



weekly **worker**

**Obama, world's No1 terrorist,
cannot win the Afghan war.
Demand troops out now**

- Communist Students plan
- Unite anti-war movement
- Origins of religion
- BNP and BBC platform

No 790 Thursday October 22 2009

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Formation of Rees faction means SWP is on the verge of a split



LETTERS



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

Flagging up

Paul Cockshott's letter further helps to open up a new discussion on the British left with regard to the European Union (October 15).

While the EU no doubt serves bourgeois interests, the reality of continental integration is something that must not be resisted with populist opportunism, such as the likes of 'No to the EU, Yes to Democracy'. The No2EU 'coalition' ran a Eurosceptic campaign in a Eurosceptic climate. The goal was not to truly resist the BNP and UK Independence Party, but to cash in on their success by promoting similar rhetoric. This is why the CPGB could not support it.

As an American (in the Socialist Party USA), I watched the EU elections debacle with a close eye, reading the *Weekly Worker* especially. While I was nonetheless disappointed to read that the CPGB had decided to call for a vote for Labour, I was still very appreciative of the fact that the CPGB did not support No2EU.

We here in the American socialist movement are firmly committed to the idea of open borders and the free movement of people. To see such a rightist campaign that singled out foreign workers being waged by 'left' elements was rather disturbing. It is not our choice as revolutionaries to choose between the nation-state and the continental union. We support neither, but we can recognise one as more progressive than the other.

It is odd that many ignore the possibilities of transnational political action offered by the EU. The downsides of the EU are because it is controlled by the capitalist class, but so is the nation-state. The US should be the clearest example of this. There never was any North American Union. But the 'sovereignty' of the American bourgeoisie only allowed it to maintain global dominance on its own, wreaking havoc through imperialist war and continuing oppression at home. And here we find the answer: the problem is not the EU; it is capitalism, a global system which must be abolished.

Revolutionaries of the left must not wage entire campaigns based on the issue of the European Union. What should have been formed during the EU elections in June was a new Socialist Alliance. Time will tell if such a thing will happen in the 2010 general election. The new left nationalists must be told that the enemy is capitalism, not Brussels. Stand and fight for a world without capitalism, where one day we will have a world socialist federation.

Leave the capitalist class of imperialist Britain behind and join a working class movement without borders. Lay down your union jack and pick up the great red flag.

Stancel Spencer
email

Agitated

Eddie Ford states that "it is tactically as legitimate to organise physical defence against groups like the EDL or the BNP (including pre-emptively) as it is to ruthlessly expose their rotten ideas on a shared platform" ('A symptom of capitalist decay, not the main enemy', October 15).

Really? The British National Party and its linked organisation, the English Defence League, carry out physical attacks on black and migrant workers. It is not only legitimate, but a necessity and a fundamental

democratic right to organise self-defence against racist attacks.

We supported printworkers who took industrial action to refuse to print *The Sun's* lies about the miners' strike. We should support industrial action to deny airtime to Nick Griffin advocating that migrants be drowned at sea and inciting racist attacks against Muslims.

Organised self-defence and industrial action is only a small part of the solution - we need a revitalised workers' movement and a fighting Communist Party to fight for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and its replacement by a workers' society based on the highest democracy of workers' councils. But sharing platforms with those advocating and carrying out physical attacks on workers will earn us derision and quite rightly so.

We should support demonstrations and industrial action against the BNP and organised self-defence against the EDL and BNP, whilst arguing clear class politics, agitating for solidarity action with postal workers and fighting for public services and decent pay.

Jason Travis
Permanent Revolution

Chasing his tail

Comrade John McKee of Permanent Revolution has written a stupidly illogical 'critique' of the CPGB's view on the BNP and EDL, taking James Turley and myself to task for our recent articles (see 'CPGB defends Nick Griffin's "democratic rights": www.permanentrevolution.net/entry/2859).

In a flagrant disregard for evidence and facts, the comrade writes that the EDL is the BNP's "boot-boy front". He accuses the CPGB and myself of "deliberate naivety" because we *have* looked at the evidence and facts, and concluded that the mutual antipathy between the BNP and EDL is genuine. Of course, we accept that individual BNP members have been involved with the EDL - why else would the BNP threaten disciplinary action against them and declare the EDL a "proscribed organisation"?

Comrade McKee fantasises about the BNP "wanting to maintain some distance between its respectable profile and its street fighting wing", but this "entirely bogus separation is strictly for public consumption". Think about it. How can the BNP say one thing in public, including to its own members and supporters, and precisely the opposite covertly? Don't you think it might cause some confusion amongst its own rank and file if the BNP were secretly running the EDL and urging its members to support it, while publicly threatening them with expulsion if they did? We also accept that the BNP is perfectly capable of lying about all sorts of things, but it is the duty of communists to identify when it is doing so and when it might just be telling the truth.

McKee displays the usual inability to actually deal with what comrade James Turley and I have been saying: "Right on queue [sic], the CPGB's *Weekly Worker* launches a campaign to explain why socialists and anti-fascists should abandon 'no platform for fascists' and support Griffin's right to a place in the mass media."

We have not launched any "campaign" for Nick Griffin's "democratic rights". We are for defending the hard won rights of the working class and oppose all state bans and censorship, which inevitably will be wielded against us. We therefore also oppose demands by the left for

the state to enforce such bans or for media outlets like the BBC to decide what views are or are not acceptable. As for 'no platform', we want to restate the classical Marxist case for utilising various tactics in the struggle in the fight against the far right - tactics which obviously include denying them a platform when appropriate. In the early 1920s the Communist Party of Germany tore apart the ideas of the Nazis not only in pamphlets, but on *shared platforms*. Under different circumstances they were prepared to tear them apart physically.

Comrade McKee states: "Like Ben Lewis, Turley does not rule out action against the fascists, but not now of course." Amazingly, he then goes on to quote comrade Turley precisely referring to "now": "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."

It is the final sentence quoted above that McKee particularly dislikes: "This is utter complacency. If [the CPGB] had any influence, which fortunately it doesn't, it would completely disarm the struggle against fascism and the BNP. This precisely needs to take place before it has built roots and can mobilise its passive voting base onto the streets." Note that comrade McKee does not dispute the contention that working class events are usually not physically attacked by far-right thugs at this time, but he wants us to behave (or pretend to behave) as though they were anyway.

What the comrade is unwilling, or unable, to countenance is that the main threat to the workers' movement does not come from the far right. It is the bourgeois state that is preparing a full-scale assault on the postal workers, planning to impose vicious cuts on all of us, waging a murderous war in Afghanistan and - as Nick Griffin points out whenever he is interviewed - is actually deporting refugees and asylum-seekers in the here and now. As Trotsky lucidly points out in his writings on fascism (have any of the so-called Trotskyists even read this stuff?), confusing the nature of threat of the far right can have disastrous tactical and strategic implications.

The icing on the cake comes when McKee scoffs at me for highlighting the core of the problem: the inability of the purportedly Marxist left to articulate its *own* political alternative in elections in the struggle to become a recognised force in society. He writes: "So, while the BNP are busy spreading their fascist politics across the media, the Marxists need to win elections in order to force 'the establishment to start taking us seriously'. As if the establishment have ever been forced to do anything by the election of MPs."

This is pathetic. The BNP is becoming recognised in society because it *is* standing candidates, getting elected and on some sort of level winning the political argument amongst a working class left high and dry by the idiocy of the confessional sects. Instead of constructing a response which focuses on the main enemy - the capitalist state - and on the need for a working class party and programme capable of challenging it, too many on the left want to chase around after the BNP like a dog chasing its tail.

As it cannot beat the BNP where it counts - in the battle of ideas - it views the ill-organised and disparate forces of the EDL as a godsend,

pretending it is seeing off the "fascist" BNP's "street fighting wing".

If my insistence on party, programme and winning the battle of ideas makes me a "liberal wearing a communist mask" and a "democrat, not a communist", then that says everything about McKee. We in the CPGB are the ones who have consistently fought for the unity of Marxists as Marxists in a political party *now*, whereas the PR comrades go along with the left 'common sense' of setting up organisations 'not programmatically delimited between reform and revolution' to swim in, as a means of building their own narrow sect.

Small wonder then that leading PR member Bill Jefferies was so keen on blocking attempts to mobilise against the EDL in Manchester around openly socialist politics. Much better to tail the bourgeois multiculturalist consensus and throw in a bit of 1980s rhetoric for good measure.

Ben Lewis
London

Advantage BNP

The 'alternative vote' system has been proposed by the Labour Party for electing members of the House of Commons.

This electoral system might have the effect of giving undue advantage to the British National Party, unlike the much better 'single transferable vote' system proposed by the Electoral Reform Society.

Dave Womersley
email

Kids know

Arthur Lawrence seeks to redefine the meaning of the word 'paedophile' (Letters, October 8). There is really no need. A paedophile is, simply enough, an adult who finds pre-pubescent children sexually attractive. No, it does not mean someone who "desires a sexual relationship as understood by adults" with a child. It also includes sexual encounters with children as understood by children.

As to the notion of pre-pubescent who cannot possibly understand 'adult' sexuality, does that mean he excludes those pre-pubescent who *do* understand it? Or that biologically and by definition a pre-pubescent isn't ready for sexual intercourse? While this is true, sex and sexuality is also socially inspired and puberty, like revolution, isn't an event, but a process. Girls, for example, who haven't yet started to have periods can have breasts; and, with or without breasts or periods, pre-pubescent can have very strong sexual impulses of the pubescent kind.

If he thinks pre-pubescent can't possibly understand full sexual relations, he certainly doesn't live on a working class housing estate, where many pre-pubescent think, dress and act exactly as young teenagers would have say 40-50 years ago. He might also ask any of the kids (if he knows any) what 'shag bands' are: thousands are wearing them all over the country and, while many do so without actually having the sexual act they depict, they all know what that sexual act is, and *some* of them at least have actually engaged in it.

None of this is to condone or recommend paedophile activity. If Arthur meant that they couldn't possibly understand the social consequences for a prepubescent engaging in sexual activity with an adult in today's society, he's right, of course. The ton of bricks dropped on them by social services, the police, the school, the community and the press will immediately condemn

them to victimhood and enforce some sexual/mental cripple status upon them. The whole witch-hunt scenario depends upon them being innocents who've been violated - a sexually active, even predatory, pre-pubescent has to be brainwashed and 'treated' until they accept their status as a wide eyed, non-consensual, non-sexual child.

As for the adult, if any of them fully understood the social consequences of their actions once they get caught, they certainly wouldn't engage in it either. It's been pointed out in this paper before by someone else, that sexual activity with a pre-pubescent, no matter how minor the action, and how consensual the child is now an offence greater than violent rape or attempted murder.

What's more, they can never see the sentence and will never be free for the rest of their lives, living under severe social restrictions. Hounded until they die. Why would they do it?

Frankly I don't understand homosexual lust either, but it continued right through the period when it too was witch-hunted and violently, socially and legally repressed. I recognise it's as strong as heterosexual lust, strong enough to see it practised despite the threat of flogging, maiming, imprisonment and even death in some countries and time periods. Presumably the paedophile lust is no more and no less strong and is highly addictive.

It's said you can't make someone have a sexuality they don't already have - you can't 'encourage' someone to be homosexual, for example. I'm not sure that that's true. I wonder if all the fuss and hoo-ha over paedophilia hasn't in some perverse sense popularised it, or created a morbid sexual curiosity about it, which has taken a great many adults who previously wouldn't have had any inclinations toward sex with a child to fantasise about it, seek it out on the web, and ultimately engage in it?

It's a weird world, but if we all just live and let live and leave people alone, perhaps mind our own sexual business, I'm sure society wouldn't come crashing down.

Willie Hunter
Berwick Upon Tweed

Don't deport Sheida

Sheida Jahanbin, a former member of Students for Freedom and Equality in Iran, is facing deportation from the Netherlands, where she resides in exile.

Sheida is 27 years old. She was a student of architecture and graphic design at Azad University, Tehran, before she was forced to abandon her studies and flee Iran following her arrest for holding a leftwing meeting. Before she left Iran, she had a promising career in journalism. If Sheida is deported, she will face arrest, prison, torture and even death.

We call on our supporters and friends to write to the Dutch consulate and send messages of solidarity to her solicitor supporting her case to be granted leave to stay permanently in the Netherlands. Her IND number is 0808-14-1310.

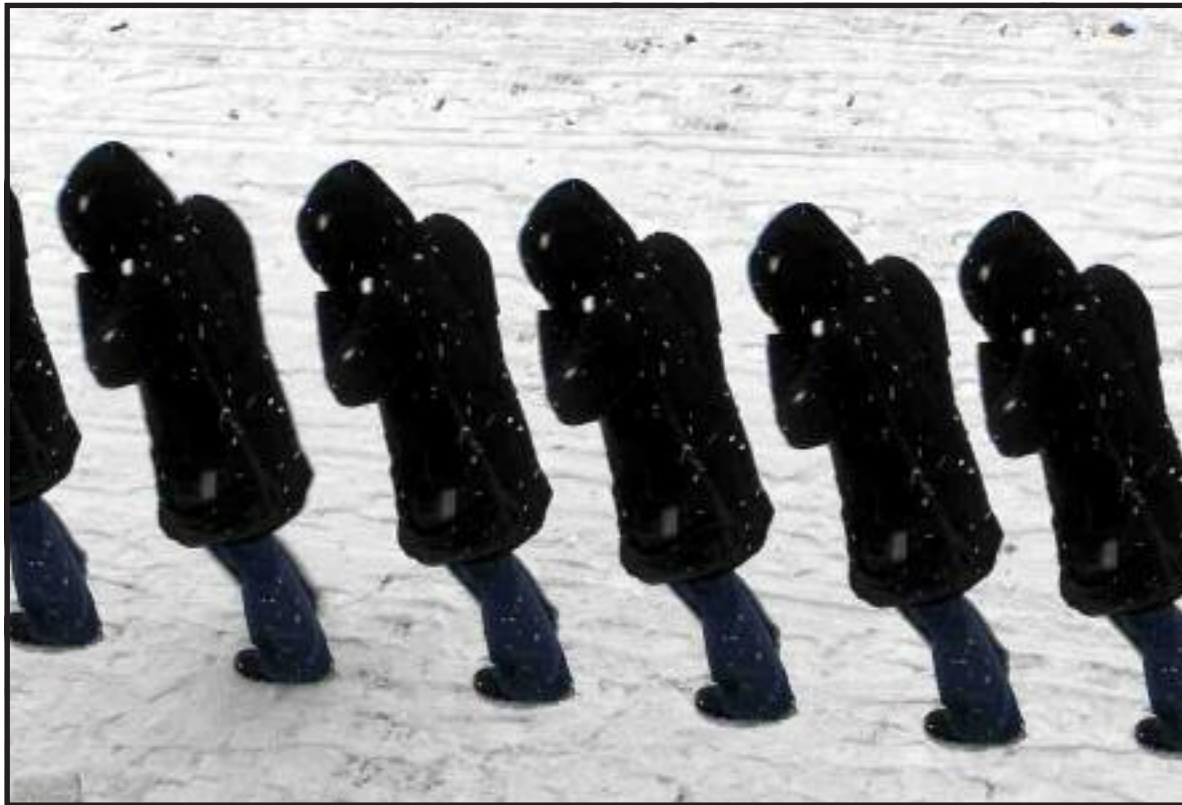
If you can get your union to send letters of support, please send a copy via email to Hands Off the People of Iran at office@hopoi.org.

Please send letters and messages of protest to: R Hijma, Postbus 14002, 3508 SB Utrecht, Netherlands; and Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 38 Hyde Park Gate, London SW7 5DP.

Dan Crone
email

STUDENTS

Space for questions and arguments



No to conformity

Over 20 people attended the Communist Students day school in Manchester on Saturday October 17. Most were from the city, where our comrades have been working hard to build the event, though there was a good contingent from London and the south.

Entitled 'Fighting for Marxism on campus', the day school was intended to introduce the politics of CS, provide a space for questions and arguments around communism in general and CS in particular, and also to stimulate discussion around the critical questions facing revolutionaries today. The introductions to the sessions were filmed and will be available to view on the CS website soon.

Opening the first session, 'A world in crisis: how can Marxism help us to understand and change it?', Ben Lewis argued that crisis was inevitable under capitalism, but that it could only be understood by studying the underlying laws of the system and not by looking for an explanation in the actions of a few 'greedy bankers'. Ben went on to argue that our task is to positively supersede capitalism, because it can never be run in the interests of the working class majority. There are no short cuts to be had through diluting our politics. Revolution, as the conscious act of the majority, will require a lengthy process of education and organisation to prepare our class for the assumption of power through the fight for radical democracy.

This introduction stimulated a good deal of debate on the nature of the current crisis and the likely political results. Some comrades thought we would see an intensification of capital accumulation across the world. Others argued that we would continue to see a cooling of the economy. The prospect of increased protectionism and national rivalry, the role of the EU as a supra-national power bloc and the rise of China's economic power were also

subjects of discussion.

Cat Rylance introduced the next session on the theme of internationalism, and began by emphasising that capitalism is a global system and Marxists see class, not nation, as determining people's real interests. The working class, above all, must have an internationalist outlook, which takes its highest form in a workers' international. But much of the left is steeped in left nationalism - while we might expect members of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain to come out against open borders and for immigration controls, what should we say about the Socialist Party in England and Wales and its silence on the awful British nationalism of the CPB-inspired No2EU platform?

Then there was the Socialist Workers Party, whose 'internationalism' involves uncritically cheerleading various reactionary forces, such as Hamas and the Iranian government, just because they are against US imperialism. Cat contrasted the SWP's belated recognition of democracy struggles in Iran with the consistent work of Hands Off the People of Iran, which was set up to fight for principled internationalism in the anti-war movement.

In the final session Chris Stafford gave an introduction on 'Communist Students: who we are and what we fight for'. Chris maintained that CS was unique on the student left. Though initiated by members and supporters of the Communist Party of Great Britain, it enjoyed real autonomy as an organisation. We have our own conferences, where motions are voted on. Not rallies, where lines are handed down by a party apparatus. Debate is encouraged rather than stifled - indeed debates started in CS have been taken up by the CPGB. We are not interested in turning out conformist drones. CS was also unique in that it was the only left student group that campaigned for

unity on the basis of Marxism. But we should recognise our own role in achieving such unity and try to win people to CS, argued Chris.

In the various contributions following the openings, comrades discussed the relationship between youth movements and 'adult' organisations, and what our political priorities should be in the coming year. In between sessions comrades were photographed with solidarity messages for our student comrades in Iran, who face beatings, arrest and torture when fighting the Islamic regime. Our solidarity work provides a great morale boost for these comrades, as well as practical assistance in terms of funds, etc.

The day school was a definite success in terms of introducing new comrades to the organisation and drawing out differences in analysis and politics, which can hopefully feed into a lively conference in spring 2010.

CS members held a business meeting the next day to discuss our plans for the new academic year. It was agreed that, with the help of new comrades who have recently joined, we should up the tempo of our work, with weekly stalls in Manchester, Oxford and various locations around London. We will also be standing candidates in student union elections.

The crisis of capitalism will not automatically turn the younger generations left - the most popular political society at Manchester University freshers fair was Conservative Future! There is a crying need for leftwing politics, however, but the divided left is incapable of producing an organisation that can provide the answers. Communist Students is here to agitate and organise, but also, crucially in this period, to *educate*. Our day school was a small contribution to that process, and a fine example of the open and democratic culture our class needs to practise ●

Dave McAllister

ACTION

Communist Forums

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

October 25: No Forum.

November 1: August H Nimzt Jr *Marx, Tocqueville and race in America*. Subject: 'Thomas Messer-Kruse's *The Yankee International*: Recent adventures in gratuitous Marx-bashing'.

Oxford: Study group, every Saturday, 2pm, starting October 31, when we begin our study of David Harvey's *Limits to capital*. Further details: oxfordcommunists@googlemail.com.

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

London: Every Wednesday, 7.30pm: Introduction to Marxism series, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way WC1 (Russell Square tube).

October 28: 'Political economy - how does capitalism work?' ben@communiststudents.org.uk; 07792 282830.

Manchester: Every Tuesday, 6pm, University of Manchester Students Union, Oxford Road, Manchester M13.

October 27: Study of Antonio Gramsci *Prison notebooks*. www.communiststudents.org.uk.

Oxford: Tuesday October 27, 7.30pm, Judges room, town hall, St Aldate's, OX1, 'Capitalism's crisis and the communist alternative'. Speaker: Mike Macnair (CPGB).

oxfordcommunists@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: the human revolution', St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1.

October 27: 'Political bodies: Eros and women's power among the Mbendjele forest people'. Speaker: Morna Finnegan. www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

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.

Love Music, Hate Racism

Friday October 30, 7pm: Benefit, the Classic Grand, Jamaica Street, Glasgow. With The Bum-Clocks, Laki Mera, High Heel and The Soles. Organised by LMHR Scotland: lmhrscotland@gmail.com.

Another Education is Possible

Saturday October 31, 11am: National student conference on free education, war and occupations, School of Oriental and African Studies, Russell Square, London, WC1.

Organised by AEIP: www.anothereducationispossible.org.uk.

Stop the EDL

Saturday October 31, 12 noon: Demonstration against proposed EDL march, Art Gallery, the Headrow, Leeds LS1.

Organised by Unite Against Fascism: www.uaf.org.uk.

Defend Palestinian children tour

Mohammad Salem Abu Eid describes his experiences as a 14-year-old prisoner of the Israelis.

Liverpool: Monday November 2, 7pm, Quaker Meeting House, School Lane, L1.

London: Tuesday November 3, 7pm, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, WC1.

Sheffield: Wednesday November 4, 7pm, Quaker Meeting House, 10 St James Street, S1.

Oxford: Thursday November 5, 7pm, town hall, St Aldate's, OX1.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.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.communiststudents.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.

ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT

Obama cannot win in Afghanistan

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have conclusively demonstrated a single, simple proposition, writes **James Turley**: imperialism has no progressive role to play

Following months of foot-dragging and not a little strong-arming from his paymasters abroad, the Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, has finally been induced to call a second round of elections after August's vote.

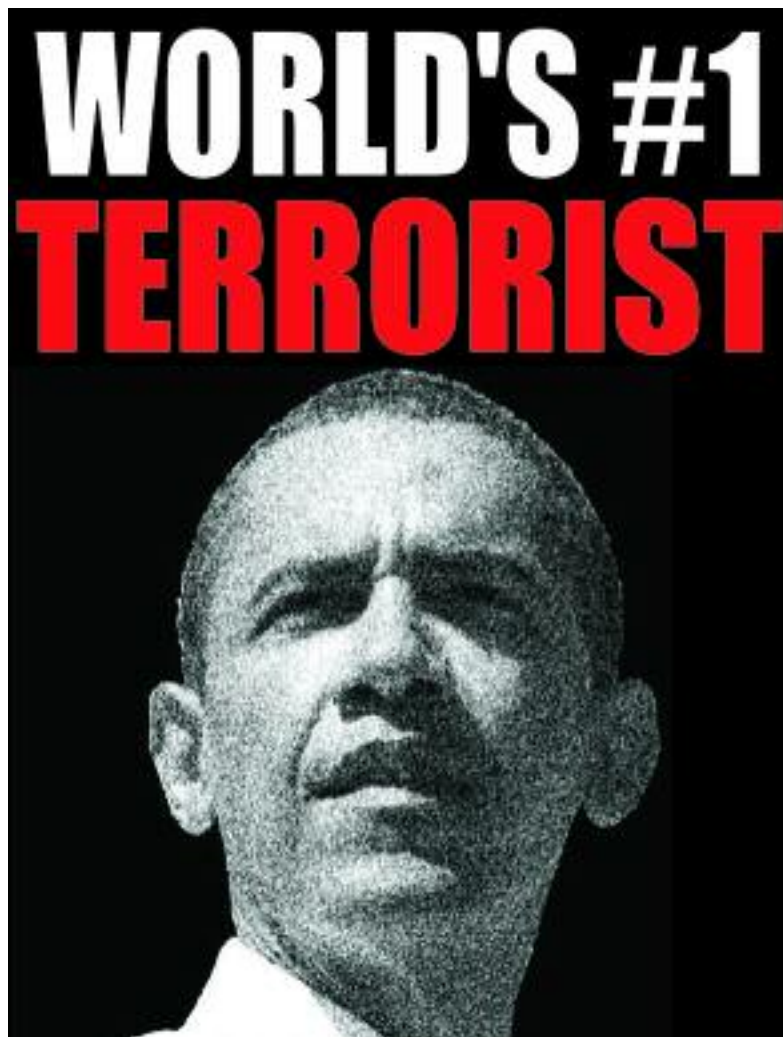
The official result of that poll, handed Karzai a narrow victory. He picked up 54.6% of the vote - the margin needed to avoid a run-off with the next candidate being 50%. Yet there was a fly in the ointment: the trifling matter of widespread, barely concealed electoral fraud, running the gamut from ballot-box-stuffing to vote-selling. The legitimacy of the election was tenuous already, the Taliban forces concentrated in the south having backed up their boycott with deadly force - turnout in the region was estimated at 5%. Before the eyes of all the world's media, the election turned into a farce.

It was, of course, a farce that - in a sane world - would have been entirely predictable. Yet judgements are rarely sober when the stakes include billions of dollars in 'aid' money, the lives and livelihoods of many tens of thousands of foreigners present on Afghan soil (be they soldiers, carpetbaggers or NGO workers), and the 'good name' of almost the entire political class in America and western Europe. It is now more than obvious that Karzai has been under almost continuous pressure from the US to back down from his victory claim and allow the run-off vote. Now, by all appearances, Karzai is back in the fold: "While this election could have remained unresolved to the detriment of the country, president Karzai's constructive actions established an important precedent for Afghanistan's new democracy," said Barack Obama.

And understandably so: Obama declined, in his own election campaign, to distance himself from the Afghan misadventure. Instead, he has happily assumed responsibility for it, taking his cue from the late Bush appointee, general David Petraeus - a man described memorably by *Guardian* columnist Simon Jenkins as "that most dangerous of generals, a clever strategist" (October 20). Victory was possible, Obama assured America and the world - provided the US and its allies showed sufficient resolve, and wound down the disastrous occupation of Iraq *tout de suite*.

In Britain, we have had our own change at the top of government. Tony Blair, whose name is entirely associated with Iraq and Afghanistan, gave way to long-time chancellor Gordon Brown. Many voices in the media, appointing themselves 'experts' on the often tortured relationship between the two, had imputed to Brown more sceptical views on the thorny issue of overseas military operations than the crusading evangelist, Blair. Precisely how continuing to fund these wars for half a decade and never raising a peep of dissent provided any basis for this conclusion was largely left to the imagination, amid a seemingly never-ending series of cryptic briefings from sources in both the great New Labour camps.

It turns out that - who'd have guessed



it? - Brown was every bit as committed to tailing US foreign policy as Blair (and, indeed, as he had been to US economic policy). The Iraq war is now effectively over, though a good handful of permanent US bases, to say nothing of thousands of US troops, will remain for the foreseeable future. Afghanistan, meanwhile, seems to be going even worse.

When the war began, the public were sold it on the basis that it was a quest to apprehend and charge Osama bin Laden for the September 11 2001 atrocities; as it became obvious that bin Laden had jumped, so the tune changed. We were there to raise the down-trodden Afghan masses from their oppressed and benighted state, by overthrowing the brutal Taliban regime and instituting a modern liberal democracy. Women were to be released from the shackles of religious domination. The country's main cash crop, opium poppies destined to form a variable percentage of street heroin in our cities, was to be wiped out and replaced with more 'constructive' economic endeavours. All this, at the point of American M16s.

The effort was already foundering by March 2003 - but by then, the ruling class had bigger fish to fry. The invasion of Iraq that month presented a more serious military problem for the Pentagon and its transatlantic toadies; though its billing by Kenneth Adelman, a Bush defence official, as a "cakewalk" had an element of truth to it, there was no doubt that, even in its decrepit state at the time, Saddam Hussein's regime

was militarily more powerful than the Taliban. Quite apart from the military side of the question, there was the political context - the legitimacy of the war drive had been challenged spectacularly by enormous protests around the world. The high point in Britain was the February 15 demonstration in central London, where the attendance was estimated at between 1.5 and two million people.

The Iraqi regime was, in the event, toppled very quickly - yet it quickly became apparent that the occupation forces had no real strategy; amid rampant corruption and the ascendancy of tribal-religious resistance groups, Iraq degenerated into an obvious quagmire, with US-UK troops stuck in a grinding stalemate with its opponents and uneasy alliances with the largest armed groups. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine the full course of events - needless to say, one side effect of the endless difficulties in Iraq was to distract attention away from parallel difficulties in Afghanistan.

Of course, we all knew *that* one wasn't going too well either - but its relatively muted coverage lent a certain spurious authority to assertions like Obama's: that Iraq was 'the wrong war', that Afghanistan was still 'winnable'. Now Obama has had to put his money where his mouth is, and that means taking responsibility for electoral fraud, thousands of civilian deaths (and, of course, highly-publicised US casualties). The Taliban have always operated across the Afghan-Pakistani border

and this forced the US into escalating incursions into the lawless western areas of Pakistan. It is a situation with worrying echoes of the extension of the Vietnam war into Cambodia; the result, then, was the Khmer Rouge killing fields, and the parloous effect on Pakistani society the 'Af-Pak' strategy is having is increasingly obvious.

Obama is dithering over a request from Nato commander Stanley McChrystal for 40,000 additional troops; the notion that such a 'troop surge' would actually end the war is transparently risible, and an increasingly war-weary electorate, who believed last November they were voting in a peacemaker, will not take well to the idea.

What the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have conclusively demonstrated can be boiled down to a single, simple proposition: *imperialism has no progressive role to play*. The ballot box cannot be exported - the act of imposing a political regime renders any claim to democratic principle a sham. A brief look at the recent histories of the US and UK, meanwhile, demonstrates that ruling class commitments to democracy are paper-thin at the best of times. Iraq was turned, by years of sanctions followed by years of low level civil war, from a semi-industrialised capitalist power (albeit one labouring under a brutal dictatorship) into a carnival of carnage, its infrastructure decimated and the Ba'athist regime replaced by an Iranian-backed Islamist 'government' and endless militia warlords no less brutal than Hussein. The net result of imperialist intervention in Iraq has been to add chaos to oppression.

In Afghanistan, the case is even more clear - not least because Afghanistan is an intensely contradictory country, deeply divided along tribal

and national lines, which has only for very brief periods in its history been united into a single meaningful political formation. More commonly, the reality has seen the country dominated by petty warlords, with any central government currying favour and collecting tribute. The establishment in 1978 of the Stalinist Democratic Republic of Afghanistan was perhaps the most serious attempt at modernisation in recent history, with much work put into building up basic infrastructure, but immediately prompted a devastating civil war and a disastrous and protracted Soviet intervention. The CIA infamously pumped millions of dollars into hard-line Islamist reactionaries to weaken the Soviet Union - among these were the predecessors to the Taliban, and a charismatic Saudi jihadist by the name of Osama bin Laden.

The result is a heap of ruins. American military dominance, though unlikely to be seriously challenged in the near future, is decaying - it has lost the ability to build stable regimes in its conquests (even if these were almost invariably brutal dictatorships); it is reduced to inflicting punishment beatings on recalcitrant populations. Where it maintains occupations, it merely intensifies and prolongs the state of chaos.

Communists fight intransigently against imperialism. This is not just the pre-eminence of America, of course, but the whole system of inequality between states, made necessary by capitalism. It is useless to pose the United Nations or 'multilateral' forces as an alternative to gung-ho American occupation, because the problem is systemic.

We demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan ●

Fighting fund

Serious hardware

The last seven days saw an increase in the number of our web readers - well up on the average of recent weeks to 13,533 - but unfortunately there was no commensurate rise in online donations. In fact there were no PayPal donations at all!

We did, however, receive £120 in standing orders, plus there was a minor influx of cheques, thanks to a sudden delivery of mail, which included items posted the best part of a month ago. Amongst them was a nice little £25 from KT, £20 each from HG and FS, and £10 from five separate comrades - PI, NP, LF, CD and SD.

The good news is that we have already achieved our £1,000 target with over a week to go! The total stands at £1,032 and rising. Those new computers and an office printer are looking more and more like realistic propositions! And we could really do with them.

The machine I am using right now kind of grinds to a halt when it downloads updates.

Talking of which, NP writes: "I know it's only a tenner, but at least it'll get you some stationery!" Well, actually, comrade, adding yours to all the other tenners, we are starting to think about some serious hardware.

I'm hoping that next week I can report a somewhat greater use of our PayPal facility (it can't be any worse). After all, we can't rely on too many cheques and postal orders during a post strike. And, the sooner we do get the extra cash we need for those computers, the more effectively we'll be able to write our solidarity articles with the postal workers ●

Robbie Rix

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

LEFT DEVELOPMENTS

Formation of Rees faction means SWP is on the verge of a split

Taking advantage of the Socialist Workers Party's pre-conference discussion period, deposed leader John Rees has launched an officially recognised oppositional faction, the so-called Left Platform.

The three months before the SWP's annual conference - due over the weekend of January 8-10 2010 - is the only time when members may form a temporary faction. Apart from then, individual members may not come together to campaign within the organisation or issue joint statements. 'Factionalism' is an expellable offence, and this leaves the self-perpetuating central committee as the only group of members capable of driving forward policy.

At the January 2009 conference, of course, the CC recommended that the members re-elect it *en bloc* - with one exception. Delegates did as requested and left off comrade Rees, although Lindsey German and Chris Nineham, his closest allies on the leadership, stood down from the recommended slate.

So now comrade Rees is attempting a comeback of sorts. He got 64 signatories for the Left Platform - more than double the minimum required. Unusually, the SWP's weekly *Party Notes* internal bulletin has not only confirmed the formation of the faction, but publicised its launch meeting. The October 19 issue contains this brief announcement:

"Notification of Left Platform faction"

"Thirty SWP members have written to the CC informing us that they are forming a faction - 'Left Platform' - to participate in the pre-conference discussion (section 10 of the party's constitution).

"They will be holding a series of faction meetings open to Left Platform supporters and other SWP members who want to know more about the Left Platform. The first of these will be held in the University of London Union (ULU), Malet Street, London on Sunday October 25 at 1pm."

It has to be said that comrade Rees is most unlikely to win the day in January. He was well and truly thrashed at the 2009 conference and he has yet to propose anything that in practice differs substantially from the CC line.

Take the October 10 meeting of the party council, the SWP's delegate body that meets between conferences. Rees and 63 other comrades, including Lindsey German, Chris Nineham, Guy Taylor and Elaine Graham-Leigh, put forward a motion reiterating the traditional line on 'no platform for fascists' and criticising the leadership for backtracking: "... at the last two national committee meetings of the SWP a majority of the CC who spoke argued that the SWP should be prepared in the future to debate with members of the BNP in the media ..."

The leadership countered with a motion agreed by the NC, which also reiterated the current position, but made no reference to the previous NC debate: "SWP members in UAF will refuse to appear on a panel with Nick Griffin"; and: "We will redouble our efforts to win the case for no platform for the BNP in the media ..."

In other words, there was no difference in substance between the two motions, but the NC motion was overwhelmingly passed, while Rees and co received just 11 votes (there were around 200 delegates). The significance of the vote lies in the continuing marginalisation of Rees.

Blogland is full of rumours about the October 9 suspension from SWP membership of two leading student comrades at the School of Oriental and African Studies, who are allegedly in the Rees camp. One of them, Clare Solomon, runs the *Solomon's Mindfield* blog, which seems to indicate a different kind of politics: - "anarchists are our closest cousins", she says, publicising the October 24 London Anarchist Bookfair.

Another casualty of the SWP faction fight has been the *Counterfire* website, run by SWP member and Rees supporter Adie Cousins. This has been closed down, following an instruction from the leadership, although it can hardly be said to have been an organ of open debate. There are also reports of resignations by full timers and suspensions of dissidents in other parts of the country. The North East and Birmingham have been mentioned. And then there is Chris Bambery (who defended Rees in last year's fight over his leadership, although he did not step down from the CC slate) 'resigning' as editor of *Socialist Worker* amidst a revolt staged by the paper's journalists.

All is not well in the SWP, to put it mildly. There is clearly a systematic but thoroughly underhand campaign being conducted from the top to destroy Rees politically by first silencing, diminishing or removing his real and imagined allies and supporters. *Socialist Worker* journalists would only revolt if they had been told to revolt.

But, of course, none of this is any business of the movement as a whole - not even SWP members in fact - at least according to the leadership. So do not expect anything by way of official confirmation or denial in *Socialist Worker* - unless, that is, pressure of public opinion forces their hand as, it did over Respect.

Are there real underlying differences between Rees and the leadership faction around national secretary Martin Smith, Alex Callinicos and Chris Harman? In a sense, yes. Simplistically it revolves around the question of 'movement or party', with Rees and co putting more stress on so-called 'united front work', and forever accusing the CC of underplaying the importance of the Stop the War Coalition, Unite Against Fascism, etc. Meanwhile Smith *et al* believe that now is the time for stopping the rot in morale and rebuilding the battered and denuded SWP branches.

In reality, of course, these are differences of nuance. They are not actually in contradiction to each other. The truth is that the SWP leadership is still smarting from the Respect disaster, the blame for which could conveniently be laid entirely on Rees. He did indeed bear prime responsibility, since he was the driving force behind the unpopular popular front with George Galloway, the Muslim Association of Britain and a clutch of Bengali businessmen. However the rest of the leadership were hardly faultless, with every one of them publicly backing the Respect turn.

Comrade Rees is not exactly a red-hot favourite when it comes to bets on the new leadership. His toppling was very popular among the overwhelming majority of SWP members, as demonstrated by the vote at party council - although, of course, he retains a small core of support, not least

in the Stop the War Coalition. What we are almost certainly seeing are initial moves towards a parting of the ways - the expulsion of Rees and co or a Rees-led split. It amounts to the same thing.

'Left unity'?

Meanwhile, the Smith leadership is still going through the motions of calling for a united left coalition to contest the 2010 general election. While ignoring the request of "the sects" - the CPGB, Workers Power, Alliance for Workers' Liberty - for discussions, the SWP has invited the Socialist Party in England and Wales, the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, 'No to the War, Yes to Democracy' and 'No to the War, Respect (not to mention the Barrow People's Party!) to a meeting on October 31. It has proposed two options:

1. That a new 'political party' for the purposes of the election be formed with a name such as Left Unity, and that each component stands candidates using a combination of the agreed 'party' title and its own name: eg, 'Left Unity-SWP' or 'Left Unity-Respect'.
2. That the organisations merely agree a 'non-aggression pact' - ie, that they agree not to stand against

each other.

The CPB has been in a state of confusion following the defeat, then reinstatement, on its executive committee of the Robert Griffiths-John Haylett line for greater electoral cooperation across the non-Labour soft left. Just two weeks after its executive decided to abandon No2EU by a single vote, a special EC meeting was called which saw a victory for comrades Griffiths and Haylett, with only one vote against their motion.

While campaigning for "the defeat of the Tories and the return of a Labour government" the CPB will "stand a limited

number of Communist Party and Unity for Peace and Socialism candidates", work with "the broadest range of mass organisations to ensure people's candidates stand against the leading figures of the New Labour clique", and "seek to stand candidates as part of a broader class-struggle coalition with trade union, left and progressive forces" (www.comunist-party.org.uk).

The long motion does not mention No2EU, in line with the previous EC decision, although the RMT is specified as the union most likely to be interested in standing candidates. Neither does it mention the SWP, and it is still not clear whether the CPB will show up at the October 31 meeting. It will certainly not agree to an umbrella 'party'.

For its part, Respect has replied to the SWP proposing a more general, vaguer cooperation. It has been engaged in discussions with the Green Party and would like the Greens included in a general agreement for mutual support, which might include joint campaigning. Respect has already decided to contest three constituencies under its own name and SPEW is likely to contest its usual limited number of seats under its electoral name, Socialist Alternative.

So, despite the 'party name' proposed by the SWP, genuine 'left unity' is far from the minds of any of the participants. No-one is proposing any kind of actual party (apart from SPEW with its no-hope call for a Labour Party mark two) and certainly not a party based on Marxism ●

Peter Manson



John Rees: being politically outmanoeuvred

IRAN



Tehran: explosion over election rigging

The sham presidential election of June 2009 has unleashed a rainbow of political forces, writes **Yassamine Mather**, including an increasingly strong red component. The task of the left is to support and strengthen the red component of this rainbow, the Iranian working class, as the only force capable of bringing about democracy, and the only movement conscious of the international complexities of the current situation

Every day for the last few weeks Iranian workers have been protesting, at times in their thousands - at their workplaces, outside government offices and provincial offices complaining about job losses, non-payment of wages, privatisation ... Universities have been the scene of daily protests and ordinary people have used every opportunity, even football matches, to express their opposition to the regime. At the same time a new wave of exiles, including reporters, writers, professors of literature, are leaving the country, despairing of continued repression and the ineffective

'reformist' leaders.

For the overwhelming majority of Iranians, however, such an option does not exist. Tens of millions of wage-earners have no choice but to continue their struggles against the regime in their daily confrontation with factory-owners and the religious state that backs them. In the words of those at Wagon Pars, who went on hunger strike last week, workers have "nothing to lose but their unpaid wages". The 1,700 employees of Wagon Pars, manufacturer of freight wagons and passenger coaches, have been in dispute with management and the state for months

over unpaid wages. In August 2009 these workers went on strike and staged a sit-in protest on factory grounds, locking the gates and preventing managers from entering.

The factory had been privatised as a subsidiary of troubled car maker Iran Khodro, after Iran's supreme leader changed article 44 of the constitution, removing the guarantee of public ownership for key industries. Protests and threats of strike by Iran Khodro workers forced the government to retreat, showing the vulnerability of the rulers when confronted by united working class action. Iran Khodro workers have

Green

now won five of their demands, including an overtime pay rise of 20% for all workers on the production line.

Last week there were also major workers' protests over non-payment of wages in Louleh Sazi Khouzestan (manufacturers of pipelines) and a demonstration by Tractor Sazi workers in Kurdistan, where tens of workers were sacked, while others are expected to work longer hours. Managers in most of these disputes blame the world economic downturn for the new wave of job losses. Nearly four months after the huge demonstrations of June 2009, the continuation of protests in workplaces and universities proves that opposition to the regime goes well beyond the issue of the sham presidential elections.

Sanctions and the working class

Sanctions have compounded an already dire economic situation. In the South Pars oilfields almost 6,000 contract workers are threatened with job losses, as whole fields are abandoned following news that Total, Repsol and Shell are pulling out. The current protests should indeed be seen in the light of the world economic crisis - whose effects have been felt far worse in the countries of the periphery - as well as the impact of sanctions. Iranian workers are adamant that the dire economic situation is one of the main reasons why protests continue and evolve, despite the failures of the green movement. Some of their supporters talk of the "suffocating silence" of the green movement's leadership.¹

Of course, workers' protests in Iran are nothing new. They have been going on for years. What is different is the massive increase in their number and the introduction of political slogans, such as "Death to the dictator" or "Tanks, bullets, *bassij* [militia] are not effective any more", in workers' sit-ins, protests and demonstrations. Workers were the first section of the population to confront unscrupulous capitalists and the religious state, and their audacity paved the way for the wider opposition to develop. Now they are showing themselves the most tenacious in continuing the protests, even if the western media do not find workers' actions newsworthy. The problems they face are enormous. Unlike the myriad well funded NGOs, some with dubious links to US regime-change funds, the Iranian working class has no source of ready income. On the contrary, their protests cost workers their meagre wages.

Reporting workers' struggles on radio and TV is considered ideological, while giving wall-to-wall coverage to the utterances of 'reformist' Islamists or bourgeois liberal politicians is deemed 'impartial'. The state can identify and punish labour activists much more easily than demonstrators. Nowhere is the state's control more severe than in the oil industry. Worker activists discussing possible strike action are moved from their regular posts to other areas.

Yet none of the state's increasingly repressive measures seem to deter the Iranian working class, who are turning the defensive actions of last year into more aggressive forms of protest, establishing road blocks, taking managers hostage, bringing their families to occupy closed factories and workplaces. In order to overcome the lack of news coverage of their struggles, Iranian workers are setting up their own means of communication through internet sites and email.

But the combination of proposed new sanctions and the 'new' econom-

ic policies of the regime will make life even harder for the majority. Just when it became clear that Iran has no intention of adhering to a proposed deal for the 'resolution' of its nuclear crisis² and the US began passing legislation to impose new unilateral sanctions, the *majles* (Islamic parliament) discussed regulations that would sharply reduce energy and food subsidies, in compliance with long-term demands of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

In the US, the Iran Sanctions Enabling Act (IRSA), approved by an overwhelming 414 to six margin in Congress, will allow local and state governments and their pension funds to divest from foreign companies or US subsidiaries with investments of more than \$20 million in Iran's energy sector. And the house foreign affairs committee has scheduled a vote for October 28 on the Iran Petroleum Sanctions Act (IRPSA) bill. This will impose sanctions on companies involved in exporting refined petroleum products to Iran or expanding Tehran's capacity to produce its own refined products. Similar sanctions are likely to be imposed by France, the United Kingdom and Germany. Meanwhile most US politicians and commentators agree that sanctions affecting the general population could actually bolster support for the Tehran government.

The new subsidies legislation in Iran will increase the prices of goods, including gasoline, natural gas and electricity. Similar legislation was proposed by 'reformist' president Mohammad Khatami during his term (1997-2005), proving once more that, when it comes to major economic decisions, including compliance with IMF demands, the two main factions of the Islamic regime have identical policies. It is therefore no surprise that 'reformist' MPs, including supporters of Mir-Hossein Mousavi, the main challenger in the June elections, back the measure.

With subsidies and the current rationing system, a litre of gasoline costs 100 toman (\$0.10). The new bill will raise the price to as much as 500 or 600 toman per litre - before the effects of US/European sanctions start to bite. The measure could double Iran's already astronomical rate of inflation, fluctuating between 15% and 30%. It will make the poor poorer, while the rich will be least affected. Ironically, legislative bodies in both the US and Iran are making sure the Iranian people will suffer this winter. Iran is the world's fifth-largest crude oil exporter, but its eight refineries cannot produce near enough fuel for the home market.

Islamic values?

If anyone had any doubt about the reactionary nature of the 'reformist' leaders, this week's meeting and joint statement from Mousavi and Khatami should have shattered their illusions. They called for "a return to the values of the Islamic republic and to the country's constitution". What values are we talking about? Air raids on inhabited villages in Kurdistan in the early 1980s, when Mousavi was prime minister? Or the massacre of peasants who sheltered leftwingers in Kurdistan? The values that led to the mass execution of political prisoners in 1987, or the values behind serial political murders during Khatami's presidency? The list of 'Islamic values' under Khatami and Mousavi is indeed endless. These gentlemen and the 'reformists' as a whole are obsessed with calling recent events a coup, as their pleas for a return to the 'glory days' of the Islamic republic make clear: Iran had previous-

road to nowhere

ly been a democracy, you see - at least when Khatami was president or Mousavi was prime minister - but then in June 2009 there was a coup!

In reality, the Islamic regime's attitude towards any form of opposition has not changed much over the last few months. Opposition groups and labour activists, women and student protesters have been arrested, tortured and executed throughout the last 30 years. What has changed is a reduction in the executive power of the 'reformists', who have been part and parcel of the regime. It is hard to see how one could call the current state of affairs a coup when the major players claiming to be the victims still hold their positions. Former 'reformist' president Ali Akbar Rafsanjani (1989-97) remains chair of the council of experts and chair of the national security council. Khatami's International Institute for Dialogue among Cultures and Civilisations is not under threat. Clerical allies of the 'reformists' in Ghom remain free to express their opinions.

None of this, of course, makes Iran a democracy. Iran remains a religious capitalist state with all the contradictions of such a combination. However, what we are witnessing is not a coup, but divisions amongst rulers.

Left illusions

The events of June 2009 have unleashed a whole set of new movements in Iran. One can no longer speak of a single movement. In the words of activists inside Iran, we see a rainbow of political forces, including an increasingly strong red component. As I said at the CPGB's Communist University in August, the task of the left is to support and strengthen the red component of this rainbow, the Iranian working class, as the only force capable of bringing about democracy - but also as the only movement conscious of the international complexities of the current situation.

However, the events of the last few years, as well as the BBC's obsession with the Iranian clergy and 'ayatollogy',³ has moved much of the exiled left and some of their supporters inside Iran further into liberalism and nationalism. For these forces, mesmerised by the euphoria of maintaining 'unity', class politics has become a dogmatic irrelevance. Yet there have been very few times in Iran's history when the role of the working class has been so pivotal in the political arena as it is today - as sections of the Iranian working class, in particular in the oil industry, keep reminding us.⁴ They are the force that continues to fight for their jobs and their livelihoods, and in doing so they are in the forefront of the battle for democracy.

Throughout the 1970s and 80s, the pro-Soviet Stalinist left in Iran started its analysis of the political situation from an international perspective. According to the dogma, there existed two camps, imperialism and socialism, and from that followed tactics and strategy. In an almost total reversal of that old position, we now see an Iranian 'left', often with roots in organisations that had pro-Soviet tendencies, looking only at Iran and analysing the region and the world through the prism of nationalism. No wonder this ex-left has become so liberal in its attitudes towards imperialism, war and sanctions.

By identifying the main enemy as the current regime in Iran with its Islamic characteristics (as opposed to its capitalist nature), this section of the 'left' becomes, consciously or unconsciously, part of the rightwing agenda. It seeks justice for Iranian workers from pro-imperialist trade unions; it wants tribunals financed by the Pentagon for abusers of human rights and execution-

ers of political prisoners; it sees nothing wrong with accepting funds from western capitalist organisations to set up NGOs; when it comes to imperialism, it supports 'third campist' positions, choosing to ignore the predominant role of the hegemonic forces in world capitalism (this malaise goes well beyond the disintegrating splinters of the Worker-communist Party of Iran, spreading to other sections of the exiled left like a contagious disease).

That is why, at a time of political upheavals which should see the radicalisation of this 'left', we hear the most astonishing comments, ranging from the sublime - 'Both Israel and Palestinians are equally at fault over Gaza' (the Palestinians presumably for being occupied), 'We should support a third campist position' - to the ridiculous - crediting the bourgeoisie in western Europe for "bringing about universal suffrage" (N Khorasani, feminist activist). Our liberal left is keen to talk of social movements rather than class politics,

forgetting that social movements, in Iran as anywhere else, are so divided by class, nationality, religion and politics that it is impossible to consider them a single coherent force - the women's movement being a clear example.

The heralded movement of movements in Iran will go nowhere unless the working class succeeds in putting its mark on current events. In so doing it will inevitably have to deal with the increasing 'liberalism' of sections of the ex-left.

We are at the beginning of such a struggle and it will take a long time. Nevertheless the signs from debates amongst workers inside Iran are encouraging. Car workers and oil workers who face international capital in their daily protests seem unaffected by the myth of bourgeois liberal heavens that will permit the development of trade unions, apparently a precondition for all workers' struggles! The Iranian working class - and here one should include the millions who have lost their jobs because of the neoliberal policies

of finance capital - are in daily confrontation with world capitalism.

No wonder, despite their hatred of the Islamic regime, they remain the only class aware of the objective interests of the United States and it allies in controlling the Middle East and the Persian Gulf region. Unlike sections of the national minorities or the women's movement, which have become pawns in imperialist games, Iranian workers have maintained their opposition to a regime which is subordinate to the US in the global pecking order, and are conscious that their movement must draw clear lines against bourgeois alternatives and imperialist plans.

They are already taking initiatives well beyond the limited horizons of our liberal left, talking of workers' control in the thousands of abandoned factories and plants throughout the country. They are talking of the need for unity in organising employed and unemployed workers, of the need to set up neighbourhood organisations in work-

ing class districts. They are discussing the possibility of a general strike, its likely risks and potential rewards.

They certainly have no illusions regarding any of the shades of the green movement, even though they clearly understand the unprecedented opportunities presented by the current divisions amongst Iran's theocratic rulers. Our solidarity and our support should be with the working class - and its many allies in the women's movement, amongst students and in the national and religious minorities ●

Notes

1. Appeal to 'reformist' leaders: "Please end this suffocating silence" (www.iran-chabar.de/article.jsp?essayId=24541).
2. 'Iran nuclear talks stall as Tehran refuses to negotiate with Paris': www.ft.com/cms/s/0/c827409e-bdd9-11de-9f6a-00144feab49a.html.
3. 'Battle over theology' - Radio 4 analysis: www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b00n80b5/Analysis_Ayatollogy.
4. See www.etchadchap.org/naft88.html.

For unity in anti-war movement

Mark Fischer calls on the Stop the War Coalition leadership to end the bar on the affiliation of Hands Off the People of Iran

The past four months have seen tumultuous events in Iran. The outcome of the presidential elections - whatever the precise scale of ballot-rigging - unleashed a tsunami of protest from below. Quickly, the political and social logic of the demonstrations overwhelmed the timid parameters set by Mir-Hossein Mousavi and the rest of the 'reformists', who touted themselves as leaders of the upsurge. From anger against the outcome of a particularly crudely stage-managed election, many protesters now look to fundamental social change, particularly amongst the workers and youth.

Iran remains a pivotal country in the region. A country which saw one of the 20th century's great revolutions in 1979, where political Islam has been tested out as a contemporary state form (and failed miserably) and which exerts an ideological and political influence in other hot spots for imperialism, not least in Iraq. No wonder it is of such concern to the US and its ally, Israel.

The June events and their aftermath vindicate the stance taken by Hands Off the People of Iran. Our campaign resolutely stands against any imperialist intervention as the main danger. At the same time, we have always insisted - sometimes in the face of fierce criticisms and ugly smears - that this implies no political compromise with the Tehran regime. Indeed, our solidarity is with the Iranian masses, crucially the working class, but also those other forces in the women's, nationalities and students' movement which support political freedom and progressive social change.

What was noticeable over the summer was that the logic of the drama unfolding on the streets of Iran propelled other political forces towards the positions taken by Hopi. In particular, we noted some movement by the leadership of the Stop the War Coalition.

A June 20 statement on the coalition's website, for example, underlined that the STWC supported "the right to demonstrate peacefully, just as we support the Iranian people's right to polit-

ical, trade union and other civil freedoms and to struggle to achieve them. We unequivocally condemn the shooting of protesters and other violations of democratic liberties by the Iranian government ...

"In expressing our solidarity with all the Iranian people striving for a democratic outcome to the crisis in their country, the coalition will support demonstrations and initiatives which reflect these principles."¹

Similar, the coverage in *Socialist Worker*. Though deeply divided, the Socialist Workers Party remains a key player in the STWC, of course - certainly had a different tone from what we used to get. A memorable front page was "People power rocks Iran", introducing an enthusiastic article which prominently featured the key slogan, 'Marg bar diktator!' - death to the dictator! "Whatever happens over the next few days," concluded the unidentified *Socialist Worker* writer, "the people of Iran have shown their power - and their thirst for change."²

Comments like these provide encouragement for those of us anxious to overcome an unnecessary and self-defeating division in the anti-war movement. That is, the unfortunate decisions of the 2007 and 2009 STWC annual conferences to reject the affiliation applications of Hands Off the People of Iran. In both cases, conference acted on the misguided recommendations of leaders of the coalition.

However, the reasons offered for this exclusion have actually changed quite dramatically. In 2007, it was because the affiliation of Hopi was supposed to be incompatible with the aims of the STWC - Hopi was told that "a study of statements and articles issued by your organisation show that you are entirely hostile to the coalition, its policies and its work ... Under these circumstances, it is impossible to regard your application as in any way supportive or sympathetic."³

The fact that this was a political exclusion of Hopi was confirmed at

the 2007 conference itself. Our campaign was attacked for its twin-track stance - against any imperialist intervention against Iran (whether in the form of sanctions or Israeli/US military strikes); and, simultaneously, opposition to the theocratic regime.

Thus, in 2007, Steve Bell of the Communication Workers Union - and Socialist Action - presented the leadership's case. Allowing Hopi to affiliate, he claimed, would be tantamount to "accepting serious conflict and disruption" into the coalition's ranks (by which he presumably meant having disagreements while engaging in united action for agreed aims). He went on to tell the conference - shamefully to loud cheers from some sections - that because Hopi "characterise Campaign Iran as apologists" for the Tehran regime (hardly an untruth) this meant that we were effectively some brand of cultural imperialists who were "telling the people of Iran what kind of government they should have".⁴

The facts of political life impose themselves, however. The ban on Hopi - especially given the wide support our campaign has garnered alongside our record of unflinching opposition to imperialism - made the leadership of the STWC look increasingly foolish.

And then there is what might be taken to be sectarianism. Andrew Murray (STWC chair) now writes to Hopi, in the aftermath of the 2009 conference, not telling us that our politics are "entirely hostile to the coalition", but that it is my role as national secretary of Hopi that is the sticking point. Or, as comrade Murray wrote, "the problem is, and remains, the hostile attitude towards the coalition publicly expressed by your national secretary" (April 30). Without my malign influence, and in stark, glaring contradiction to the storm of accusations and smears that leading STWCers threw at Hopi in 2007, comrade Murray tells us that our "political differences" do not "constitute a barrier to affiliation". What has never been explained is

quite how our organisation - with no change in its core political or campaigning priorities - sloughed off its "entirely hostile" skin that had previously made it "impossible" to admit to the ranks of the STWC without risking "serious conflict and disruption".

Now, if we are to believe comrade Murray, the only barrier to Hopi's 'exile' are the remarks I made to a CPGB internal aggregate meeting in 2007, to the effect that Hopi - in my view - should aim to be an "alternative political centre" to the "rotten politics" of the STWC leadership.⁵

For the record, I want to make my position crystal clear. I continue to oppose many of the political positions upheld by officers of the STWC such as comrades Murray and Lindsey German and John Rees. But then so now does the SWP central committee.

However, advocating an "alternative political centre" to this leadership is not the same as advocating, still less attempting to form, a rival *organisational* centre. We are not in the business of frivolous splits. Indeed, at Hopi's December 2008 annual conference, I voted against a motion which demanded that Hopi should "take on political responsibility for building an anti-war movement on a principled basis". Other CPGB comrades joined me in voting down this motion.

It is time to end the absurd position that the CPGB is allowed to affiliate to the STWC but Hopi is not because of the harsh comments made by the CPGB's national organiser (Mark Fischer). This simply brings discredit to the STWC. Surely, with yet further sanctions threatened against Iran it is time to unite our movement ●

Notes

1. <http://stopwar.org.uk/content/view/full/1310/27>.
2. *Socialist Worker* June 20 2009
3. Email from STWC national chair Andrew Murray, October 12 2007 (my emphasis).
4. *Weekly Worker* November 1 2007.
5. *Weekly Worker* May 7 2007.

ANTHROPOLOGY



San hunter gatherers: counterdominance

Earthly core of misty creations

Camilla Power addressed the CPGB's Communist University on the origins and evolution of religion. This is an edited version of her speech

I am going to start with the famous "opium of the masses" quote from Marx's *Contribution to a critique of Hegel's philosophy of right*, which gives an overview of Marx's attitude to religion:

"The foundation of irreligious criticism is: *Man makes religion*; religion does not make man. Religion is, indeed, the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man, who has either not yet won through to himself or has already lost himself again. But *man* is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is *the world of man* - state, society. This state and this society produce religion, which is an *inverted consciousness of the world*, because they are an *inverted world*. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual *point d'honneur*, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, and its universal basis of consolation and justification. It is the *fantastic realisation* of the human essence, since the *human essence* has not acquired any true reality. The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly

the struggle *against that world* whose spiritual *aroma* is religion.

"Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the *expression* of real suffering and a *protest* against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people."¹

In this sense, religion is everything that makes us human: the fantastic realisation of the human *essence*. So the idea about the "opium of the people, the heart of the heartless world, the soul of soulless conditions", etc does not contain in it anything about quashing religion as something holding back strategies of resistance for the working class, but revolves around the idea that religion enables people to get by in the horrible and exploitative world that they are born into. It is a call to give up illusions about the conditions, to give up the conditions that *require* illusions - fight the conditions, not the illusions themselves.

Contrast this with somebody like our friend Richard Dawkins, ultra-bourgeois liberal that he is, who thinks

that you just have to stop people believing in things. As an anthropologist I am fascinated by the effects of religion, some of which are, of course, extremely exploitative, but some extremely empowering. Dawkins simply says, 'Quash it all'.

I challenge Dawkins on two levels: not just on the level that he is failing to meet the sort of vision that Marx had of religion in his young writings, but also because Dawkins himself has the very theory which we can use to try to understand religion's origins and role. Religion belongs to every human society. It is peculiar when it is not there. Our particular, peculiar capitalist society is very unusual. And, of course, religion keeps popping up at us - we cannot get rid of it. That is because it fundamentally belongs to humanity - it is what separates us from apes.

This is another quote, a footnote from *Capital*:

"Technology discloses man's mode of dealing with nature, the process of production by which he sustains his life, and thereby also lays bare the mode of formation of his social relations, and

of the mental conceptions that flow from them. Every history of religion, even, that fails to take account of this material basis, is uncritical. It is, in reality, much easier to discover by analysis the earthly core of the misty creations of religion than, conversely, it is to develop from the actual relations of life the corresponding celestialised forms of those relations. The latter method is the only materialistic, and therefore the only scientific, one."²

This is what I want to discuss - it is from understanding the economic modes of production and the social conditions they throw up that we can draw and develop models for predicting what the first gods look like, what religion in its origins looks like. If we begin from this starting point, then we have also some chance of understanding in what directions religion may develop.

That is the materialist method, and the theory we need to use is Darwinian. It is Darwinian in the sense of behavioural ecology: counting the costs and benefits of individual strategies for reproductive success as the ultimate

currency of evolution. The strategies that produced ritual behaviour - religion, as I understand it.

Three approaches

I divide these Darwinian approaches between, firstly, those that consider religion in terms of an adaptive strategy - something strategic that may achieve reproductive success; those that see religion arising in the first place as a kind of by-product (the spandrel idea) of the way our minds work; and the Dawkinsite view of maladaptation. The argument is that we are designed to be extremely receptive to new ideas when young, leaving us prey to be colonised and parasitised by religious 'viruses', to our cost.

I do not think the third approach stands up to examination. If it were true that religion is just a kind of parasite that does no good to humans, why have the human cultures around the world that developed a successful resistance to that parasite not been the most successful in terms of reproduction? That is, if religion is a parasite, then you would expect the host to

develop a resistance to it. So I am going to leave Dawkins aside.

In my view Richard Sosis has done valuable work in applying a true behavioural ecology of costs and benefits, devising all kinds of interesting tests and finding historical and contemporary contexts where he can test out his main idea: religion involves very costly behaviour, which individuals engage in to demonstrate their commitment to particular groups. He examines such costly behaviour - the giving up of certain practices - and whether this results in a given group retaining its cohesion.

Robin Dunbar also views religion as a form of adaptation and a way to guard against free-riders and social defection. This is the same idea as Sosis - religion as commitment to a particular group - but Dunbar makes the idea more complex with his examination of 'levels of intentionality' - taking into account what is in the mind of others who have a different perspective of the world.

Dunbar's argument is that to have an understanding of god - or indeed to produce Shakespearean drama - five levels of intentionality are required. This is the maximum that humans are capable of achieving, the pinnacle of our evolutionary capacity. However, I believe that what happens with ritual behaviour is that you transform a perspective of *I* as an individual into a perspective of *we* - ie, we belong, we are part of this, we exist. This is essentially what ritual is doing.

And that is all you need. You do not need to build a schema of 'I think that John knows that the elders believe that god is watching us' - it is not necessary to engage in this sort of Machiavellian series of calculations, which flows from a bourgeois, liberal and individualistic view of one-on-one transactions, instead of seeing religion for what it is. You need to look at what it is that creates *we*. That can provide us with the answer to the evolution of large-scale human cooperation - yet one that does not lose the 'selfish gene' way of thinking, which always considers individual strategies first before moving on to group behaviour.

For 100,000 years at least humans were hunter-gatherers, so I focus above all on the religious experience of hunter-gatherers. The use of shamanic trance in hunter-gatherer societies is an example. This is a collective experience. In the case of southern African San Bushman religion, the healer goes into a kind of trance death. He or she (healers are not always male) will have gone through long periods of apprenticeship to learn to control a kind of 'boiling energy' that rises up from the stomach and mounts up the spine in an incredibly painful and frightening experience.

Chris Knight talks about counter-dominance as the political mode of hunter-gatherers.³ Trance is the ultimate signal of counter-dominance. The healer has as much prestige as anyone in his society, yet he is exposing himself to a state of ultimate vulnerability, where he requires the help of all those around him to come through the trance experience and for them to come through it with him. So it is a huge signal of trust.

However, above all we should note the huge costs in terms of time and energy. There is the fear, pain and emotion. Around him mostly women sing and clap all through the day and the night and into the next day - at least two or three days would be spent on trance activity each month, and this in a subsistence culture that is quite food-limited. And in addition to that, all kinds of myth, story and rock art is woven and elaborated around it.

This is at odds with the hard-headed, ultra-materialist, 'selfish gene' perspective of acquiring food or mates. There is a further cost of confusing the real world. For instance, making out that animals can speak or that the heal-

er can go to god and admonish him - a typical San Bushman attitude quite without deference or asking for mercy! The cognitive confusion of mixing up the real world with an imaginary one should also be factored as a Darwinian cost. So the Darwinian approach is to ask: What selection pressures promoted an interest in sharing in the fantasies of other individuals? What drove human ancestors to expend increasing time and energy on 'things that don't exist' - fictions entertained by whole groups of individuals?

Costly signal

In order to understand this, let us look at what is known as the 'costly signal theory' of animal communication.

The basics of natural selection can also be termed utilitarian - ie, selection for useful functional organs, such as wings and limbs or ears and eyes. We can expect that selection will proceed down a road of basic engineering efficiency - cutting and reducing the costs and making things more efficiently designed. Those organisms whose costs are cut will succeed and reproduce better in a Darwinian world.

In signal selection a different dynamic obtains: to prove their quality, animals signal with increasing costliness. The classic example is the beautiful display of the peacock showing himself off to all nearby peahens. Signalling can occur in various contexts: for instance between parents and young, or even between different species, like predator and prey. You would think that there would be no room for cooperation between a lion and its intended prey - a gazelle, say - but there is. The lion does not want to chase the very fastest gazelle, and any gazelle who is faster than the slowest wants to let the lion know that it is not worth her bother, so a certain amount of communication is in the interest of both. And this communication, in order to be reliable on both sides, has to be costly.

However, in the human case of the evolution of religion and symbolism, the most interesting area of sophisticated communicative signalling systems involves sexual selection - costly signalling between the sexes.

Across species, this arena of sexual conflict is a breeding ground for second-guessing, mind-reading and much more - particularly where, as in the case of birds, males and females share in the investment of reproducing their young. Here there is an obvious problem to be solved - if one partner or the other deserts, then the whole future of those young could really be threatened. So there has to be considerable trust established between the male and female of these species.

That is not the case for chimpanzees, where males do nothing but produce the sperm and compete for females. In the course of hominid evolution, humans engaged in working out this relationship between males and females. Significant evolutionary changes in communication occurred in the context of intense sexual selection.

Among birds, grebes are renowned for their ritualised behaviour, which offers some analogy to human ritual. What is interesting about ritualisation is that it may start off as quite normal behaviour - in the case of grebes preening feathers, for example. And then somehow that becomes formalised - a symmetrical kind of dance in which the pair of grebes mirror each other's behaviour. An original functional behaviour becomes completely displaced, so that preening is transformed into a complex courtship dance. This mirrors a key aspect of symbolism: displaced reference. Collusion occurs between two animals, so that one thing, X (directly perceptible), stands for something else, Y (intangible or inferred) - here preening of feathers stands for courtship.

The other point about ritualisation is its formalisation. If we look at the lion and the gazelle, the lion is watching the gazelle's behaviour closely in order to assess whether it can run very fast; it is also wondering whether the gazelle has noticed that it is being watched. If the gazelle has got its head down then the lion may assume he has not been seen, but if it lifts its neck and gazes then the lion assumes he has. So in the first place the lion is watching the gazelle's normal behaviour.

But then the gazelle works out that if it really wants to show the lion that it has spotted her, it should exaggerate its normal movements. Then the whole signal evolution process becomes formalised and ritualised, with the gazelle raising its head and jumping up and down - demonstrating reliably to the lion that it is fit and fast, and that the lion should look elsewhere.

This signalling process consists of a two-way feedback that has evolved from fundamentally functional behaviour. As soon as the observed animal starts to exaggerate, formalise and stereotype that behaviour, that is when it becomes a signal and subject to the rules of signal evolution. Notice that the process is driven by an observer who is interested in the qualities of the observed animal, which responds by producing increasingly costly, formalised and displaced signals.

So how can such behaviour help us model human phenomena, such as the hunter-gatherer religious experiences? There are big differences, but these are also shared aspects: displaced reference, highly formalised activity. Could we model a process of ritualisation in human evolution - with observers driving the initially normal behaviours of the observed, who then exaggerate, formalise and stereotype their behaviours in order to communicate their qualities to observers?

Coalitions

In the human case of ritual, compared to the animal case, we need to talk about *coalitions* involved in such quality display, not just one-on-one individuals. Those coalitions are not just interested in preening feathers or showing off how strong they are, but in things that are out of this world. Our working signal evolution model of religion comes down to a process of ritualisation involving whole coalitions of 'peacocks' engaged collectively in costly signalling that refers to 'things out of this world'. But why?

Given that our starting point is sexual signalling, what are the possibilities? The basic scenario in sexual selection is nearly always one of males - like peacocks - signalling quality to females. So this would project coalitions of males showing off their qualities to females in competition with other rival: competing coalitions of males.

The alternative would be coalitions of females showing off their quality. This is the obverse of the sexual selection coin. Animal sexual selection only rarely produces this logic of female display to males, and when it does it has to be accounted for. Geoffrey Miller argues that culture basically consists of males showing off to females.

Let's run with a male coalition model. Can any sort of religious symbolism evolve through it? You can imagine a bunch of Homo erectus showing off that they are a fantastic coalition by doing dances with beautiful, symmetrical hand axes, which could really impress the females. The problem is, though, where is the symbolic token - one thing, X, standing for another thing, Y? Could Homo erectus pick up a pebble and pretend it is a hand axe? Could he stick a twig in the ground as a symbol that his brother is coming in half an hour?

I argue that such a token will not do. That might possibly impress the group

of females, but, as soon as tokens are offered in place of real muscle and bodies, a rival group of males will test for weaknesses. They are not going to be impressed by tokenism - what counts is ability of the males to fight.

And what exactly would females be looking for in these male coalition strategies? Presumably, they want strong, healthy and muscled men who are going to be good at protecting them and finding food, etc. It is possible that the men might want to show how tough they are by cutting themselves and bleeding a bit, but why should they use any cosmetics? Fake blood will not get the right message across. There is no reason to predict it. We also have no reason to predict that male coalitions would signal something like: 'No sex today, please'. We would not expect sex taboos or males displaying as if females either.

Let us look at the alternative possibility of female coalitions signalling and see where it takes us.

There are good theoretical grounds for this reverse from normal. In sexual selection theory, the more that one partner invests in another to raise offspring, the choosier they should be about *which* partner they invest in. Usually it is the females who are choosy about who they want to father their offspring, because they are investing large amounts. That remains the case with humans - but in their case the males also invest through the hard work of hunting to get sexual access to a female. Then they must produce more meat and more support for that offspring as it grows up. The more they invest, the more choosy they should be too.

So the question then is: which females are they going to choose? The obvious Darwinian answer to that is to find a nice, fertile woman who can have healthy babies. Today we women appear well designed to confuse human males about when exactly we are fertile. This has the effect of rewarding males who hang around with us for a long time and keep having sex with us - they are more likely to become fathers. Until a woman is visibly pregnant, there is no moment at which the male can tell that he has been successful, at which point he might run off and find another female.

However, one signal does give the game away, allowing males to discriminate. A menstruating female can be made pregnant, whereas another who is obviously heavily pregnant or has just given birth and is breastfeeding can obviously not. In the Darwinian world, males cannot ignore that information.

Females who are not cycling are potentially threatened by the presence of a menstrual female who will get lots of attention from males. At that point there are two choices: either females should try to hide evidence of menstrual females, or they do the very opposite: make a huge song and dance out of it. The reason that the second option is the most productive for females is that males are hugely interested in a potentially fertile female in the neighbourhood. In this situation the best thing for the females who are pregnant and already have babies is to join up with the menstrual female, 'borrowing' her signal. They all paint up together using blood, or blood substitutes - red cosmetics - and make a fantastic display. Now we have a costly display of quality by a coalition of females, showing off to the interested observer males.

Obviously, any male will be interested in the young female who is becoming ready to reproduce. But she is not alone. She has a whole alliance - her mother, aunts and sisters - who will be supportive of her and her future offspring. So the quality being advertised to potential investor males is not simply the presence of a single fertile female, but the fact that the women as a collective are a solid coalition. The deal is: invest in us, bring energy, bring meat for the girl's coalition and togeth-

er we will raise you great babies.

Collective ritualised signalling demonstrates the quality of such coalitions in an easy to see and hard to fake manner. From a male perspective, relatives of those women will defend their coalition, because it raises their own kin. But what of males who are potential mates of those women? A dominant male might try to fight his way through and grab hold of the obviously fertile, menstrual woman. But the majority of males actually have no interest in such behaviour. Instead, males who are willing investors should go along with the reproductive counter-dominance strategy. They would observe the 'picket line', the rule of law, and the effectively religious concept of 'We're all fertile, we're all sacred, we're all taboo'.

In resisting dominant philanderers, to say *no* loud and clear, we predict that females will produce a set of signals saying: 'wrong sex, wrong species'. Whereas a female chimp employs oestrus signals to attract the most dominant male, the counter-dominant human female will signal in ritual song and dance that she is not even the right species, pretending to be a game animal, or pretending to be the wrong sex by dressing up as a male, and showing 'wrong time' with cosmetic signals of ritual 'menstruation'.

This is our testable model using Darwinian theory, reversing the usual direction of signal selection. Our predictions also concern cosmetics: that is, the earliest types of symbolic behaviour and the earliest attributes of religious ritual - what the first gods actually look like. Religious entities are being produced by counter-dominance, where the coalitions of females, plus all their male allies (ie, brothers and investor males) participate and share in these ritual signals of counterreality - things that do not exist in this world.

'Wrong' gods

The first gods will be in some sense be 'wrong' - the wrong species, wrong sex, and red and bloody. There are strong reasons in theory why these collective representations will be maintained with extreme fidelity. Even through 100,000 years of hunter-gatherer economies, even when we come out of the other side in the Neolithic and in future developments of religions of state and market economies, there should still be a faithful conservation of 'time-resistant' syntax. We expect this above all in rock art and myth of groups like San Bushmen hunters.

We expect red ochre cosmetics to relate strongly to menstrual taboos in hunter-gatherer cosmologies, and in addition, hunter-gatherer prohibitions about sex and menstruation should operate inside lunar/menstrual cosmologies. Ritual preparation for the hunt should occur at the dark side of the moon, while full moon should be the time when hunting is taking place.

To conclude, we have the emergence of hunter-gatherer religious experience through 'wrong sex, wrong species' that incorporates both trance and initiation as ways of accessing this 'other world' counterreality. It is likely that even before the Neolithic, and the onset of farming and property, there were strategies whereby religious symbolism became oppressive and exploitative. But there is no way that religion - the collective sharing and enacting of ritual fantasies - can have emerged in an exploitative environment.

Our image of the evolution of religion is of counter-dominance, where what is being signalled above all is trust and solidarity within groups. Trust is essential before the collective can share such visions of the supernatural.

And the very first symbol of the supernatural was the red flag of the women's 'sex strike' picket line ●

Notes

1. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm.
2. K Marx *Capital*, Vol 1, chapter 15: 'Machinery and modern industry', footnote 4.
3. See 'Sex and the human revolution' *Weekly Worker* September 24.

Who's afraid of Griffin?

No-platforming is not a principle but one of many tactics. As a strategy it has failed miserably, says **Eddie Ford**



Nick Griffin: we must beat his arguments

By the time you read this article, the chances are that the world has not come to a sudden end. Which, if you had believed the hysterical outpourings of some with regard to Nick Griffin - the "Nazi" British National Party's 'fuhrer' - and his scheduled appearance on this week's BBC *Question time* programme, would probably come as a bit of a surprise. Of course, the most hysterical voices ringing the alarm about the fascist doomsday pencilled in for Thursday October 22 have emitted from the left, most notably in the shape of the Socialist Workers Party and its current favourite popular front, Unite Against Fascism.

Hence, on the dreadful day itself, the UAF supported an all-day picket outside the BBC centre at White City - a follow-on from the previous day's 'Questioning *Question time*' rally in Conway Hall, central London. The UAF is, of course, backed by a roll call of the 'anti-fascist' great and good - union and religious leaders, plus leftist establishment politicians (not so leftist in the case of Peter Hain).

The UAF poster for the October 22 demonstration declares, "No plug for Nazi Nick - keep *QT* Nazi-free". In this similar vein of liberal outrage, UAF's website boasts about the "anger" that is "building up" against the BBC's "disgraceful" decision to invite "convicted holocaust denier" into the hallowed *Question time* studio. Naturally, it quotes the UAF's chair, Ken Livingstone, who fulminates about how the "public do not pay licence fees to have them abused by the BBC to help people spread hatred and intolerance" - and, warns Livingstone, if the BBC "continues" to allow BNP members to appear on *Question time*, it will "share responsibility for the crimes against minorities which will follow".¹

So, barring divine intervention or maybe a 'pitch invasion' by enraged UAF supporters, Nick Griffin - whose

very words can corrupt the nation, or so we are led to believe - is to speak alongside the Conservative Muslim peer, baroness Sayeeda Warsi; Liberal Democrat home affairs spokesperson, Chris Huhne; US-born black woman and critic, Bonnie Greer, and, of course, Labour's very own minister of justice, Jack Straw.

In other words, all thoroughly acceptable figures for the establishment, as is the norm, of course, for the BBC's 'flagship' (ie, dull as ditchwater) current affairs show - just like its BBC radio four sister programme, the equally sporadic *Any questions?* Indeed, compared to his speak-by-numbers opponents, Griffin will almost come across as an edgy, free-thinking, radical - seeing how there will be no militant socialist or leftwinger on the panel. Yet the fact of the matter is that her majesty's very loyal government in the shape of Straw shares many of Griffin's obnoxious views on immigration - kick out the 'illegals', for instance. No room in the inn, and all that sort of 'common sense' reactionary crap spewed out every day by the popular press. But, of course, Griffin has no liberal anti-racist baggage to hulk around, so has the advantage of appearing more upfront, consistent and 'honest' than his ministerial co-panellist.

Naturally, there have been noisy protests against the besmirching of that once proud British institution, *Question time* - even doubts raised as to the moral probity of the BBC itself for inviting Griffin onto the programme. Perhaps even to the very legality of Griffin's appearance, following last week's attempt by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission to seek a court injunction against the BNP - on the grounds that the organisation was breaking the Race Relations Act by restricting membership to "indigenous Caucasian" people (such as those deemed part of the "Anglo-Saxon folk community", the "Celtic Scottish folk

community", the "Scots-Northern Irish folk community", the "Anglo-Saxon-Norse folk community", etc). In turn, Griffin promptly agreed to use "all reasonable endeavours" to persuade the BNP to amend its constitution so it no longer discriminates on grounds of race or religion, in accordance with clause four of the Equality Act. The BNP had no choice but to comply - not entirely without reason, Griffin accused the commission of "trying to bankrupt" it.

But, whatever the exact case, these legalistic shenanigans were enough for the reptilian elitist, Peter Hain - official anti-racist and "anti-fascist veteran", according to the love-struck UAF - to discharge a thunderous letter to the BBC's director general, Mark Thompson, maintaining that the BNP by its very own admission was *currently* an "unlawful body". In which case, Hain sternly told Thompson, it "would be perverse of you to maintain that they are just like any other democratically elected party", and that therefore the BBC should "rescind" the invitation to Griffin until the BNP passed "a basic threshold of legality". Failing that, spluttered Hain, Thompson's approach can only be seen as "unreasonable, irrational and unlawful".

In response, the BBC failed to blink under Hain's righteous offensive - the corporation, says it is obliged to treat all parties and individuals with "due impartiality". Hence at the beginning of the week, BBC spokesperson Ric Bailey (and *Question time*'s executive editor until 2006), told Radio Five Live listeners - with impeccable logic, it has to be said - that if there was a general election tomorrow, then the BNP could stand. So what, went on Bailey, that there is a court case pending against the BNP - the government is *always* up before various courts about something or other. Does that make the UK government or the Labour Party an "illegal body"?

Furthermore, and crucially, Bailey

cited the precedent of the United Kingdom Independence Party and the Greens. Ever since they won representation at a national level they have appeared every now and then on *Question time* - so, Bailey stated, putting a BNP member on the panel would just be a "continuation of the approach which recognises that the level of electoral support is a relevant factor in making these judgements". In fact, he pointed out, in the European elections 6% of all voters - nearly one million people - voted for the BNP, and the party also has more than 50 local councillors. That fact cannot be ignored or wished away, declared Bailey, nor can the BBC "apply different standards to different parties because of their particular policies" - which would be a flagrant breach of the BBC charter. Indeed, he concluded, if Griffin's invitation was rescinded, as Hain wanted, then the BNP could easily have taken the BBC to the high court - and almost certainly won.

However, Hain's almost aristocratic sentiments were echoed by an editorial in *The Guardian* - and enthusiastically quoted by UAF, of course - which pontificated about how the BNP is not a "normal party" and that the BBC should not be "allowing this mob such a spotlight". Rather, the BNP on *Question time* is the "wrong party on the wrong programme". In fact, fumed *The Guardian*, by placing Griffin on a panel with "established politicians", the naive BBC is granting him a "spurious legitimacy" - this "dangerously slick" Cambridge graduate could be made to look like an "ordinary politician", one "perfectly deserving of a cross on a ballot paper".²

Frankly, communists must treat the arguments put forward by Hain and *The Guardian* - and brainlessly parroted by UAF - with the proper contempt they deserve. Yes, of course, the BBC is part and parcel of the establishment, and in no way could be described as a progressive institution. In reality its "due impartiality" ultimately helps to serve and maintain the capitalist status quo, constantly recycling the same old stale, mainstream viewpoints and opinions. Yes, of course, the BNP is an odious organisation and the left should never miss an opportunity to confront and destroy the repellent ideas promulgated by someone like Nick Griffin.

Clearly the whole political approach, and methodology, adopted by UAF/SWP is disastrously self-defeating - if not positively suicidal. Talk about cutting off your nose to spite your face. By no yardstick can the SWP be viewed as a "normal party", no matter how much it pretends to be one. Does not *Socialist Worker* inform its (possibly duped) readers every week that "the present system cannot be patched up" and that "the structures of the parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working people" - and presumably that includes the BBC as well? Therefore should the SWP "mob" also be denied access to a programme like *Question time* on the premise that it is an 'anti-democratic body' which seeks the abolition of her majesty's lawfully constituted government, including the much beloved BBC?

Yet quite hypocritically, and with monumental dishonesty, the latest issue of *Socialist Worker* declares that those who "defend" Griffin's appearance on *Question time* "need to learn from history". Oh really? Thus Chris Bambery claims that in the Germany of the 1920s and 1930s the Nazis were "allowed to pose as respectable parliamentarians and given a free run in the media, with

liberal and leftwing opponents debating them" - but instead, he argues, the Nazis were "clear that they were using democracy in order to destroy all democracy". Despite that though, writes Bambery sorrowfully, the leaders of Germany's Social Democratic Party - apparently "the equivalent of the Labour Party in Britain today" - stupidly implored their supporters to "only oppose the fascists by 'legal', constitutional means" and not use 'direct action' against the Nazis (like "attempting to break up" their meetings and so on). Bambery concludes that Hitler's eventual victory "shows we cannot trust big business or the liberal elite to fight the Nazis", and that we cannot "allow the Nazis to gain respectability" - which will happen if "we fail to mobilise in opposition to them" (October 24). Like, we are meant to deduce, the UAF's 'No plugs for Nazi Nick' demonstration/rally on October 22 in London.

Is this the very same SWP whose UAF comrades have called upon the "liberal elite" in the form of the BBC to banish Nick Griffin from *Question time* - and has repeatedly called upon the bourgeois state to use every "constitutional means" at its disposal to ban BNP events, along with demonstrations organised by the English Defence League? Or the very same SWP which is very happily part of the mother of all popular fronts in order to take on the "Nazi" BNP-EDL menace - and which now seems to include general Sir Richard Dannatt, former chief of the general staff and soon to be Conservative defence adviser in the House of Lords? Brandishing his anti-BNP credentials, Dannatt, it should be noted, is an evangelical Christian and self-confessed Islamophobe - who has told the *Daily Mail* that "the Islamist threat" within British society needs to be countered, so as to stop the country's "moral compass" from "spinning" into a "spiritual vacuum".³

But none of this prevented the *Morning Star*, which too, of course, thinks that Griffin should not be given a "platform" on *Question time*, from plastering all over its front-page - "Brass bites back at BNP army plot", almost joyfully telling us that "top army figures" generals Dannatt and Sir Mike Jackson "presented a united front against fascism in Britain" by penning a "contempt-filled" open letter "denouncing the BNP, as new allegations emerged that the party has built influence at the heart of the military" (October 20). Yes, we are witnessing what the SWP would doubtless call a "united front of a special type" - an 'anti-fascist alliance' which stretches from rightwing army generals all the way to the SWP's central committee. In effect that means the SWP has constituted itself the leftwing of the bourgeois establishment, albeit its extreme left.

So who's afraid of Nick Griffin and the BNP then? Well, it looks like the SWP, UAF and *Morning Star* are - very, very, afraid. We communists, however, are not afraid. Indeed, so confident is the CPGB as to the power, correctness and popularity of its politics and programme, we would readily accept an invitation from the 'impartial' BBC to appear on *Question time* - even with likes of Nick Griffin there - in order to advocate democracy and socialism and expose the capitalist system in general and the British state in particular. Bring it on ●

Notes

1. www.uaf.org.uk.
2. *The Guardian* October 15.
3. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dannatt.

Callinicos rattled over no-platforming



Callinicos: rattled

In the squash court beneath Wadham College bar about 40 students gathered on October 15 for an Oxford Socialist Worker Student Society meeting with Alex Callinicos, a leading member of the Socialist Workers Party central committee and noted academic, who was billed under the title, 'Is capitalism still in crisis?'

Before comrade Callinicos spoke, we heard a few words from the Communication Workers Union local branch secretary, Paul Garraway, on the upcoming strike action. He described the militancy of his members and bitterly complained of persistent management bullying.

On to comrade Callinicos. Within a few syllables he, somewhat predictably, made clear that capitalism was still in crisis. He then outlined some of the factors underlying the current recession, and twinned this with some telling criticisms of mainstream economics.

His discussion of Marx's concept of the state was relatively good too. And his most interesting points were made here, as he explored the contradiction between, on the one hand, the idea of the state as, in the words of the *Communist manifesto*, a "committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie" and, on the other, competition between capitalists.

Comrade Callinicos described the United States as international capitalism's "key organiser", and went on to explore the possibility of another state assuming this position. In line with the thoughts of those such as Hillel Ticktin, he argued that at present it was hard to see China becoming a new hegemonic state. It is just too tied up with American capital. The great threat, Callinicos argued, was due to climate change.

The comrade moved on to the nature of the workers' fightback. No mention of democracy, perhaps unsurprisingly. But also no mention

of other key necessities, like an organised party of the Marxists. The nearest thing to a programme or strategy that Callinicos came up with was the call for "more and more workers to do what Lindsey and Vestas have done". Let us leave aside for now the tincture of hypocrisy here - the SWP, after all, opposed the first Lindsey strike.

Most of the initial contributions from the floor consisted of fairly simple questions - some interesting and pertinent, some less so. There was a bit of 'But my brother is a banker, and I don't think he is a nasty person'.

Then my turn came. I emphasised that we need independent working class politics. I therefore criticised the SWP's conduct in the Stop the War Coalition and its role in the preventing the affiliation of Hands Off the People of Iran and the "We are all Hezbollah now" slogans repeatedly chanted by SWPers on demos.

I also picked up on comments made by the SWSS chair of the meeting that the BNP "didn't deserve a platform" and the no-platform dogma. Does Ukip "deserve a platform"? Do the Tories? And then there is the question of Unite Against Fascism's popular front strategy. I reminded comrades of some history, of how the left's calls for a ban on the British Union of Fascists backfired with the 1936 Public Order Act, which lost its legislative virginity by being wielded not against Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts, but against the left. It has likewise been heavily employed by the state against Irish republicans and striking miners.

Finally I argued that it was a fatal mistake to rely on the state and call for the BNP to be banned. Once again it was a question of working class political independence.

My remarks on the far right dominated the remaining discussion. Chosen SWSS comrades were quick to wheel out the usual

arguments for tactical inflexibility. Apparently, the BNP are just really nasty - Nazis in fact (and, as posters on the wall informed any in doubt, this was a "Nazi-free zone").

A few seemingly new people quite rightly suggested that the blanket no-platforming policy - aside from not having worked, considering the growth in influence of the BNP - might not always be the best approach. We end up no-platforming ourselves. Quite reasonably they, perhaps representing the majority of those at the meeting, thought that there must be occasions when we could use the power of our ideas to defeat the simplistic and in many cases easily disprovable arguments of the BNP. There were plenty of nods.

The chair announced there was time for one more speaker. No hands were raised, so I stuck mine up. Callinicos gave some of the most emphatic head-shaking I have ever seen, and hissed something to the chair. "Um, we would prefer someone who hasn't spoken yet," the poor comrade then announced. So someone else, who had also spoken already, was chosen instead! Don't you just love the SWP? Things did not go fully according to plan, however. The 'anyone except him' substitute likewise argued against auto-no-platformism.

In his summing up comrade Callinicos ignored the unfortunate fact that I exist and had dared to open my mouth. He managed to make the bad arguments of the young SWSSers even worse. "The BBC is publicly funded," he informed us, descending into liberalistic mode. As if this somehow made this cog of the capitalist ideological apparatus a friend of the working class.

Any talk of debating with fascists rendered one a fool, he then emphatically declared. Presumably this must include his own comrade, John Molyneux. A loyal oppositionist in the SWP who has recently had the good sense to question the no platform mantra as being self-defeating. Interestingly, this viewpoint has gained some considerable support within the SWP, including on its national committee.

Obviously Callinicos is rattled and feels under attack even within. That is how I explain his response anyway. For him the *only* correct strategy when Nick Griffin appears on *Question time* is to get into the BBC and "punch Griffin on the nose or a more sensitive part of his anatomy". But what then to do about the million who voted for the BNP in June's Euro election and those who elected their dozens of councillors? Should they be forcibly silenced too? Should their vote be discounted?

As the meeting was about to close, a comrade (I am not sure if he belongs to any organisation) indignantly criticised the way the chair had refused to allow me to speak again. Surely a basic norm in a debate where one side has taken a lot of flak? Callinicos launched into a tirade. Apparently I had simply said nothing important - "something about the Stop the War Coalition that I didn't understand," he blustered. So I shouted: "I want to discuss Iran and the role of the SWP in the Stop the War Coalition." Callinicos defensively retorted: "I am here from the SWP, not the STWC" and tried to change the topic. "Yes, *the role of the SWP* in the STWC," I repeated. The chair quickly closed the meeting, and Callinicos scurried off into the night.

As SWP-provided bottles of cider were opened following the meeting most of the comrades were in fact friendly and more than willing to discuss. Myself and other Communist Student comrades were able to have some good exchanges. Clearly many in SWSS are genuine revolutionaries and have no liking for the way the SWP leadership refuses to debate with others on the left •

Huw Sheridan

What we fight for

- Our central aim is the organisation of communists, revolutionary socialists and all politically advanced workers into a Communist Party. Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.
- The Provisional Central Committee organises members of the Communist Party, but there exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.
- Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.
- Communists oppose the US-UK occupation of Iraq and stand against all imperialist wars but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.
- Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'. To the extent that the European Union becomes a state then that necessitates EU-wide trade unions and a Communist Party of the EU.
- The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.
- Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.
- Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally. All forms of nationalist socialism are reactionary and anti-working class.
- The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote. They will resist using every means at their disposal. Communists favour using parliament and winning the biggest possible working class representation. But workers must be ready to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.
- Communists fight for extreme democracy in all spheres of society. Democracy must be given a social content.
- We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.
- Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.
- Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.
- Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.
- All who accept these principles are urged to join the Communist Party.

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weekly worker

Victory to the postal workers

Form strike committees, build strong picket lines

Today it is the jobs and conditions of postal workers that is on the line, writes **Jim Moody**. But if New Labour, the Tories and the Lib Dems have their way, it will be all of us on the chopping block tomorrow

Backed to the hilt by the state, Royal Mail's aim is to crush the postal workers' strike and destroy their union. This has become ever clearer during the last fortnight. So, as the first two days of national strike action begin, rank and file workers are faced with the challenge of how to fight for their jobs and save their union from annihilation.

With 120,000 Communication Workers Union members having had the opportunity to vote for strike action, the massive 76% in favour is decisive. A resounding success for those in the union who have hammered away in the localities, building the strike movement piecemeal. Certainly that was the only way that the union's leadership would countenance holding a ballot for national action. Far from becoming dissipated or dispirited by the time it has taken for the leadership to get its act together, militancy has grown by leaps and bounds at the ground level.

By now we all know how vile the management of Royal Mail is. Exposed by *Newsnight* a week ago, Royal Mail's secret document *Dispute: strategic overview* clearly lays down management's intention of continuing to implement a policy of undermining the CWU's role in labour relations. Even going so far as to consider the possibility of removing it as the recognised trade union. If union bureaucrats do not play ball - and at present the membership won't let them - then Royal Mail plans to institute a "programme of reducing relationship with union."

As a first stage to derecognition, the document advocates taking away union representatives' current rights to carry out their duties during work time ('facility time'). In addition the provision of meeting spaces for the CWU in local offices will be withdrawn. Royal Mail has also made it clear that it will carry through plans that will decimate the workforce and increase the work burden of those who remain employed, all "with or without union engagement".

Royal Mail has provocatively cancelled a planned campaign sponsored jointly with the CWU, Ban Bullying Week. As the CWU says, it has done this just when management bullying and harassment are causing more and more problems in the workplace. One of many examples followed the introduction of computerised Geo-Route plotting of postal walks and drives: when it failed to live up to the hype, it was the man or woman on the ground who got blamed - despite the many warnings from the union that the system was unworkable.

There is no doubt whatsoever that Royal Mail is more than happy to see its customers suffer through strikes. It estimates that this will undermine its employees' stand against cuts, by eroding public support. So they will be beaten back to

work in defeat - or so senior managers imagine. As Royal Mail's hitherto secret document makes clear, "demonstration of commercial impact of dispute - strikes make things worse - the more we can demonstrate this to our people, the better." In effect Royal Mail is saying that the more business it loses, the better.

Readers will know that Royal Mail wants to recruit 30,000 scabs. Ostensibly they are being brought in to deal with the backlog that the series of local one-day strikes has resulted in, though it is arguable whether this is legal under industrial relations legislation. The scabs are to be used after Royal Mail refused to allow postal workers to do overtime work: CWU members could not possibly be allowed to 'benefit' from their strike action by receiving a meagre time and a third in overtime to clear the backlog.

Equally bellicose has been unelected business minister Lord Mandelson. He has clearly expressed the Labour government's position: Royal Mail has to be 'modernised' at the expense of jobs and conditions. So there is no point looking upon the government as some kind of ally, despite the CWU contributing handsomely to the Labour Party's coffers over many years. True, there is a wide body of support for the CWU coming from backbenchers, including in the form of early day motion 2035. Nevertheless it is hardly surprising that many CWU members are incandescent with rage over a Labour government which is in effect egging on a management attempt to break their union.

Royal Mail might have offered to take part in arbitration to avoid the strikes this week. But that was simply a publicity

stunt: its conditions were that the CWU roll over, call off the strikes and begin negotiating away jobs and working conditions. Rightly the CWU has rejected this out of hand. Royal Mail has simply refused to go for arbitration in all but name. It wants confrontation. However, why should workers be forced to accept what Acas decrees is reasonable? It is not exactly a surprise that such establishment bodies tend to favour ... the establishment - in the guise of a compromise settlement.

Despite Royal Mail manoeuvring and clear intentions to break the union, Billy Hayes, CWU general secretary, seems to be banking on Acas. He insists that the CWU "remains available for talks". However, he says, any third party involvement, needs to be on "an entirely transparent basis" with a "joint intention of reaching an agreement" (www.cwu.org).

The problem with all this is that it leaves rank and file postal workers around the country as passive onlookers. There is also the danger of a rotten sell-out. So strike committees need to be set up, giving the rank and file its own input into the aims, running and termination of the dispute. Local strikers will push forward new, energetic and popular leaders and they obviously need to lead local CWU organisations for the duration of what looks set to be a long and bitter struggle. Local strike committees are especially needed when faced by a strikebreaking force of 30,000 scabs. They are equivalent to a quarter of the CWU membership. There should be no cooperation with such casuals in between strikes, and strong picket lines should be imposed on strike days.

The CWU and CWU strike commit-

tees would also be well advised to learn the lessons of the 1980s miners' and printers' strikes and organise hit squads to persuade strike breakers not to scab. Obviously such bodies do not organise themselves and certainly the idea of them needs first of all to be popularised.

CWU militants are aware that the union leadership is, even at this stage, looking for a cosy compromise rather than winning the fight against the imposition of speed-ups and job losses. For Hayes and co what matters above all is that management is imposing, not consulting. Of course, rank and file members are right to insist that management must negotiate with their elected representatives. But they must remain vigilant against what is an inevitable tendency of union bureaucrats to settle for a *less* bad deal when their members are under attack.

Of course, most postal workers have taken part in local strikes precisely because they damned well do not want *any more* job losses. Somewhere around 50,000 have gone already in the last two years. Enough, they say, is enough. It is true that for the ordinary CWU member every day out on strike means a day without pay. Not that postal workers are well paid in the first place. But if Royal Mail, New Labour and the Tories have their way, they will be even more poorly off in the future. These workers have known for months that they have to make a firm stand. There can be no more acceptance of vicious attacks lying down.

Collections for the postal workers at workplaces and elsewhere are important. But more is needed. Supporters must be encouraged to join picket lines outside sorting offices and distribution depots. PCS members at job centres must not

help recruit scabs for Royal Mail, and student groups and student unions should launch a campaign to stop their members from taking temporary postal work while the dispute lasts. Public sector workers and their unions should also be brought into active engagement with the postal workers. That means delegations, resolutions and above all a refusal to cross picket lines or in any way strike break. Joint days of action would be a real boost too. The attack on the postal workers is a precursor for what all three main political parties intend to do. Cuts, cuts, cuts. Pension holes, alleged overmanning, etc, will all be used to break other unions, push down wages and force through speed-ups.

The state machine is already preparing for combat. According to one report, "The Association of Chief Police Officers ... said that it was closely monitoring the situation and had issued guidance to forces on dealing with large-scale strike action. Each police force is assessing and reviewing the implications for public disorder that might arise from industrial action" (*The Guardian* October 17).

It is up to the rest of the working class to give solidarity to the postal workers. But in order to make this really effective we must generalise this dispute and give it a political form and content. We must challenge Royal Mail and its right to manage; we must challenge New Labour and the Tories and their cuts programme; we must organise our own combat party with a programme that can link our day-to-day struggles with the perspective of a new society that replaces the capitalist imperative of profit with the communist principle of production for the common good and distribution according to need ●

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