughout the country - the largest being at Tehran University on September 27-28. Students shouted "Death to the dictator" and booed the new minister of higher education. Security forces retreated from the

campus. On Tuesday September 29 students protested at Sharif University, once more causing the minister for higher education to abandon plans to speak. Meanwhile, security forces are warning football crowds not to chant political slogans at the Tehran derby between Esteghlal and Persepolis on October 2.

As former president and leading 'reformist' Ali Akbar Rafsanjani continues his efforts to find a compromise between the regime's warring factions, the first signs of a rift amongst 'reformists' has appeared. In an open letter addressed to Rafsanjani, another 'reformist' presidential candidate, Mehdi Karoubi, writes: "What is your answer to the people who, under dangerous conditions, question the actions of the Assembly of Experts under your leadership? ... By what measure have you preserved the ideals of the revolution in your role as chair of the Assembly of Experts, whose first duty is fighting injustice?"

Mousavi's latest statement on September 28 is also predictably uninspiring. Its repeated references to the "wisdom" of Iran's first supreme leader, Ruhollah Khomeini, confirmed his continued allegiance to the 'imam's line'. But this will not gain him much support amongst young Iranians, who will not accept any solution short of the overthrow of the entire regime. Mousavi's call on his supporters to "avoid any radical measures which could damage the achievements so far made by the opposition" expose once more his fear of radical change and his determination to save the religious state.

All this is very good news for the revolutionary forces. However, the threat of sanctions and war only strengthens Khamenei and Ahmadinejad. In the words of UN weapons inspector Hans Blix, any "rush to punitive sanctions - tightened to the point where ordinary Iranians, already suffering the effects of chronic unemployment, had to endure petrol shortages or big fuel price hikes - could backfire spectacularly".

Hands Off the People of Iran has always condemned sanctions and threats of war against Iran. We oppose them not only because we want to see imperialism defeated, but because they increase patriotism and nationalism, thus helping the reactionary regime. The government will use the 'threat of the enemy without' to increase repression, to arrest and torture its 'enemy within'. Sanctions disorganise the working class, as people are forced to squander their fighting energies on day-to-day struggles to keep their jobs and feed their families - Iranian oil workers are right to be concerned about going on strike at a time when sanctions will also target 'imported refined oil'.

The proposed US-European sanctions dramatically degrade the ability of the working people to struggle collectively on their own account, to organise and to fight. In other words, for the sake of Iranian working class we must continue our opposition to war, sanctions and regime change from above, while increasing our solidarity with the revolutionary movement inside Iran ●

GERMANY

Success poses new questions

With an astonishing 11.9% of the vote at the September 27 national elections, the German left party Die Linke now has 76 members of parliament. **Tina Becker** reports

The September 27 general election was 'historic' on a number of levels:

- At 70.8%, the turnout was the lowest since the formation of the *Bundesrepublik* in 1949.
- Both the conservative CDU (33.8%) and the social democratic SPD (23%) achieved their worst results since 1949. While the CDU lost 1.4% in comparison to the last election in 2005, the SPD lost a massive 11.2%.
- The Liberal Democrats (FDP, 14.6%), the Greens (10.7%) and Die Linke (11.9%) all achieved their best results ever.
- Germany now has a five-party system. In each of the 16 federal states, all five easily passed the so-called '5% hurdle', an extremely undemocratic barrier designed to keep out smaller parties.

On a less scientific level, it was also one of the most boring elections of all time, in which the CDU and the SPD, partners in the 'grand coalition' of the last four years, refused to attack each other. Their extremely muted election campaign culminated in a TV 'debate' between the two party leaders, Angela Merkel and Frank-Walter Steinmeier, in which "they threw cotton balls at each other for a bit, then went for a drink", as a Die Linke press release fittingly describes it.

The last four years were a rather civilised union between two parties with almost identical programmes. At the beginning, one of the two might have tried to introduce small changes - but the other party quickly vetoed it.

And then the financial crisis hit. Both parties quickly united to hold off the worst effects. They nationalised banks, rescued companies on the verge of going bust, introduced the popular car-scrappping scheme and extended *Kurzarbeit* (where a part of an employer's wage is paid for by the state). In addition, they spent €80 billion on two *Konjunkturpakete* (programmes for economic growth). Because of these measures, unemployment is a lot lower than it would have been. The official figure stands at 8.3%, but is expected to rise to around 10% soon, when some of the above measures come to an end.

Bad time to be in government

This might well be one of the worst times in living history to form a government. Like most other countries, Germany is deep in debt. According to the International Monetary Fund, Germany's public debt will rise to 91.4% of its GDP by 2014 (Britain will be at 87.7%)¹. Because of the economic slowdown, the government is faced with a reduction in tax revenues of up to 20%. Following the logic of capitalist book-keeping, the new administration will have to make some dramatic cuts to pay for the crisis.

No bourgeois government can emerge from this crisis smelling of roses. After the success of the FDP, which increased its representation by 32 seats, the CDU has dumped the SPD and quickly gone back to its 'natural coalition partner'. However, in comparison to previous 'black-yellow' coalitions (the last one under Helmut Kohl oversaw German unification), this one is likely to be dominated by the rapid end of what remains of the post World War II social democratic compromise, pushed along by the FDP.

There will be tensions between the CDU and the FDP. In fact, they have already come to the surface. To understand those tensions, one has to grasp that the CDU is not just the German version of the British Tories. The CDU

is a 'social' party - it touts fairness at work, caring for the needy and admonishes naked greed in the name of traditional Christian and German values. In fact, it was the SPD-Green government under chancellor Gerhard Schröder (1998-2005), which first 'broke' the social democratic contract of 1949 by introducing a systematic attack on the German working class, in a package of neoliberal policies known as *Agenda 2010*.

Angela Merkel has succeeded to some degree in presenting herself as the caring *Mutti* of all Germans. There is very little Maggie Thatcher about her - that role is played by Guido Westerwelle, the leader of the FDP. The FDP is the only openly pro-market party in Germany. The main plank of its election programme was the call for a cut in taxes (which only benefit the middle class and the rich, rather than the millions of unemployed and working poor). In other words, they want the state to have even less money available to deal with the effects of the crisis.

They will also clash with Merkel over regulations to the banking system. The CDU wants them; the FDP does not. The FDP wants to abolish the minimum wage that exists in a few German industries - the CDU does not. Just after the election, Merkel even had to come out publicly and "assure the German people" that she will not allow other parts of the FDP programme to become government policy: privatisation of the health system, the abolition of the right of employees in small companies to have union representation and a relaxation of legal protection against unfair dismissal.

SPD: Saved by humiliation

Of course, this was a deeply humiliating result for SPD. In government since 1998, the SPD has steadily moved to the right. For the first time since 1949, the big German unions refused to call on the working class to vote for the party of Bebel and Liebknecht. Almost a million SPD voters have switched to Die Linke (and over 1.6 million former SPD voters chose not to go to the polls at all this year)².

However, this is the best thing that could have happened to the SPD (apart from winning a majority, which was never on the cards). Had it done slightly better, the CDU might have turned to it for another 'grand coalition' - which might well have finished off the SPD. But in opposition it has an actual chance to recover. The SPD is clearly not just a "pro-capitalist party", as, for example, the Socialist Party's German section, Sozialistische Alternative (SAV), claims. Just like the Labour Party in Britain, it is a bourgeois workers' party with two poles that has clearly been dominated by the right over recent years.

However, the pull to the left has increased and will now speed up dramatically with the move into opposition. It might have been economically naive and nothing but a PR exercise, but Steinmeier's call for "full employment" speaks volumes.³ The Berlin SPD has just published an open letter in which its members demand the "abolition of the reforms introduced by *Agenda 2010*" and a replacement of the national leadership, which is "too closely linked to Schröder"⁴. Andrea Nahles, a prominent member of the SPD left, is now likely to become the new general secretary.

This pull to the left has undoubtedly also been sparked by the success of Die Linke. While some in the SPD just want to move to the left to stop Die Linke from nicking its 'natural votes', others have a

more long-term strategy. For example, Olaf Scholz (secretary of employment in the grand coalition) demands a "rapprochement" between the parties. We are likely to see a dramatic increase in 'red-red' cooperation and coalitions at a local and regional level.

So far, the SPD and Die Linke have only governed together in the east German state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and, notoriously, in Berlin. But with the move into opposition, the SPD will work hard towards a majority in the second chamber, the *Bundesrat*. This is made up according to the strength of the parties in regional governments. At the moment, the CDU and FDP have a slight majority. But this could change quickly, as a number of regional elections have failed to produce a clear majority and coalition negotiations are still ongoing. The SPD will try to avoid regional coalitions that give more votes to the CDU nationally. Instead, the pressure is now on to form more regional governments with Die Linke.

Many in Die Linke are already looking forward to the next national elections, the *Bundestagswahl* of 2013. Steinmeier has refused to rule out a future red-red national coalition (which, realistically, would also have to include the Greens). Not only because this might be the only way the SPD can get back into government. But also because such a rapprochement would trigger the demise of Die Linke. The SPD hopes that it can now start to win back all those who have turned their backs on the Social Democrats over the last 11 years in power. Even if the SPD moves slightly to the left, that will increase the pressure on Die Linke to split.

Die Linke: good and bad

The result for Die Linke is fantastic - no doubt about it. More than five million people in Germany voted for a party that describes itself as "left" (and sometimes even "socialist"). Since 1949 there had never previously been a two-figure return at a national election for a party left of the SPD (25% of all unemployed people voted Die Linke - more than for any other party). Die Linke now has 76 members of parliament who can use their positions to oppose the neoliberal attacks and job losses, and fight for the introduction of a national minimum wage and the immediate withdrawal of German troops from Afghanistan.

The election saw Die Linke become the biggest party in most states in the former East Germany. In most eastern regions, Die Linke is a real *Volkspartei*. In Saxony-Anhalt, for example, 32.2% of the electorate voted for it. However, across Bavaria, it only managed to pick up 6.5% of the vote. This reflects the two very different component parts of the organisation that joined together in 2007: the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) was the successor of the 'official communists' running East Germany, while in the west disillusioned trade union cadre and ex-SPD members formed the WASG (Electoral Alternative for Work and Social Justice). Here, Die Linke and its predecessors had struggled for years to get 5% of the vote. But now Die Linke has comfortably cleared the 5% hurdle everywhere. In three of the 11 west German federal states, it even exceeded 10%. So the gap between east and west has got smaller, although it is still there.

And another interesting statistic: When asked as to describe their reasons for voting Die Linke, 39% said "out of conviction", but 60% cited "disappointment" with the other

parties.⁵ Die Linke should really take this to heart. Its current trajectory will undoubtedly lead to a lot of "disappointment" amongst its electorate. The leadership is very keen to follow the SPD into red-red coalitions locally, regionally and also nationally.

Although, according to its carefully arrived at official position, Die Linke would have refused to take part in a national government if results had favoured the SPD last Sunday, party leader Oskar Lafontaine sounded like he was more than ready to backtrack. Just after the results came in he said: "It is a paradox that in the current situation, where a strong state becomes more important and where more regulations are needed, that those two parties have got a majority which stand against those political necessities. The current crisis would have demanded a government coalition that could have redefined the role of the state and its regulatory functions. It is regrettable that it has not come to this."⁶

Gregor Gysi, joint parliamentary leader of Die Linke, said that "there is a re-social-democratisation of the SPD going on because of us. But we will also change, because now, with a bigger share of the vote, we have a bigger responsibility. The SPD has to make a big step in our direction and we have to make a small step towards them." Asked by journalists, he would not divulge which "small step" Die Linke would be prepared to take.⁷

Of course, it has already taken many, many steps on its way to 'electability' (on its way to the right, in other words). In the Berlin and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern government coalitions Die Linke has been responsible for draconian cuts and closures. How could it be any different? As a minority in a bourgeois government, Die Linke is forced to manage capitalism, which especially in this period means cuts, cuts and cuts again.

It would be much better served to concentrate on becoming the main opposition party - especially now that the SPD will fight for the same role. But a majority on the party's leadership years for office. However, around 40% of the national executive are critical of the majority line to one degree or another. They are opposed by the very strong *Realo* wing, which is mainly based in the east of Germany.

The Die Linke body politic is currently being held together by a very thin skin. Is it fighting for socialism? If so, what is socialism? Was East Germany a socialist country? These are only some of questions that have been bubbling away for many years. In fact, the party currently has no programme. The big programmatic fight that was suspended for the elections is set to resume.

German SWP section

One (formally) revolutionary organisation that is *not* involved in this fight is the Socialist Workers Party's German section, Linksruck, which was formally dissolved in 2005. Its 200 or so members are currently grouped around the magazine *Marx 21*. This comes out about five times a year and so is always on the ball and up to the minute. As we go to press, four days after the elections, its website still does not mention the

results - or the fact that two ex-Linksruck members now sit in the national parliament.

In fact, you can find more about it in *Socialist Worker*. The current issue carries a brief report on the elections and an interview with "Stefan Bomost, editor of German magazine *Marx 21*" (no mention of the link with the SWP):

"Party leader Oskar Lafontaine says the key tasks ahead include joining governments in order to block federal legislation, winning future elections and taking to the streets to protest against cuts. However, joining governing coalitions at a time of budget cuts would almost certainly mean implementing policies that hit the party's working class supporters, says Stefan. 'You cannot say that a vote for Die Linke is one that will defend public services, while at the same time making cuts,' he says. 'But the pressure to take office is great. The revulsion with the CDU is such that the vast majority of Die Linke's voters say they want our party in government.'"⁸

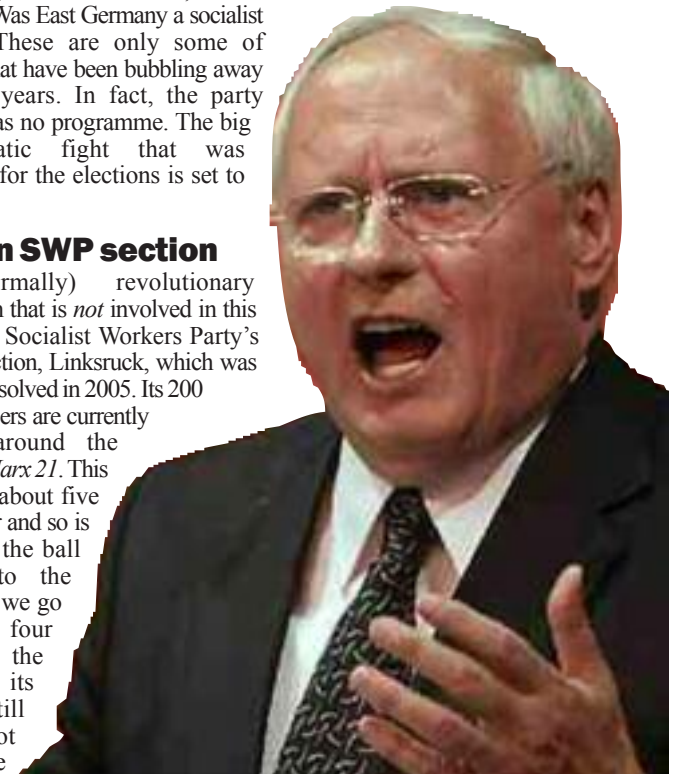
Officially, the comrades argue against government participation. But not particularly emphatically. In fact, comrade Stefan's comments sound almost like an excuse to *join* a future government - and an excuse for *Marx 21* not to protest too loudly.

The comrades are playing a very dodgy role. More than a dozen of them have paid employment within Die Linke - most working for MPs or as members of local, regional and now national parliaments themselves. They have been acting as outriders for the leadership, particularly Oskar Lafontaine, and have consistently argued that Die Linke should not be a socialist organisation. And now they are reaping their 'rewards'.

But the price to pay for such unprincipled politics can be very high indeed ●

Notes

1. *The Daily Telegraph* September 29.
2. <http://wahlarchiv.tagesschau.de/wahlen/2009-09-27-BT-DE/analyse-wanderung.shtml>.
3. See *Weekly Worker* September 3.
4. www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article4678940/So-zerlegt-das-Wahl-Desaster-die-alte-SPD.html.
5. <http://wahlarchiv.tagesschau.de/wahlen/2009-09-27-BT-DE>.
6. <http://die-linke.de/politik/aktuell/nachrichten/detail/zurueck/nachrichten/artikel/die-linke-hat-das-deutsche-parteiensystem-veraendert>.
7. www.welt.de/politik/bundestagswahl/article4662141/Gysi-und-Lafontaine-wollen-jetzt-die-SPD-beraten.html.
8. *Socialist Worker* October 3.



BOOKER

The 'new Indian' tiger

On October 6, the winner of the Man Booker prize will be announced. All but one of the shortlisted works are 'historical fiction'. Last year, however, the winning novel was set in present-day India - *The white tiger* by 34-year-old Aravind Adiga. **Mike Belbin** weighs up its appeal to UK judges and asks whether or not it does credit to the 'new India' of technological and cultural advance

The *white tiger* is written in the form of a letter by Balram Halwai, son of a rickshaw puller, to visiting Chinese premier Wen Jiabao.

This enables the story to be told, like Dickens's *Great expectations*, retrospectively in the first person. At the time of writing, Balram has 'made it', become an entrepreneur and is looking back on how he did it, seeking to show the premier what things are like in Indian society.

Balram travels from the semi-feudal, caste-rigid ethos of a traditional village to the employ of a rich landlord. Early on, he is praised by a government schools inspector, picked out as special, a 'white tiger'. He works in a teashop and is involved in an Indian election, which, through fraud and bribery, returns someone called the Great Socialist to power. Through all this Balram is happy to take whatever place and position he can get.

Like Voltaire's *Candide*, the story uses the lack of guile of the protagonist to show us how merrily corrupt and venial this democracy is. In fact Adiga does not hesitate to demonstrate a social framework where traditional clan India and new entrepreneurial India are not positive and negative, past and present, but deeply entwined. The book even comes up with a name for this: the 'rooster coop'. Servants do not revolt, notes Balram, because their extended family would consequently suffer: "...only the man who is prepared to see his family destroyed - hunted, beaten and burned alive by the masters - can break out of the coop. That would take no normal human being, but a freak, a pervert of nature."

He is finally hired as a chauffeur in Delhi for Ashok, the son of a landlord. As Balram takes his place among the cockroaches and call centres of the city, there seems no way out for the compliant driver to rise safely into the confidence of the letter writer, no possibility of a complete transition, as the publisher's blurb puts it, "from the darkness of village life to the light of entrepreneurial success".

Realism and the novel

It is a measure of Adiga's achievement as a writer that I was reminded of Raymond Williams' concept of a "knowable community".

In his analysis of *The English novel from Dickens to Lawrence* Williams identifies realism as not just a technique (vernacular dialogue, secular concerns, typical characters), but also as an achievement: the coverage of "an effective range of social experience by sufficiently manifest relations" (R Williams *Politics and letters: interviews with New Left Review* London 1979, p247). As with Thomas Hardy, whose novels of late 19th-century Dorset are not just another 'regional' or 'provincial' portrait, but stories of varied class interaction and more general social issues like exploitation and education (*Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *Jude the obscure*).

Exploring a 'known society' might be a better description. Plenty of fiction can give you a particular place or small community, but lack a sense of broader connections and involvements. This is the realist project, not just a commitment to an independent, interpersonal reality, but the extension



Aravind Adiga

of understanding into new areas of character and relationships. Even James Joyce, often considered to be merely playing with words, admits a world of communications - magazines, advertising - to the experience of a Dublin *Ulysses* not fully presented in fiction before. On the other hand, Frederic Jameson more recently has advised us not to underestimate the difficulty of 'social mapping' in our more atomistic, abstract present. This often requires more than the conventional naturalist novel, but modes of fantasy and sociology, as in science fiction. Williams' point though was that writers should not underestimate the amount of social life we can trace to the experience of individuals in a novel of current times.

In recent decades, of course, even everyday fictional realism, sometimes called 'naturalism', has been challenged as naive by postmodernists in theory and fiction. The very idea of an external reality (social or physical) that can be mapped by a writer and appreciated by a critic - a world independent of our imagination and discourse - has been judged a mistake and even oppressive (taking 'my' reality as the Reality). But if there is no independent reality existing to be described (both materially and historically) - yes, with difficulty, that is, discovered - then we are rejecting not only the chance of useful knowledge, but our very physical being, our body and where it exists.

It was Jameson again who said that history is what hurts (*The political unconscious*, New York 1981). Physical being is independent because it involves hunger, unhappiness, pain, frustration and pleasure - effects we cannot or sometimes would not wish into existence. The anti-realist may reply: 'Ah, but these things depend on how you define them; define them locally, culturally, with concepts and words. What entertains one culture may differ from what does it for another culture.' Agreed: this is still a definition of something, of pleasure at something, a response to not an imagining of something. When we understand someone's joke, we laugh.

Of course, anti-realism is nothing new. There have been philosophers before the 1960s who went even further. Bishop Berkeley in the 18th century, provocatively reacting against the scientific empiricism of the time, asserted

that the supposed sensations from the outside world need only be ideas in our mind - what can prove they are from some material outside? These ideas could have been put there in the mind by god.

One wonders, though, what, say, a snooker player might say: 'My appreciation of the external world allows me to act on it, to hit the cue ball with a certain force, to judge how to place it after it's hit another, to play in the circumstances presented to me by the game. Which doesn't mean I don't make ill-judged shots. Maybe I have to practise more.'

Berkeley might well have countered with: 'All of that could be just ideas in your head. How can you be so sure it's not?' To which Steve Davis might reply: 'You're right, I can't be certain. But it's good enough - for the sake of practice.'

The tiger's leap

Balram's story is a convincing - realistic - account of servility undergoing pains amongst an India of interlocking forces and structures, feudal and market. His break with this, when it comes, overcomes the problem too swiftly.

Am I as a reader simply disagreeing with the text for its implausibility and its uncongenial ideological turn, the suddenness of the leap from skivvy to petty bourgeois? No, rather let me call on Althusser's concept of a *symptomatic* reading (*symptomale*), as presented in *Reading Capital* (co-authored with Etienne Balibar, London 1970). Althusser contends that Karl Marx, when discussing Adam Smith, does not just look for what Smith fails to mention, but for how the text itself, Smith's very argument, reveals its fragility in the presence of problem areas.

Smith writes: "The value of labour is equal to the value of the subsistence goods necessary for the maintenance and reproduction of labour." An odd phrase? Labour itself needs subsistence goods? The spade that digs the hole, the looms that spins the wool needs a tea break? Substituting 'labourer' at the end would sound better, but Smith is not here discussing life and people, but labour - doing work. The sentence quivers on the edge of nonsense. Either that or a new problematic, about to break through to the concept of labour-power. Marx, of course, is reading this very problematic, where labour occurs in a new complex of relations. He does so

because of 'new information' from elsewhere, but still arguing from inside the text itself - not just disagreeing, but also locating the disturbances, the gaps and instabilities within it.

There is no such thing then as a professional reading - one that does not apply concerns from 'elsewhere' about how society has developed and how it might be changed. The most respected bourgeois literary critics of the past - IA Richards, QD Leavis, FR Leavis, Northrop Frye - were each applying their own general notions of history and value. There is no such thing as a non-ideological (in this sense) critic. The symptomatic reader, however, is not just concerned with disagreement between ideologies, but also with the ideology in the text: how it works - or doesn't work.

How will Balram become an entrepreneur if the coop is so tight and he is so willing a servant? How will he get from under the degradations and terrors of the rooster coop, the hypocrisies of Great Socialist politicians, squabbling bosses and jealous fellow servants, and leap beyond?

By accident, or rather by a particular accident. While operating in his position as chauffeur one night, he is ordered out of the driving seat and replaced by Pinky Madam, his employer's American wife, who is drunk and possibly homesick. In the event, a pedestrian is run over and Balram is told to take the blame.

He must now assert himself - he resorts to murder and prepares to run for it along with a young apprentice servant. Balram is shown to be not entirely selfish in not leaving this boy, a relative, behind. Before he goes, Balram has been granted a large sum of money as a gift by one of the Delhians, just like that, and he makes good use of this in the city of Bangalore. He hands over part of it to the police, who accept this bribe, as in Delhi, and uses the rest to set up a business.

The story has suddenly speeded up and some of the people are doing things for which the motivation has hardly been prepared. No-one seems to come after Balram: his relatives may be suffering from the consequences of what has happened, but we do not hear about it. Balram seems to have jumped clear of the coop, or rather up on top of it, and into a new, purer problematic. As he contemplates the 'bling' of his mansion's chandeliers, he ends his letter with an assurance (to the premier?) that, in his expanding business, he will treat his workforce more correctly than any of his previous employers: he believes in proper contracts.

This triumph then is not without irony. Balram - and the reader - may be aware of all the corners he has cut to 'escape', but there seems to be no other option.

A choice of capitalisms

So perhaps it was the happy ending, the change of pace, the triumph, however hollow or clumsily prepared, that impressed the judges.

In an interview in *The Times* Adiga describes himself as "both a small-town conservative and a more cosmopolitan person in one" (July 18). In fact he belongs to a new kind of international fiction - made up of writers initially from the developing and non-western world who nevertheless write in the metropolitan language, English, and for a primarily western readership. They do not need to be translated. Adiga, like

other writers - Libyans, Chinese and Ukrainians - is a hybrid.

For some academics, in 'postcolonial studies', hybridity is good: the opposite of racialist 'purity'. But as with Salman Rushdie, their hybridity, their mobility and attraction for a mainly western readership is based on class and education. This enables these writers to look both ways, making good points about the societies they have left (most live in London or New York) but from the assumption that liberal capitalism is the superior and only alternative - that is, as an ideal, of course, not a full description.

After the publication of his second book, a volume of short stories, Adiga remarked of India: "The corruption exists because it works for the benefit of the middle class." From the middle class, but a member of an international intelligentsia, he is able to be sharp about this, presenting it as telling comedy. The alternative that he offers, though, is for at least one character to identify human rights with another form of capitalism: contract-wage rather than rooster coop.

The speed at which the book's conclusion is achieved - its advance through bribery, its magic, free-gift, consequence-free nature - undermines it. However, even if, as Balram alluded to at the start, it has made him less than "a normal human being - a freak, a pervert of nature", he still proclaims human rights. Not quite a happy ending, a Booker judge might think, but better than nothing.

If the end is being ironical at the character's expense, this irony is not conservative - like Swift in *Gulliver's travels*, it is actually in favour of traditional ways or humilities. We know that nothing today is permanent (not even the planet), so the slipperiness of its conclusion makes the book even more contemporary - another reason, however faintly sensed, for choosing it as exemplar best book. Global capitalism is all but morally vacant - the crunch has seen to that. But people are angry with those mainly responsible and about other things. It remains to be seen whether this rage, the repercussion of disenfranchisement, will result in a struggle for more accountability or support for more reaction, such as Sarah Palin and the religious right of all countries.

One last reflection: it is interesting to compare this most contemporary of novels with an earlier Indian work, one from 1935, now a Penguin classic: *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand. This novel, from the 'committed' 30s, explores a day in the life of an earlier Bakha, a member of that lowest in the caste system, an 'untouchable'.

Bakha hears a speech by Gandhi which addresses the theme of finally treating the untouchables with equal respect. He also encounters a 'modernist poet', who declares that India is now ready to accept the machine - ie, technology: untouchables need not be sunk in the dirty work when the flush toilet exists.

The actual future, however, was the Nehru family - from 'non-aligned' to the Indo-US nuclear deal, and the 'new India' that Adiga's novel so evokes. Today, moreover, the answer to the coop is not 'western' materialism, but sustainable materialism; not the racing after bling, but the flourishing of life, including a democratic political life - the satisfactions of living ●

STUDENTS

Rooted on campus

Communist Students have been winning supporters at freshers fairs **Chris Brandler** reports from Manchester



From tiny seeds

Manchester Communist Students have gone from strength to strength over the past 12 months. At this year's freshers fair we recruited three times as many students than the previous year, with nearly 170 signing up to the society.

For three days comrades staffed stalls inside and outside the University of Manchester Students Union, handing out thousands of leaflets, as well as the new edition of *Communist Student*, and selling the *Weekly Worker* and other leftwing papers, including *The Commune*. As well as getting through a mountain of literature comrades spent hours discussing and debating with freshers on topics ranging from ecology and the English Defence League to sexual liberation and the legalisation of drugs.

We were situated next to the recently established 'Men's Society' and saw first hand the true nature of this new formation - members of Conservative Future staffed the stall and its members were calling for the abolition of the students union women's officer position. The CS Manchester secretary has written for the women's magazine *The Riveter* polemicising against the society and we will also be laying out our opposition to

this misogynist club in the paper *Student Direct*. CS comrades will be standing shoulder to shoulder with women's rights activists against any attacks on the women's movement and the gains it has made over the last few decades.

Many freshers wondered why the left was so varied and fractured - there were stalls from the Socialist Worker Student Society, Socialist Students and the very dull and ultra-sectarian International Students for Social Equality, which is the student front of David North's post-Healyite International Committee of the Fourth International. Alongside the organisations of the left, many campaigns were also present and out in force, including Action Palestine, which led the month-long occupation at the University of Manchester at the beginning of the year, Stop the War Coalition and Unite Against Fascism.

Manchester CS was the only left group to hold a meeting on campus during freshers week. We invited Mark Fischer from the CPGB to speak on Karl Marx, his ideas and the relevance of Marxism today. In a varied discussion we managed to get to grips with Karl Marx and ecology, the Spanish civil war and how to avoid another catastrophe like the Soviet

Union. A member of the Socialist Workers Party was forced to admit that he secretly is a communist, but that we should not tell those outside the movement - after all, communism is associated with Stalinism, isn't it?

In the next few months Manchester CS will be inviting speakers from different organisations, including Israeli socialist Moshé Machover, who will speak on November 4.

CS comrades also helped other supporters of the Hands Off the People of Iran, taking shifts on the Hopi stall and signing students up to the Hopi Society. Hopi showed Marjane Satrapi's wonderful film *Persepolis* during freshers week, which drew over 40 people.

Peter Grant from the train drivers' union, Aslef, and Ste Monaghan from the Anarchist Federation spoke of the importance of Hopi's work in view of the current situation in Iran. The brief discussion we managed to have ranged from whether it is right to support the Iranian 'reformists' against the conservatives as the lesser evil to the massacres of the 80s in Iran.

Manchester CS is now looking to the future and has set out an ambitious timetable for study and action. We will be reading Gramsci's *Prison notebooks* over October, culminating in a public presentation and discussion. To facilitate this comrades have devised study packs and guides for all those interested. In November we have a French series, which will be kicked off with a study of Karl Marx's *The civil war in France*, followed by a look at 'The French Resistance and the Communist Party' and the 'Lessons of 1968', and finishing off with a discussion on the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) led off by Tina Purcell. Comrade Purcell was at the NPA's founding congress and reported on it for *Permanent Revolution*.

We have stalls planned over the coming term and will be helping other anti-war activists on campus get as many students down to the October 24 demonstration to end the occupation of Afghanistan.

We still have a long way to go in fleshing out our organisation, but we are firmly rooted on campus and have a new generation of young Marxist organisers preparing to study and educate, agitate for our politics and organise struggles on campus and beyond ●

Fighting fund

Tremendous

Thanks in no small measure to SK's tremendous £230 donation, we have well and truly exceeded our £1,000 monthly target.

Our total for September climbed to £1,257 in the final few days - one of our best ever months. I also need to thank comrades DO, JT, AP, JC and BS - the last two for their slightly more modest online contributions (there were 12,412 internet readers last week). As JC writes, hers is "just a small donation", but it is valued all the more for the support for our paper it demonstrates. The same goes for BS, who wants to show us "some solidarity from an American comrade".

Meanwhile SS reports how well things are going in Leeds. TB and AP have

vowed to continue their weekly subscriptions, whilst DK has taken out a new one. Also newly signed up is PW, who has paid a £10 advance partly to atone for his "guilt for always having read the *Weekly Worker* online but never paying for it".

I like your style, comrade. And I will also like it very much if we crash through the £1,000 barrier once again next month - and the month after that. What will really delight me, though, is a raft of new standing orders. Any offers? ●

Robbie Rix

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

What we fight for

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

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

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

■ Communists oppose 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.

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**Can Labour
underdog
bite back?**

Writing on wall for Brown

“We’re not done yet!” - so proclaimed Gordon Brown at this week’s Labour Party conference. On more than one occasion. Maybe so, but that is not what the latest Mori survey suggests - with the Conservatives on 36%, Labour on 24% and the Liberal Democrats on 25%. This is the first time since 1982 that Labour has come third in such a poll, and all the various other such surveys and polls indicate similar results.

Unfortunately for the Brown team, depressing poll returns are not the only bad omens. Far more significant than Mori’s statistical tea-leaves, *The Sun* - the newspaper that claimed not entirely without reason to be “wot won it” for John Major in 1992 - has finally deserted Labour and gone back to its natural ideological home, the Tories. So its front-page headline reads: “Labour’s lost it” - and goes on to inform us: “After 12 long years in power, Labour has lost its way and now it has lost us too” (September 30). Cripes, maybe the writing really is on the wall for Labour.

Perhaps naively, home secretary Alan Johnson responded to *The Sun*’s electoral body blow by saying it was “electors that decide elections, not newspapers” - a sentiment echoed by Brown, who ventured the idea that he would, of course, “like the support of every newspaper”, but it is “people that decide elections”. Very profound. However, the plain fact of the matter is that it is very rare for *The Sun* not to sniff which way the populist wind is blowing. Hence Rupert Murdoch ruthlessly ditched the Tories in 1997, as he knew they did not have a hope in hell of winning the general election - or as *The Sun* put it at the time, Blair’s New Labour represented the “breath of fresh air this great country needs” in contrast to the “tired, divided and rudderless” Conservative Party under the final dog days of John Major (March 18 1997).

Similarly, David Cameron - according to George Pascoe-Watson, *The Sun*’s political editor - is now apparently the man with the “vision, the energy, the drive, the ideas to take the country forward”, and *The Sun* eagerly anticipates in particular that the Tory leader will “cut away a lot of the red tape which is strangling British business”. As if things were not bad enough, Labour now suddenly finds itself confronted by a formidable and rapacious foe in the shape of the tabloid ‘fourth estate’.

Unsurprisingly then, with Labour facing the very real prospect of a resounding electoral defeat - possibly even a cataclysmic one akin to the victory of the Ramsay MacDonald’s Conservative-National Labour-Liberal coalition when Labour was reduced to a mere 52 seats - morale among the Labour troops is beginning to plummet, even amongst senior apparatchiks within the cabinet. Expressing his frustration with such backsliding elements, the chancellor, Alastair Darling, sharply lambasted his colleagues who appear to have lost the “will to live” - comparing them to a “gutless football side” who have “allowed their heads to drop well before the final whistle”. Instead of indulging in such defeatist sentiments, Darling told *The Observer*: “We have got to come out fighting” (September 27). Faced with such extraordinarily



Gordon Brown: cuts

unpromising conditions, Brown’s speech this week at Brighton attempted to pull the iron from the fire - though first we had to endure yet another sickly-sweet, lachrymose introduction by his wife, Sarah, who described him, Michelle Obama-style, as “my hero” who “loves his country” and “will always, always, put you first”.

Therefore Brown urged party activists to “reach inside ourselves for the strength of our convictions” and to “dream big dreams and watch our country soar” (a reference to Goethe’s *Faust* - probably something *The Sun* missed). As part of this big dreaming, or “vision thing” as a US president once memorably put it, Brown announced a shopping list of new policies, such as: 10 hours of free childcare a week for 250,000 two-year-olds from families “on modest or middle incomes”; a plan to house 16 and 17-year-old single parents in state-run “shared houses” rather than council flats; a £1 billion “innovation fund” to boost industry; a new National

Care Service to “provide security for pensioners for generations to come”; a “commitment” to allocate a whopping 0.7% of GDP to international aid; the abandonment of a “compulsory” ID card scheme for British citizens; a pledge to force the courts to issue more Drinking Banning Orders, or ‘drink Asbos’; a draft bill to abolish the remaining unelected Lords before the next general election; proposals to implement a ‘right of recall’ of MPs if more than 25% of their constituents demand one, and - in a move which caught virtually everyone by surprise - casually tossed in a reference to a referendum on “voting reform”.

However, genuine democrats should not get too excited by the latter remark, it does have to be said. Brown’s stated preference, if indeed that is what it is, is for the ‘alternative vote’ method, as used in the Australian House of Representatives - being not a proportional electoral system, but rather a majoritarian one which looks extremely similar to the current ‘first past the post’

mechanism. Indeed, the results produced by an AV system could conceivably be even more distorted, or less democratic, than under FPTP - making electoral life for ‘extreme’ or non-mainstream parties (eg, BNP, Communist Party, etc) just that little bit harder than it already is, and under AV coalition governments composed of mainstream or establishment parties would be no more likely to arise than they are under FPTP. No wonder Brown is prepared, if need be, to accept such a voting system.

Of course, Brown’s primary objective at Brighton was to present himself as the saviour of capitalism - the man of steel who took the lead and made the decisions that had to be made in order to prevent the entire global economic-financial system plunging into the abyss with near unfathomable consequences. Unlike the spineless and irresponsible Tories, Brown implied, who would have let the banks go under due to their dogmatic and selfish adherence to the Thatcherite ideology of ‘never bucking the market’. What “failed” last autumn, he declared to conference cheers, was the “rightwing fundamentalism that says you just leave everything to the market” and “says that free markets should not just be free, but value-free”.

Well, he - Gordon Brown, no less - had no fear to ‘buck the market’ when it came to the crunch and when the Tories “were faced with the economic call of the century”, they “called it wrong”. Wrong, wrong, wrong - and of course Brown got the prolonged ovation he wanted, and needed.

Brown obviously has a point, of course - it would be churlish to say anything else. The Tories’ essentially *laissez-faire* approach would almost certainly have seen them copy the criminal stupidity of George Bush and ‘do a Lehman’ - that is, petulantly refuse to ‘throw money’ at the problem and thus kick off a domino effect that would have triggered a tsunami throughout the UK’s entire credit-financial system. Whoops apocalypse. After all, the Tories adamantly opposed the nationalisation of Northern Rock, so what other measures would they also have opposed?

Furthermore, it is clear - as the financial pages of the newspapers love to point out - that the economy *is* improving, albeit sluggishly and tenuously. In other words, the economy has stopped going down the plughole quite as fast as it was previously, and in that sense Gordon Brown and the other governments that followed fashion - by massive state intervention in the markets - self-evidently acted in the best immediate and short-term interests of capitalism. The fact that the ‘free market’ system is still with us at all in its current shape and form is testament to that fact, especially when you consider the long-standing and persistent rumours (or leaks) that at one stage last year George Bush was on the verge of declaring a state of emergency - even drawing-up contingency plans for a ‘limited’ period of military rule.

However, having said all that, we can see that increasing swathes of the population are being persuaded to believe that the ‘credit crunch’ and the general economic downturn was Gordon Brown-induced - not an inevitable consequence, or by-product, of the ceaseless ‘boom-and-bust’ cycle of capitalism, regardless of who happens to be sitting in No10.

Worse, the idea that cutting public spending - though, of course, dressed up as being ‘anti-waste’, ‘anti-red tape’ and so on - is the only way out of the mess we are still in, is steadily acquiring the status of ‘common sense’ in official political discourse. Hence all the mainstream parties are now committed to cut-backs and ‘cost reductions’. The only debate - if you can call it that - being about your degree of enthusiasm for a spot of muscular axe-wielding.

Of course, those who argue for the continuation - if not an intensification - of Keynesian stimulation have more than a valid point. Unemployment is still going up and the recovery, such as it is, could easily flounder - and we could find ourselves stuck in a classic ‘W-shaped’ downturn. But such voices will not be heard come the next general election amongst the clamour for cuts, cuts, cuts ●

Eddie Ford

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