



weekly **worker**

**Peter Taaffe's Socialist Party
in England and Wales boasts
of confidence and growth**

- Ireland cuts protests
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Iranian workers gain new courage



LETTERS



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

Monotonic

Two of your correspondents, Steve Cooke and Steve Wallis, repeat the claim that the single transferable vote election system is 'proportional' (Letters, November 5).

This is a myth propagated by some bourgeois ideologues, and widely believed. It is easily refuted.

A necessary (albeit not sufficient) condition of proportionality is that if support for a given party increases then, other things being equal, the number of seats it wins cannot decrease. This is known in the technical literature as the 'monotonicity' condition.

Here is a simple example showing that STV violates this condition. Consider a constituency of 26 voters who need to elect two MPs. Suppose there are four candidates, standing for four parties, say A, B, C and D; and the voters indicate their preferences as follows:

6: ABCD

2: BACD

4: BCAD

5: CABD

9: DCAB

(Here the first row means that six voters prefer candidate A to candidate B, B to C and C to D. The other rows are to be interpreted similarly.)

According to the rules of STV, the quota needed for being elected outright is nine votes. This is because at most two candidates can get at least nine first-preference votes. So candidate D gets elected outright. Candidate C has the smallest number of first-preference votes, so she is eliminated and her five second-preference votes are added to candidate A, who now has 11 votes and gets elected. So here the winners are candidates D and A.

But suppose that the two voters listed in the second row change their minds and decide to prefer candidates A to B; and all else remains unchanged. Now we have:

8: ABCD

4: BCAD

5: CABD

9: DCAB

Again candidate D is elected outright. But now it is candidate B who has the least number of first-preference votes, so he is eliminated and his four second-preference votes are added to candidate C, who now has nine votes and gets elected. So here the winners are candidates D and C.

Thus, an increase of support for candidate A (and no other change) has resulted in A losing instead of winning!

This is, of course, just a toy example and I have used small numbers for the sake of simplicity. But the same phenomenon can be illustrated with large, and more realistic, numbers.

It is true that STV tends to produce less disproportionate outcomes than the extremely undemocratic plurality ('first past the post') system. But this is not saying very much. And the approximate degree of proportionality it produces is quite erratic.

Comrade Wallis says: "Due to the advantages a genuine form of PR such as STV gives to both extremes, left and right, it looks very unlikely that the capitalist parties will introduce it ... I advocate STV more as a policy we should introduce after a socialist revolution ..."

Actually, STV is currently used in Ireland and several other capitalist countries. And depicting STV as the epitome of democracy, fit for a socialist society, is ill-founded.

Moshé Machover
email

Confused CS

Despite promising a full mobilisation, only one member (not from Manchester) of Communist Students turned up for the anti-English Defence League mobilisation in Leeds on October 31.

This is surely caused by the political confusion wrought by Ben Lewis and James Turley on the question of 'no platform'. To take just one example, in his article 'How not to stop the BNP' (July 23), Ben Lewis endorses the biggest mistake that the Bolsheviks ever made - debating the fascists in 1923 - typified by the infamous speech by Karl Radek to the executive committee of the Communist International (www.marxists.org/archive/radek/1923/06/schlageter.htm).

Trotsky was not present at that meeting, and Lenin was by now at death's door. The meeting was politically dominated by Stalin, Zinoviev and Bukharin, who were already well advanced in opportunist degeneration, as Trotsky pointed out in *Lessons of October*. We might accuse Trotsky of failing to carry out Lenin's instructions to wage political war on Stalin at that point, but he waited in expectation of Lenin's recovery and then, after his death, he was reluctant to fight to split the Bolsheviks by revealing the contents of Lenin's testament.

Comrade Lewis says: "As both Broué and Harman acknowledge in their accounts, these meetings (between Nazis and communists) proved too much for the Nazis, who discontinued them after August 1923, believing them to be a cause of lost members and waning influence." It really is impermissible to endorse the political confusion of both Broué and Harman on the reason for the decline in the influence of the fascists. By August 1923 there was a rapidly developing revolutionary situation in Germany and this is what caused the decline in the number of fascist sympathisers.

And, as we all know, this revolutionary situation was lost because of the political confusion of the KPD leadership, Heinrich Brandler in particular. Making alliances with fascists instead of preparing the working class for revolution is most definitely the wrong orientation; it was opportunist, libertarian rubbish. And Ben endorses Ruth Fischer in his piece, who Lenin described, together with Arkadi Maslow, as "the worst sort of opportunists".

Let us see what German communist leader Walter Held made of these events: "But the most hopeless floundering was in the ranks of the Communist Party. With its adventurist soul it swam in the wake of the chauvinist Nazi propaganda; with its bureaucratic 'ministerial' soul, it adapted itself to the sterile, negatively limited anti-fascism of the social democracy ... Confusion reached its height when, in Moscow, Radek glorified the anti-semitic soldier, Schlageter. 'Schlageter, the courageous soldier of the counter-revolution, deserves to be honoured by us soldiers of the revolution,' declared Radek in an improvised speech at the extended plenum of the ECCI on the day after Schlageter was shot by the French troops of occupation. The speaker turned to the 'German Workers Party' (as the Nazis were then called) with the question: 'Against whom do you want to fight - Entente capitalism or the Russian people? With whom do you want to unite - the Russian workers and peasants in our common struggle to throw off the burden of finance capital or with Entente capital to enslave the German and Russian people?'"

"Through Radek's words, the communists declared themselves ready to be in league with the Nazis: 'We shall do everything so that men like Schlageter, who were ready to encounter death for a common cause,

shall not be wanderers into nothingness, but travellers towards a better future for all of humanity'. At this conference only one delegate - the German Bohemian, Neurath - protested against this nationalist-communist mischief. Otherwise Radek's speech aroused frantic applause. In Germany it was the basis of a series of fraternal actions between the communists and the Nazis. Communist firms published pamphlets in which communist and Nazi statements appeared alongside each other. This ideological disintegration made rapid progress."

You can find the rest of the very important article, 'Why the German revolution failed', at www.marxists.org/archive/held-walter/1942/12/germrev.htm.

Gerry Downing
email

Got it in one

I am currently researching Marxism as part of my philosophy course and I am struggling to understand the debate over internationalism versus the Stalinist concept of 'socialism in one country'.

Whilst I agree that internationalism is preferable, given that a universal brotherhood of man is desirable, I cannot see why socialism in one country is doomed to failure, as the Trotskyists argue. Is it because socialism in one country cannot compete with rival capitalist countries, even when that country has resources as vast as Russia? Does this not tacitly admit that a capitalist economy is stronger than a socialist one?

Or is it more to do with the hostilities invoked by being a socialist country in a sea of capitalist ones? But why then can't the socialist country defend itself? Again, this seems to point to a tacit admission that the socialist economy is necessarily weaker.

I think this is an important debate because, whilst I can see socialists winning power in the odd country, I can't see the revolution spreading unless that country is doing well, and therefore internationalism can never come to fruition. The *Weekly Worker* argues that the European Union should go socialist. But would this 'socialism in several countries' not carry the same problems as that faced by Soviet Russia?

Fern Rachels
Brighton

Political road

The recent decision by the Irish National Liberation Army to renounce armed struggle and encourage all its members and supporters to engage in politics is welcome. It is the end of one chapter in the history of republican socialism. But it should not be the end of republican socialism.

Abuse has been the stable form of political analysis for some republicans. 'Sell-out', 'traitors' and other forms of abuse have routinely been applied to any republicans that sought to develop their republicanism from the simple slogans of 'Brits out' or the 'armed struggle'. Indeed there was a long period during the 70s and 80s when it was almost considered profane to question the tactic of armed struggle. References to 1916 heroism and the brave guerrilla fighters were enough to end debate.

So it has been a welcome development that after a period of intense debate and arguments the leadership and volunteers of the INLA have reached the decision they did. Perhaps it was always inevitable. The INLA had been plagued over the years with internal bickering, external physical attacks, infiltration from pro-British agents and sometimes apolitical leaders. When the membership took back

control of the organisation from the Torney faction in the mid-90s a slow process of politicisation took place.

Recognising the changing political situation, the organisation in April 1996 adopted the position of defence and retaliation and promoted the idea of a non-aggression pact to lessen sectarian tensions. The decision to call a ceasefire in August 1998 was another step in moving away from a military strategy. Now the 2009 decision is the culmination of a process that began back in that period 1994-95.

In the intervening years the Irish Republican Socialist Party has been almost rebuilt from scratch. It is now in as strong a position as it has ever been despite many teething problems. During all those years of rebuilding it kept its commitment to the centrality of the working class in the struggle and reaffirmed its Marxist orientation in all the *ard fheis* [conferences] since 1997.

Indeed it is fair to say that the continued existence of the republican socialist movement is as a result of its commitment to a specific form of socialism and a specific form of republicanism. It rejected nationalism and pointed out the dangers of sectarianism. It placed itself firmly in the camp of internationalism, rejecting imperialism and committing itself to a socialist world.

But beware of the word 'struggle'! Too many republicans think that struggle equates with the use of arms against the British. What kind of serious revolutionary restricts him/herself to only one form of struggle? The almost exclusive use of armed struggle by republicans from the 20s up to today resulted in almost total failure. Some republicans have been reduced to believing that the maintenance of armed struggle is a success in itself without regard to the goals that republicans actually have.

The sum total success of the use of armed struggle by republicans has been the legitimisation of the 26-county state in the eyes of its inhabitants and the stabilisation and consolidation of the northern state under British hegemony. Some return for the generations of republicans killed, jailed and demonised over the past 90 years.

On the other hand, those who adopted an almost exclusively parliamentary road also failed. Fianna Fáil in the 20s, Clann Na Poblachta in the 50s, the Workers Party and Democratic Left in the 80s and 90s, and now Provisional Sinn Féin all succumbed to the lure of constitutional politics and forsook their revolutionary past, becoming integrated in to the ruling class and administering capitalist rule in Ireland.

Two major attempts to build a mass anti-imperialist front - in the 30s with the Republican Congress and in 1976-77 to build a 'broad front' - also ended in failure. The death of Seamus Costello, a founder of the IRSP who advocated the broad front strategy, stymied the approach, and subsequent attempts by the IRSP during the 1981 hunger strikes and in the recent past few years to build some republican left unity in action came to nothing.

These three approaches - armed struggle, parliamentarism and broad fronts - are not the only actions available to revolutionaries. Traditionally Marxist groups have worked within the trade unions, seeking to win advanced sections of workers to the ideas of socialism, supporting workers in defence of hard won rights and seeking to influence significant sections of the trade union bureaucracy to make a left turn and/or establish rank and file groups to mobilise the working class.

Others argue that, given the strict segregation that operates within the northern state, the best method is to operate at a community level, working

within the sectarian parameters of the state, trying to reach across sectarian divides using community groups and ex-political prisoners' organisations to build up contacts. This approach leaves one open to the charge of 'gas and water socialism'. It also leaves one open to the charge of pandering to reactionary loyalism by giving credence to former loyalist combatants. Certainly if it means hiding one's politics or aims, such a charge is justified.

But left republicans need to ask themselves, how do we reach out to the mass of workers with illusions either in British or Irish nationalism? One thing is for certain: it will not be easy or quick. Given the strong, entrenched hold that sectarian views have, it is not surprising that many seek short cuts or else give up the struggle altogether, but revolutionaries should, rather than see the difficulties, see the opportunities.

There can be no better time to win workers to the ideas of socialism in Ireland. The crisis within the world banking system has seen the governments pouring money into the banks to maintain the system, while at the same time exhorting workers to do the patriotic thing and accept savage cuts in wages and living conditions. North or south or in Britain, all workers are under attack, regardless of ethnic background, nationality, religion or colour.

In the south of Ireland the economic crisis means that it is the working class who are bearing the worst of the cuts and there is much scope for intervention by socialists. Fianna Fáil has its lowest support for years and the public front line service unions are in militant mood over proposed cuts in wages.

In the north it is imperative that efforts are now directed towards the defence of not only the public services but of the rights of all workers. It would be a bad mistake for the IRSP to shadow Provisional Sinn Féin by echoing the mantras of 'equality' and 'human rights'.

It needs to be clearly stated that there is no such thing as equality under capitalism. Sloganeering about equality in the current context of the north simply means the redistribution of resources away from the mainly Protestant population and towards the mainly Catholic population. Then it becomes a sectarian dogfight. Indeed that was precisely the intent of the British when they negotiated the Good Friday agreement. It has always been in Britain's imperial interests to nurture and maintain sectarianism in Ireland.

It is inconceivable that the IRSP, particularly with the examples of Seamus Costello and Ta Power before them, could go down the path of reformist illusions. Certainly the IRSP should re-educate itself in the classic writings of Marxism and republicanism. It needs to organise, agitate and work with the broad working class movement. It should certainly consider fighting elections, should work within the trade union movement, with other republicans, Marxists, socialists, etc and work to build a mass party of the working class that encompasses all nationalities.

No doubt the usual macho talk will surface on the internet and in the pubs that the 'Irsps' have lost their nerve. But the decision to stand down the INLA was not taken by ceasefire soldiers. It was taken by comrades whose republican involvement sometimes predated the establishment of the IRSP in 1974 and was the collective decision of many comrades who believed in the armed struggle, participated in that struggle and were shot and/or jailed for their involvement in the struggle against British imperialism. It was absolutely the right decision.

GR
IRSP

IRELAND

We won't pay for their crisis



Drowning in debt

The huge scale of opposition throughout Ireland to government cuts was made crystal clear on November 6. Despite poor organisation by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions nearly 100,000 marched in protest in major towns and cities.

New forces were very much in evidence, as non-unionised workers, the unemployed and pensioners joined trade unionists in protests against the draconian attacks on pay, benefits and public services - to be intensified with the December 9 budget. Many middle class people are also up in arms against the government's determination to make them too pay the billions needed to underwrite the National Asset Management Agency - its bailout of finance capital.

The demonstrations were part of the ICTU-organised 'Get up, stand up' campaign. Another march took place on Wednesday November 11 and a national strike is planned for November 24. Ballots for strike action have received overwhelming support - with over 80% 'yes' votes received on turnouts of more than 70%. The mandate for action is unquestionable. So is the militancy. Public service workers are at the forefront of the dispute, being the most highly unionised and also being a central target of government cuts.

The 24/7 Frontline Alliance was formed in September to mount a united fightback and includes nurses, paramedics, firefighters and gardai (police). It also included servicemen and women until minister for defence Willie O'Dea warned them to withdraw immediately. But defiantly soldiers have warned that they will not scab on any national strike. The alliance organised a militant demo of over 4,000 on November 11, with gardai marching in baseball caps displaying the official police insignia, as they were not allowed to wear their uniform. Angry speakers insisted on defiance of the government and assured marchers that no further cuts would be tolerated.

The raw material is certainly there for a major social movement. The depth of the crisis cannot be understated. Unemployment has now risen to 13% and many still in work are also in big difficulty, as wage cuts mean that mortgages and other debts cannot be paid. Public sector workers are facing job losses of between 7% and 15%, while social welfare, including child benefits, is also for the chop. Already charities like St Vincent de Paul have said they are unable to cope with the huge rise in demand for help. Many people have gone from being

charity-givers to depending on handouts themselves.

The scale of the problem is immense. During the Celtic Tiger years people were actively encouraged to go into major debt. Housing prices were astronomically high, but credit was easy. Banks would phone mortgage holders enticing them to borrow still more - for a second house, a holiday of a lifetime, a new car: the sky's the limit; you could have it all. Many were already living way beyond their means before the current recession hit. Now they are drowning in debt.

Unfortunately the problem remains lack of leadership. ICTU is not serious about fighting the cuts. More than that, it is actively undermining the militancy of those prepared to fight. It has a 10-point programme which openly accepts the need for "pain". But rather than short, sharp shock treatment, general secretary David Begg proposes a "more gentle adjustment over a longer period".

ICTU is therefore using its members' militancy to pressurise the government into accepting a programme that is directly counterposed to the interests and the wishes of its members. Desperate to uphold 'social partnership', ICTU remains in talks with government about how best to cut €1.3 billion from public sector wages. This is despite the militant speeches of individual trade union leaders. Begg has promised that the strikes and protests can be avoided if agreement is reached on minimising the pain. Conflicting messages are being sent out and there are splits and divisions between unions.

Meanwhile the Irish government is hell-bent on squeezing the working class. Social welfare and pensions as well as wages will be slashed in the December budget. And now that union leaders are indicating their acceptance of some cuts, taoiseach Brian Cowan is upping the pressure even further. He has promised that the €4 billion-worth of savings to be made in the budget is only the beginning. Much more 'sacrifice' will be needed. By participating in the drive to save Irish capitalism, the ICTU leadership is shamelessly selling out the working class. An urgent challenge to this complicity is needed.

So the left has a major challenge to face. Although talk continues of electoral unity (or a non-aggression pact at any rate) between the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party's People before Profit, nothing tangible has emerged. The SWP is calling for committees of action to be set up by public sector workers in the run-up to

the November 24 strike. The Socialist Party has called on ICTU to turn it into a general strike. Meanwhile both groups continue to run their own separate campaigns.

A meeting on November 7 organised by the Irish Socialist Network and the magazine *Fourthwrite* to discuss left unity reflected both the possibilities and problems facing the left. Addressed by a number of speakers, including Chekhov Feeney of the Workers Solidarity Movement and Tommy McKearney of the Independent Workers Union. One of the sessions was chaired by Mick O'Reilly, former Irish regional secretary of the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union. There were also contributions from Murray Smith of the New Anti-capitalist Party in France and José Antonio Gutiérrez, a Chilean activist.

The meeting heard about the crisis at the heart of global capitalism, whose effects are being felt particularly deeply in Ireland. From the floor comrades spoke of the frustration of forever fighting a losing battle against cuts. There was recognition of the potential. More than 50 people were present, from different traditions, including anarchists, republicans, Labour members and Marxists. There were obviously enormous differences and a lot of confusion. But all were there to discuss left unity and there was an expectation that a further initiative would be taken. However, none was, although it was called for from the floor. Mick O'Reilly said it would be "up to the organisers of the meeting". Perhaps the discussions are being held behind closed doors and we will all be enlightened later.

It is not clear as to whether any invite went out to the SPI and the SWP to attend. Certainly any initiative around unity must try to involve these two left organisations. The need for a mass workers' party based on Marxism received minority support. None at all from the platform speakers. Although the need to challenge social partnership was raised by members of Socialist Democracy (a split from the SWP).

Hopefully this meeting is a spark for something more ambitious. Meanwhile those of us committed to the formation of a single revolutionary party will raise the need for it whenever we can. It is the only serious answer for a working class desperate for change. Workers can see with their own eyes that capitalism has failed. What they need now is inspiration, ideas and, above all, organisation ●

Anne Mc Shane

ACTION

Communist Forums

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

November 15: John Bellamy Foster, *The ecological revolution: making peace with the planet*. Subject: 'Introduction: a green industrial revolution; economics of exterminism'.

November 22: John Bellamy Foster, *The ecological revolution: making peace with the planet*. Subject: 'Ecological and social revolution; the elementary triangle of ecology'.

Oxford: Study group, every Monday evening, studying David Harvey's *Limits to capital*.

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).

November 18: Trotsky and Trotskyism. ben@communiststudents.org.uk; 07792 282830.

Manchester: Every Tuesday, 7pm, University of Manchester Students Union, Oxford Road, Manchester M13.

November 17, 6pm: The French resistance and communists. Speaker: Matthew Cobb.

www.comuniststudents.org.uk.

Oxford: Mondays. e.mail: oxfordcommunists@googlemail.com.

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

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesdays, until December 15, 6.45pm: Evening course, 'Introduction to anthropology: the human revolution', St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1.

November 17: 'Living cosmology today: the Mbendjele hunter-gatherers of Congo.' Speaker: Jerome Lewis.

www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Shraddha

Ends Sunday November 21, 7.30pm: New play, 'You are what's in your heart', Soho Theatre, 21 Dean Street, London W1. Director: Lisa Goldman. 020 7478 0100

Labour Representation Committee

Saturday November 14, 10am to 5pm: Conference and AGM, Institute of Education, Bedford Way, London WC1 (Russell Square tube).

Details and registration:

<http://php.l-r-c.org.uk/events/detail/lrc-conference-agm>.

Anti-capitalism 2009

Saturday November 14, Sunday November 15: Weekend school, Caxton House, St Johns Way, London, N19. Including rally - 'Call for a new anti-capitalist party', Saturday, 5.45pm.

Organised by Workers Power: www.workerspower.com.

Pensions today and tomorrow

Saturday November 14, 10am to 4pm: Conference, Somers Town Community Centre, 150 Ossulton Street, London NW1. Speakers include Frank Dobson MP and John McDonnell MP. Entrance: £3, including buffet lunch. Organised by Greater London Pensioners Association: glpa@capital5.freemove.co.uk.

People's Charter

Saturday November 21, 10am to 3pm: Convention, Camden Centre, Bidborough Street, London WC1. Speakers include Bob Crow, Matt Wrack, Mark Serwotka, Caroline Lucas MEP. www.thepeoplescharter.com.

Yurukoglu Memorial Lecture 2009

Saturday November 21, 1.30pm: Meeting, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1 - 'The Paris Commune and democracy'. Speaker: Claudine Rey. Organised by Union of Turkish Progressives in Britain: yml.2009@yahoo.com.

Climate emergency

Saturday December 5, 10am: Bike ride, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London WC2. 12 noon: Rally, Speakers Corner, Hyde Park, London W2.

1.30pm: March, Grosvenor Square, London W1, to surround parliament for 'The wave', 3pm. Organised by Campaign Against Climate Change: www.campaignccc.org.

Latin America 2009

Saturday December 5, 9.30am to 5pm: Conference, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Colombia, Honduras, Mexico - facing the challenges.

Supported by Cuba Solidarity Campaign, Venezuela Solidarity Campaign, Unite, Sertuc: www.latinamerica2009.org.uk.

Defend public services

Saturday April 10 2010, 12 noon: March, Victoria Gardens, London WC2 for rally, Trafalgar Square.

Organised by National Pensioners Convention: www.npcuk.org.

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.

Confident and boasting of growth

The Socialist Party in England and Wales held its annual school, Socialism 2009, on November 7-8

Socialism 2009 was a pretty good event, so it may seem churlish to quibble over figures. However, the claim on the organisation's website that "over 1,000" attended its opening rally is just not correct. According to staff at the venue - and they should know - the capacity of Friends Meeting House is 1,000 when the balcony is factored in. And the balcony was decidedly *not* full.

Left organisations do appear to have precisely this self-defeating impulse to exaggerate their size,

influence and genuine implantation in the working class. This adds to the general culture of cynicism the left generates around itself and in this case casts doubt over the claim made at the closing rally that SPEW membership now stands at close to 2,000. It also underlines the fact that the group is essentially not that different from the Socialist Workers Party and its ilk, despite its pretensions and despite its (understandable) smugness when it surveys the slow-motion car wreck its main

rival has made of its political work over the last few years.

In general the Socialism event was relatively inclusive - certainly in comparison with the SWP's paranoid control-freakery at its annual equivalent, Marxism. In the Peter Taaffe session we attended and intervened in (see opposite), some 16 comrades spoke in the discussion. Aside from the CPGB, this included an Alliance for Workers' Liberty member and an International Bolshevik Tendency comrade. They got to talk for a

(generous) five minutes. CPGB comrades reported a pretty relaxed attitude to dissenting views in the sessions they attended.

On the negative side - again, reflecting the general culture of the left - nothing in the way of controversial debates featured on the platforms. For instance, the reported tensions over SPEW's involvement with a flopped electoral intervention, No2EU, that saw it essentially subordinate its politics to the programme of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party

of Britain. So the event was not that *interesting*, to be blunt.

SPEW's serious orientation to working class militants is clearly one of its strengths. Its patience and dogged application to building is another. However, as our reports show, it is programmatically incoherent and mired in economism and nationalism. In that context, has there ever been a left event where so many self-proclaimed Marxists were wearing poppies? Very disturbing, comrades ... ●

The opening rally (which took place a full 21 hours before the closing rally), started with an old, animated film about 'Mouse-land', where mice had always been voting for a government of "big, fat, black cats".

But because they were cats, they introduced laws that suited - well - cats. The disappointed mice thought they should vote for somebody else - and chose white cats. They were equally disappointed, of course. So after four years they returned to voting for the black cats ... then the white cats again ... you get the picture. Until one day, there was a little mouse who had a rather brilliant idea: "Why don't we vote for a government of mice?"

Old film ends. Insert footage and pictures of SPEW members on the picket line, on demonstrations, on stalls.

I had not seen this film before and was surprised about its rather uninspiring and abrupt ending, so I looked it up on the internet. It is in fact an old election broadcast by the social democratic New Democratic Party of Canada. On YouTube, you can find the film introduced by actor Kiefer Sutherland, who is the grandson of NDP leader Tommy Douglas (www.youtube.com/watch?v=GqgOvzUeiAA).

Funnily enough though, the SPEW comrades deleted the last scene - and surely not for time reasons. This comes just after the clever mouse suggests that they should vote for a government of mice: "Oh, they said, he's a Bolshevik. Lock him up! So they put him in jail. But I want to remind you that you can lock up a mouse or a man, but you can't lock up an idea."

Rather more interesting ending, isn't it? But clearly one that does not fit with SPEW's current political trajectory of establishing a Labour Party mark two, led by Bob Crow and any other union leader who will have SPEW on board.

Three such union leaders were on the platform of the opening rally, as chair Judy Beishon reminded the audience at least four times. In their publicity blurb, the comrades had announced that there would be "over a thousand people" present. In fact, with Friends Meeting House less than three quarters full, it was nearer 650 - a figure which dwindled to maybe 400 during the 25-minute-long (!) financial appeal. Bizarrely, you had to be present at the closing rally to find out what the money is actually for: they are aiming to raise £50,000 to be able to stand in 25 seats as part of whatever alliance is put together for the 2010 general election (half of the total was

raised at the opening rally).

Brian Caton, general secretary of the Prison Officers Association, was the first speaker. He told the meeting that he had recently joined the Socialist Party after being a Labour member for 40 years. Apparently, there had been some opposition from within SPEW to his membership, as he called on comrades to "come and speak to me directly rather than attack me behind my back". Unfortunately, SPEW is unable to report the details of this opposition either on its website or in its publications like *The Socialist*, which is reserved for exciting reports about the fat cats getting fatter while the NHS is getting worse.

So comrade Caton attempted to use his speech to stress his socialist credentials and so persuade the doubters. The problem is that his socialism basically consists of calling for a general strike. The TUC might have refused to debate the POA motion demanding this for the last two years, "but we will come back next year and the year after that with the same motion". Because at some unspecified point in the past, "when the unions were stronger, Britain was a much better country".

Matt Wrack, leader of the Fire Brigades Union, made a perfectly adequate speech about the need to put socialism back on the agenda. But he certainly did not endorse No2EU or the new electoral formation, although one or two inattentive SPEW members claim he did so on their blogs. In fact, comrade Wrack did not mention either No2EU or the general election.

Bob Crow spoke passionately about various trade union disputes, before mentioning "a new alliance that is now up and running. Our executive hasn't had time to endorse it yet," he said, but promised that there would be "a political party in the form of an alliance at the next general election". There would be no challenge to John McDonnell or Jeremy Corbyn, he announced, only to "New Labour MPs".

While he did not speak directly about the programme of the prospective formation, he took up the charge of "having been accused of being a little Englander" and tried to assure the comrades: "It's not about nationality: it's about class." After all, quite a number of SPEW members were unhappy with No2EU's chauvinist platform, which, on the insistence of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, opposed the free movement of people. I am not sure if he was able to convince SPEW mem-

bers that the new formation would be any less chauvinistic. In any case, about a dozen people in the hall gave him a standing ovation.

SPEW member Keith Gibson made a fiery, if not always coherent, speech about the strike of the Lindsey oil refinery workers. As a member of the strike committee, he also felt the need to defend himself and his organisation against charges of nationalism and started off by claiming that the strike had "nothing at all to do with racism, but was fought purely and simply on class issues". Well, not quite. After all, many of the workers on the unofficial picket line at first came out with the demand, 'British jobs for British workers'. Comrade Gibson pointed out as much later on, when he described how he and his comrades were able to "turn the strike away from the racist to a working class point of

view", for example by directing leaflets at the Italian workers who were supposed to replace the existing workforce on lower wages.

Despite the good work comrade Gibson did during that strike, the SP seems to have done surprisingly badly in terms of recruitment. Comrade Gibson proudly mentioned that there were "two workers from that strike in the audience here today", while "one other worker has joined the SP".

It was left to leader Peter Taaffe to actually mention No2EU for the first time. He endorsed it wholeheartedly and congratulated Bob Crow on taking the lead in establishing another electoral alternative in the 2010 general election. "We need an alternative, because today's Labour Party is no different to a Stalinist nomenklatura", which is why all unions should

disaffiliate and "prepare for the general strike".

The Tories are even worse, of course, and the BNP are "knocking on the door" - which is why we need socialism and "not lesser evilism". Luckily, for comrade Taaffe socialism is "a very simple idea", because "all you have to do is take the power out of the hands of the 150 biggest British companies and 500 more companies worldwide". That is a very simple idea indeed. And also utterly idiotic, utopian, economic, unworkable... and, worst of all, deeply uninspiring.

In fact it is a bit like the clever mouse asking the others to vote for another government to rule *over* them - this time a mousy grey one. Not even a social democrat like Tommy Douglas thought that this had anything to do with socialism ●

Tina Becker

Marxist party or Labour Party mark two?

In the session on 'Young people: the fight for a future', a rather small audience of 10 comrades was addressed by Ben Robinson of SPEW's Youth Fight for Jobs campaign and Tracy Edwards, the PCS union's youth organiser.

They correctly identified that the working class is under attack in this recession, and will face further assaults on wages and working conditions under the next government, be it a Labour or Tory one. The trade unions and the left are weak, and we are entering a period of rebuilding working class organisation. However, the speakers placed a lot of faith in union leaders like Bob Crow in achieving this aim.

But there is also the question of what politics the working class needs in order both to defend its immediate interests and to actually overthrow capitalism. We would argue the most effective politics for both is Marxism: an understanding of its own identity and role would lead the working class to abandon sectional interests and unite in the face of bourgeois attacks. Marxism also enables us to envision, and create, a society in which the majority rule. Instead, SPEW bases its appeal to youth on the twin demands

of jobs and free education. While these are important, fighting for them does not lead automatically to socialist consciousness. And SPEW's pandering to union bureaucrats can only be a handicap in the class struggle.

I also heard Peter Taaffe speaking on the fall of the Berlin Wall. He asserted that, had an enlightened Trotskyist leadership existed in the German Democratic Republic in 1989, the capitalist reunification of Germany could have been turned into a political revolution leading to socialism. A highly optimistic analysis. If one parachutes in your perfect Marxist party at critical junctures of history, then of course there could have been a revolution. But Marxism had been thoroughly discredited in the GDR, organising openly against the state was near impossible for most of its duration and, more fundamentally, any political revolution in the USSR or its satellite states would, had it not spread to the capitalist heartlands, been strangled soon after birth, as it was the first time round.

A forum on 'How can the crisis in working class political representation be solved?' had speakers from the Green Party, Respect, the Labour Representation Committee, RMT, Alliance for Green Socialism and SPEW coun-

cillor Dave Nellist. The upper hall at ULU was packed out for this session. The forum had been advertised as including an SWP speaker, but they were a no-show. The Green and IRC speakers seemed to have been invited solely to receive a barracking from the floor, the latter receiving short shrift now that, in SPEW's analysis, Labour is a purely bourgeois, rather than, in Lenin's deliberately contradictory words, a bourgeois worker's, party. Of course, this supposed shift helps to provide justification for SPEW's aim of founding a Labour Party mark two, though the politics Nellist proposed fell short even of a rounded social democratic programme.

Two days prior to the RMT conference on political representation, the SPEW national executive, along with other organisations and individual supporters of No2EU, had released a statement calling for a new electoral coalition to stand candidates in the next general election. There was little politics in this statement, and only a tad more in comrade Nellist's speech. The aim is to unite all those opposed to cuts and privatisation - a welcome step forward in spite of its political weaknesses ●

Laurie McCauley

Nationalist common sense

Opposing capitalist attempts to integrate Europe is part of the common sense of the bulk of the British left. At the November 8 Socialism session entitled 'Why do socialists say No2EU?' Clive Heemskerck advanced a more thoughtful line of argument than is usual in defence of this position. His introduction served as a defence of the decision of the Socialist Party in England and Wales to participate in the 'No to the EU, Yes to Democracy' electoral coalition in the European elections, but also sought to set out some of the theoretical underpinnings of SPEW's stance towards the European Union.

Comrade Heemskerck began by assuring the fairly sparse audience that SPEW was in favour of a united Europe, which would be a genuine step forward. But European unity could not be imposed from above - which was precisely the problem with the EU. In fact capitalism could not unite Europe. Only the working class could achieve that aim. The correct slogan was for a united socialist Europe.

The EU was in substance simply a treaty between individual nation-states to create the largest possible market for European capitalists. The Lisbon treaty was only the latest initiative to deepen the ongoing process of creating an internal market in which competition is free and undistorted. This was a process that was forcing the pace of marketisation in the health and education services, and had produced the posted workers' directive - a direct threat to the jobs of the Lindsey workers.

Comrade Heemskerck's most novel point was his argument that in the absence of a European army and police force, the EU was not a state. Control of the capitalists' 'armed bodies of men' was retained at the level of the member-countries. There were good reasons why the capitalist classes of Europe could not overcome the nation-state. Those states were rooted in language, culture and history and would not fall in a mechanical manner in the face of economic forces alone.

It was useless to attempt to lobby at the European level - the EU's decisions were ultimately made by its component states. It was inevitable that the latter would be the main terrain of working class struggle.

Turning to No2EU, comrade Heemskerck adopted a defensive tone. No2EU had been an alliance and therefore the SPEW had not been able to get its whole programme onto the platform. Nevertheless, in its own literature distributed during the campaign SPEW had raised both the slogans of 'No to a bosses' Europe' and 'Yes to a united socialist Europe'.

Entering the debate during contributions from the floor, I argued that the most pressing challenge facing the organisations of the working class was how to build a united working class movement in Europe and across the world that transcended the nation-state. The struggles of the working class had to be rooted in the material conditions created by capitalism. We were agreed that the European capitalist class was coordinating its attacks on workers across Eu-

rope. What was demanded was a European-wide response by the working class.

To the extent that the EU created a terrain of class struggle at a European level it presented progressive features. And to the extent that the capitalists created the foundations of a proto-European state - whether or not the capitalist class was able to complete this process - it also had progressive content.

To present European integration in itself as the problem - which No2EU had done - was a nationalist response. Even SPEW's own slogan of 'No to a bosses' Europe' implied that the bosses somehow held less sway in the individual nation-states than within the EU. It was particularly bizarre for British socialists to raise the spectre of the EU as the main enemy when successive British governments have implemented the most neoliberal policies in Europe and the New Labour government was manoeuvring within EU institutions to impose a neoliberal course on other countries.

Comrade James Turley - also of the CPGB - agreed with comrade Heemskerck that the capitalist class cannot unite Europe. He pointed out that there was a division between those states favouring deeper integration and those wanting to slow down the process. Britain was in the latter camp and in effect served as the US's 'mole' in the EU.

Responding to a point comrade Heemskerck had made about the involvement of militant trade unionists - Lindsey, Visteon and the RMT - in

No2EU, comrade Turley said that there were some workers' leaders, such as Bob Crow, who socialists should fight alongside but, given their Stalinist politics, should not take a political lead from.

SPEW contributors from the floor spoke of the value of the No2EU campaign. A comrade from Derby referred to the opportunity No2EU had provided SPEW to leaflet estates where the BNP has been making headway. A Dundee comrade spoke of the privilege it had been for her to be on the No2EU list in Scotland.

Interestingly, some SPEW comrades also expressed reservations about No2EU, suggesting that 'No to a bosses' Europe' should have been part of the platform. The Derby comrade explained that SPEW had won some of the argument in No2EU, but lost others. The election broadcast in particular had conveyed nationalist undertones. There should have been a call to unite workers from across Europe.

Responding to the debate, comrade Heemskerck focused on the arguments advanced by CPGB comrades. He agreed that it was necessary to confront the class struggle as it develops. Vestas workers had demanded the nationalisation of their factory. There was no European institution that could implement nationalisation. It was only possible to demand such policies at the level of the nation-state, where the EU's competition rules would seek to frustrate them.

Given that SPEW comrades presumably recognise that an attempt to

build socialism in a single country is doomed, this argument begs the question of how a socialist Europe is to emerge in the absence of the European-wide class struggle that not only challenges the policies pursued by Europe's capitalists, but articulates demands that unite workers across Europe.

Comrade Heemskerck's concluding argument was his weakest. It followed the usual SPEW template about the way to head off a swing towards nationalist politics within the working class as being "clear and unambiguous" in what can only be described as aping the politics of the nationalists. Hence in Scotland SPEW's Committee for a Workers' International claims to be opposed to Scottish nationalism, but expresses this by saying that it would call for a 'yes' vote in a referendum on independence.

When it comes to Europe, the dangers of inter-imperialist divisions re-emerging on the continent and workers blaming workers of a different nationality for their problems is to be combated by advocating withdrawal from the EU. Apparently, this will pre-empt a swing to the nationalist right. The size of the UK Independence Party and British National Party vote in the European elections indicates that No2EU failed to siphon off much support from these formations back in June. SPEW comrades need to learn the lesson that the last thing the British working class needs is a renewed attempt to build a leftwing UKip ●

Nick Rogers

Soviet 'planning' and bolt-on democracy

Peter Taaffe made a number of rather dubious claims in his competently delivered session entitled 'Why did Stalinism collapse in the Soviet Union - what have the consequences been?'

Prominent amongst these was the assertion that his was "the only organisation" that recognised that the collapse of the Soviet Union - and in particular, the ignominious manner of its defeat - represented an important "ideological defeat" for the left as a whole that precipitated a rightwing global offensive on working class gains. He used the Labour Party as an especially pertinent example, correctly pinpointing the removal of clause four and growing confidence of the right as a political consequence of the collapse of Stalinism.

He did not even qualify this - manifestly untrue - statement about the 'unique' position of his organisation by admitting that the Socialist Party had arrived at it in hindsight. This was, after all, the same Peter Taaffe who told us in 1989 that talk of "capitalist restoration" was a "chimera" (*Militant* July 21 1989). Indeed, he once thought that "Gorbachev's coming to power signified the beginning of the political revolution" and would define the coming decade as the "red 90s" (*Militant* January 19 1990). A tad on the over-optimistic side, I'm sure even comrade Taaffe would now concede.

He was not alone in this confusion, of course. Practically the entire Trotskyist/Trotskyoid left mechanically insisted that there were only two possibilities open to societies such as the USSR. There "will either be totalitarian rule under a one-party state" (ie, the status quo) "or there will be control of industry and state by the workers" (ie, a healthy workers' state - Ted Grant, writing in *Militant* October 3

1980). Ironically, this was quoted as an example of how "*Militant* was absolutely correct and born out by events" in the May 1989 introduction to Grant's selected works, *The unbroken thread*.

In vivid contrast, our organisation - despite its very different evaluation of the nature of bureaucratic socialism in those days - was able to point to the obvious fact that "in these countries capitalism is being restored with the consent of the broad mass of the population and that for the full-blown re-introduction of capitalism there exists no necessity for violently smashing the existing state" (editorial *The Leninist* April 1 1990). To halt this process, we called for "a real political revolution" in the USSR, not the counter-revolutionary farce headed by Gorbachev (*The Leninist* November 21 1987) - a simple fact that belies comrade Taaffe's assertion in his reply to remarks I made during the discussion that it was *our* now highly critical attitude to the Stalinist states that was retrospective and that "no wing" of the Communist Party had made these sorts of criticisms at the time.

I decided not to explore these rather involved questions in my five-minute contribution to the discussion. Instead, I took issue with a much more straightforward difference - the notion that collapse of Stalinism equated with the "liquidation of planned economies", an historical 'gain' of the revolution that had been preserved despite the bureaucratic excrescences.

I pointed out that planning for Marxists was not simply target-setting - it must have a genuine social content. Specifically, the democratic formulation of that plan by the direct producers themselves. The farcical nature of bureau-

cratic 'planning' in the USSR was perfectly illustrated in the five-year plans, when Stalin and Molotov arbitrarily leapfrogged one crazy unrealistic set of targets by another, with no concern for equilibrium or balance in the economy, nor indeed for genuine utility of the outputs.

Comrade Taaffe would later reply to discussion and underline that the "vital issues" that were raised as we endeavour to "understand Stalinism" would have a "direct bearing on our coming struggles". This was not simply relevant to regimes such as Venezuela and its creeping Bonapartist authoritarianism, he suggested, but also because Stalin would be "used as a scarecrow to frighten new generations away from socialism".

Absolutely. And the fact that SPEW comrades - including Peter Taaffe himself - can still see the unviable monstrosity of the USSR as an "anticipation from an economic point of view" of the society of the future is a pretty frightening prospect in itself. Summing up, the comrade told the meeting that what existed in the Soviet Un-

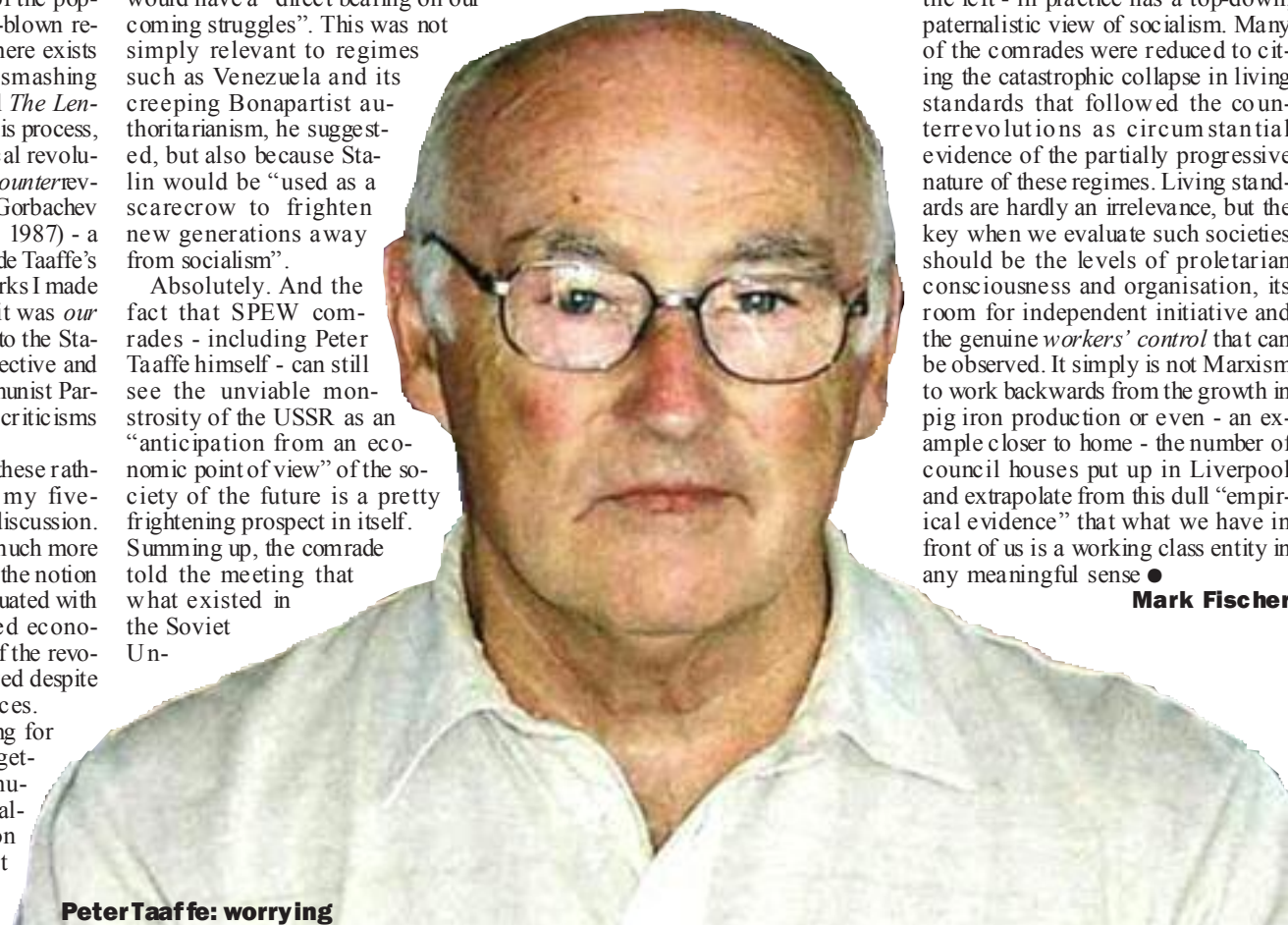
ion and eastern Europe was "planning in a rudimentary form" (although quite why and how it "disintegrated" in the 1980s he did not elaborate) and, even in this primitive form, the mass of simple "empirical evidence" countered my claim about the absence of planning. I actually got quite nostalgic when comrade Taaffe cited achievements such as Sputnik and other SPEWers talked of the rights enjoyed by Soviet citizens to "a home, a job, a decent health serv-

ice" - it was like being in a CPGB meeting from the mid-70s again.

One comrade put it particularly crudely. After listing all the economic advantages conferred on the population by even bureaucratic 'planning', he conceded "the bit that was missing was democracy".

The notion that democracy is a desirable, but non-essential bolt-on in a workers' state underlines that SPEW - in common with much of the rest of the left - in practice has a top-down, paternalistic view of socialism. Many of the comrades were reduced to citing the catastrophic collapse in living standards that followed the counter-revolutions as circumstantial evidence of the partially progressive nature of these regimes. Living standards are hardly an irrelevance, but the key when we evaluate such societies should be the levels of proletarian consciousness and organisation, its room for independent initiative and the genuine workers' control that can be observed. It simply is not Marxism to work backwards from the growth in pig iron production or even - an example closer to home - the number of council houses put up in Liverpool and extrapolate from this dull "empirical evidence" that what we have in front of us is a working class entity in any meaningful sense ●

Mark Fischer



Peter Taaffe: worrying

RMT

Towards an election coalition

November 7 saw the latest in what now seems to be an annual conference on working class political representation, organised by the RMT union. **Peter Manson** reports



Bob Crow: for a party, in a personal capacity

Just in case you were naive enough to have expected anything different, the pre-event publicity for the Rail, Maritime and Transport union's Crisis in Working Class Political Representation 'conference' advised those likely to attend that the meeting would be "non-binding and non-resolution-based". In other words, yet another talking shop. And so it turned out to be - only this time even the 'talking' (ie, anything approaching a serious exchange of ideas) was severely restricted. The problem for the RMT is that, although the annual 'crisis' event is mandated by its annual conference, it has no official line on what it hopes the outcome will be. While general secretary Bob Crow and his staunch ally on the executive, Alex Gordon, want to see concrete moves towards a new party, that is not the position of the RMT as a whole - not yet in any case. In the meantime comrades Crow and Gordon are personally backing the insistent call from the Socialist Party in England and Wales for a coalition to contest the general election. But they think the place for arguing out differences and working out the next steps is in small committee rooms behind closed doors.

So the 'conference' was limited to a mere four hours in the middle of the day - which obviously meant that there would have to be a lunch break as well. This was due to last just 30 minutes, but somehow took up a full hour - comrade Gordon, who chaired Saturday's gathering, explained at the beginning of the afternoon session that the delay had been caused by "difficulty with speakers".

This comment was rather oblique. After all, there was no shortage of people hoping to have their say - scores of the 200-250 comrades assembled in the Camden Centre had in-

dicated they wanted to speak. But in the end only 65 minutes in total was given over to their contributions and just 13 comrades managed to address the meeting from the floor - all but the very first having been pre-selected by comrade Gordon.

The speakers he was referring to were those on the platform, of course. And, since there were two sessions, it was only right to have two sets of them - in the morning they even had the right of reply! The first session was supposed to be about the "current crisis" and the second about "the fightback", but it goes without saying that not one speaker - whether from the top table or from comrade Gordon's predetermined list - stuck to this artificial division. Why did we need to waste time on going over the "current crisis" in any case? What was meant by this title was a combination of the failings of capitalism and the absence of a fighting working class alternative - as if this was not familiar territory to everyone in the hall.

Despite the clash with SPEW's weekend school, Socialism 2009, there were several dozen Socialist Party comrades present - perhaps as many as a third of the total. And out of the 21 people who got to address the conference from both the platform and the floor, six were from SPEW or the Committee for a Workers' International. By contrast, the other main political group in the 'No to the EU, Yes to Democracy' platform that contested the June 4 European Union elections - the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain - had far fewer people in the hall and only one identifiable speaker.

You would not know any of this, however, from the *Star's* report on November 9. SPEW was not mentioned and neither were any of its speakers.

The Socialist Workers Party had

just three or four comrades present and national committee member Tom Woodcock was allowed to give the SWP view from the floor. No member of any other left-of-Labour group was called - certainly not the CPGB, despite our active support for past left unity initiatives, not least the Socialist Alliance. Nor Workers Power, which has launched the 'Call for a new anti-capitalist party' (WP recently walked out of SPEW's Campaign for a New Workers' Party after the CNWP steering committee voted to support the Lindsey strikes). Understandably perhaps, RMT militants were given speaking priority over other activists by comrade Gordon.

Election coalition

With most other groups unable to speak, it was only SPEW comrades who were able to put forward anything resembling a consistent strategy. They plugged away at the need for a left electoral coalition as a step towards a new 'mass workers' party'.

It was SPEW that took the initiative to put out an unsigned leaflet headed "Coalition to stand general election candidates" for the conference. The leaflet states that this coalition has been launched "by organisations and individuals who participated in No2EU, Yes to Democracy". As "a minimum", it will stand against "as many current cabinet ministers as possible, together with other ministers and prominent ex-ministers who have been complicit in New Labour's anti-working class policies". While, according to the leaflet, SPEW and the CPB are backing the coalition, comrade Crow and other union figures are doing so only "in a personal capacity".

The first platform speaker was Brian Caton, general secretary of the Prison Officers Association. Having been a member of the Labour Party

for 40 years, he was now "proud to be a member of the Socialist Party". Labour is different from the Tories in that it is like "the prisoner who kicks you in the face - and apologises" (the Tories are like the prisoner who attacks POA members with enthusiasm). Sporting a poppy, comrade Caton said that, while working men and women "have good trade union representation in the main", even this is highly restricted. He thought that the POA needed to be a "proper socialist organisation".

Like comrade Caton, Susan Press of the Labour Representation Committee had been a member of the party for a very long time - in her case 33 years. Also like Caton, she condemned the "cuts consensus" - the difference being that Labour, to quote Gordon Brown, "make cuts because we have to: they make cuts because they want to". She tantalised the audience with the rhetorical question, "Why not leave" and "build a new party"? But all she would say was that this was "not the way ahead" - she was "happy to have that argument, but we are here today to build consensus".

It did not seem to occur to the comrade that we can only achieve consensus by openly expressing our differences - and a forum on working class representation might have been a good place to argue out this particular difference. Instead she thought the most important thing was to unite behind trade union disputes and campaigns against climate change and war and defending council housing.

John Foster of the *Morning Star's* CPB - introduced as representing No2EU - was even more reticent about the subject we were supposed to be debating. In fact he did not touch upon it at all. No2EU, he said, had achieved "unity across the left and across communities". What planet is

he living on? Planet Europhobia perhaps. He was pleased to say that, while the UK Independence Party "always raised sovereignty" during the EU election campaign, only No2EU also took up working class questions like EU-driven privatisation and cuts.

The campaign had been just the ticket, but now we "can't just let it lie until 2014" - he was referring to the next EU elections (the fact that another election - to be held a little sooner than 2014 - was rather more in the forefront of people's minds was of no concern to comrade Foster). Brussels is planning all sorts of new attacks and the way to combat them is by rallying behind the People's Charter, he said. However, not one of the charter's six sets of demands can be won "within the confines of the Lisbon treaty and the EU".

And that was it. Absurdly comrade Foster could not bring himself even to outline the CPB's official 'twin-track' policy on working class representation - leaving the door open for a new, trade union-backed "party of labour", while at the same time backing any move to 'reclaim' the genuine article. Of course, comrade Foster is four-square behind the second option and hates the thought of lining up with the likes of SPEW in an overt campaign for a replacement Labour Party (which is how he regards anything more than the usual CPB token general election intervention), as opposed to a campaign against the EU.

After the only randomly chosen speaker - Gerry Byrne of the Socialist Alliance - had finished her rather unnoteworthy contribution, Pat Sikorski, RMT assistant general secretary and former witch-hunter in chief in Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party, came to the microphone. He asserted that New Labour had "gutted and assassinated what Labour used to represent" and now we are left with "maybe four socialist MPs". They should debate with us about the fight for a "new mass party with roots in the community". We should unite around policies which have a "social democratic current", but nevertheless provide a "cutting edge" against the current attacks.

Rob Williams of SPEW said that 2009 had been "a year of workers fighting to defend themselves". The National Shop Stewards Network, of which he is a partisan, was "now the beginnings of a genuine rank and file movement". But there was also a need for an electoral platform campaigning under a "left, radical, pro-worker banner". We have started to see the industrial vacuum being filled - now we must fill the political vacuum.

At this point another platform speaker arrived - Joe Higgins TD from the Socialist Party in Ireland. His view was that, just like across the Irish Sea, it would take only "one large union like the RMT" to make possible the launch of a new party.

Dave Hill, No2EU's lead candidate in the South East in the EU elections, ridiculed the notion of resting our hopes either on "powerless left Labour MPs" or the People's Charter. Instead there had to be a "party offering a socialist perspective to the working class".

Peter Daniels, an RMT member and Labour councillor, said that there were two options - "reclaim or form a new party" - and he was now convinced that "the latter is the one we'll have to do". For him Labour MPs are "all career politicians".

The contribution from Roger Banister (SPEW), lead No2EU candidate in the North West, was in my view a complete waste of time. He devoted his entire speech to refuting the old allegation that the campaign in the North West had split the vote, thus preventing a left Green Party MEP being elected and letting in Nick Griffin of the British National Party.

Communications Workers Union militant and LRC member Peter Firmin lambasted the simplistic view of those who looked to the unions in their current state to lead a break from Labour. He pointed out that the London district committee of the CWU has recommended ending the Labour link, but it also recommended calling off the strike and accepting the CWU-Royal Mail sell-out 'truce'. The conclusion comrade Firmin drew was that if we "don't address the rebuilding of the unions" the kind of trade union-based party being proposed would be "no answer".

Apart from Dot Gibson of the United Socialist Party and National Pensioners Association, who was given time to plug a demonstration the NPA has organised for April 2010, there were no more speakers from the floor in the first session. So the platform speakers were called back. Comrade Press was annoyed at the idea of MPs like John McDonnell being "comfortably ensconced" in parliament, as comrade Daniels had implied. She reminded the meeting that the alternative to Labour in the general election will not be a left party, but the Tories. But her call for positive support for "Labour's socialist MPs" got a mere smattering of applause.

John Foster droned on some more about the EU, although for the first time he mentioned the "crisis in working class representation" - but only to agree with comrade Firmin that it was "also about ensuring ... the trade unions do reflect the interests of their members". Then it was back to the EU's iniquities yet again. Comrade Higgins, without addressing anyone directly, pleaded with the RMT not to "leave it until the last four weeks to stand in the election".

'Strong strand of socialism'

After the extended lunch break (for once most people were back in their seats well before the chair called the meeting to order) we had the second raft of platform speakers. SPEW's Dave Nellist claimed that there was now only one bourgeois party in Brit-

ain, "artificially split into three wings". He talked about the £90 billion-worth of annual cuts that some had predicted after the election - "they will be coming for the equivalent of our national health service every year". Yet without a party we will be fighting with one hand tied behind our back.

For those with high expectations he pointed out that the electoral coalition would not mean the "establishment of a new party before the election" - it "isn't broad enough". Even if the RMT comes on board, the Public and Commercial Services Union is still in consultation. Nor is it "an attempt to stand in every seat". No, not quite.

Comrade Nellist talked about the necessity for the process to be conducted in a "sober and serious way" and at a pace that would lead to a new working class party. "Revolutionaries", he said, hope that there would be a "strong strand of socialism within that organisation". Such ambition! Here was the clearest indication yet that a Labour Party mark two is the very most SPEW is aiming for.

Bob Crow's speech was an impressive one. He too pointed out that it was not merely through the absence of a party that the working class was not being represented. The unions too were sorely lacking. He strongly criticised the role of the TUC in the postal workers' dispute - instead of rallying solidarity and generating support for the CWU, it had brokered a deal which, he implied, left postal workers in limbo.

"So what are we going to do about it? Just have meetings like this and chat?" We either "give Gordon Brown a blank cheque or stand an alternative". He asked, "Do you want to be hanged or knifed to death? I want my own political party to fight for the working class." That was why he was backing the proposed electoral alliance - in a "personal capacity", he reminded us once again. However, he urged everyone to campaign for MPs like John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn, who are members of the RMT parliamentary group: "Back those who back us and stand against the others."

In my opinion that is exactly the slogan we ought to be raising for the general election. In other words, place conditions on every Labour candidate: come out against all anti-working class cuts, demand immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan and we will vote for you. If not we intend to stand against as many of you as possible.

By contrast Matt Wrack's speech was disappointing. He said nothing

about the possibility of Fire Brigades Union support for any election coalition - except that the FBU had been observing "other initiatives" and "will have to talk about it". He was much more interested in the People's Charter - "let's get stuck into a campaign which is about building a movement". While the TUC "sit on their backsides and do nothing about motions passed, the People's Charter won't sit around". What on earth is he talking about? How can six sets of (rather modest) demands constitute a movement or substitute for working class political organisation?

Jeremy Corbyn summed up the approach of New Labour as "Ditch the Labour Party, ditch the union link, embrace the market" and develop an "obsession with going to war". However, "some of us have stood against that", he said. So far, so good. But after that comrade Corbyn's speech drifted into a series of platitudes. There was no indication of any strategy to be adopted. Just a vague call to "stand together" against a range of evils and be willing to engage in "big debates". Not that he was prepared to do so.

There was now just 20 minutes before the 'conference' was due to end - time for five more speakers from comrade Gordon's list. John Milligan, the RMT executive member who fronted his union's walkout from the Scottish Socialist Party following the 2006 split, talked about having written to "every left political party in Scotland" calling for electoral cooperation.

He was followed by another SPEW speaker, Andrew Price, who talked about Labour's "abandonment of every socialist principle". For him, No2EU had been a "small step". But this conference was a "huge step", with the "endorsement of a coalition by most speakers". Now, now, comrade Price: the 'conference' was "non-binding and non-resolution-based", remember? For him, it was not a question of voting for Labour candidates like John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn. Instead, they should join with the general "endorsement" of the anti-Labour coalition.

After two speakers from the Save the Tyne and Wear Metro campaign, and an RMT comrade from Portsmouth, who reported that local activists had agreed to stand a candidate in Portsmouth North on the basis of the People's Charter, Tom Woodcock announced the SWP's support for an electoral challenge. As someone who had been a socialist general election candidate in the past (he did not say that he meant in 2005, for Respect), he thought the "platform is already written for us" - all we have to do is bundle together all the slogans from the various single-issue campaigns and lots of their supporters will come on board. After all, election work is "massively important".

Well, that's good to know. Following the Respect split the SWP leadership was telling its members that a left electoral challenge would just not be viable again until "after the general election". Mind you, the SWP's own "open letter to the left" initiative launched after the EU elections is no longer spoken about, and the promised "autumn conference" conveniently forgotten.

However, it is certainly positive that there is now reasonable support for a "federal coalition under a common name" ('Coalition to stand general election candidates' leaflet). Had I been able to speak on Saturday I would have stated the CPGB's willingness to finance candidates standing on our own communist programme under such a coalition.

In closing, Alex Gordon announced that he would be putting a report to the RMT executive on the day's proceedings. The implication was: watch this space; expect our union's backing ●

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Fighting fund

Go for it

As I predicted, the last seven days saw a considerable slowdown in donations to the *Weekly Worker* compared to the week before. But, there again, it wasn't a difficult prediction to make, as the biggest proportion of standing orders are paid at the beginning of the month.

Nevertheless another £97 paid directly into our account was added and there were also two other donations - a £25 cheque from MW "towards the cost of publishing the *Weekly Worker*" (MW has also applied for CPGB membership), plus an online payment of £10 from WD (who is too modest to say anything about her PayPal donation - I think maybe she would prefer not to be mentioned in this column at all!).

I must say I was a bit surprised

not to receive more cash in the post. As things start to pick up following the CWU action, I was expecting a bit of a flurry of items held in storage by Royal Mail. Perhaps next week! And just the one internet donor out of the 15,357 online readers of our paper is also a bit on the low side.

However, the £132 I got this week brings our total for November to £519. So we are still on target for another much needed surplus over and above the £1,000 we must get as a minimum each and every month. Let's go for it, comrades ●

Robbie Rix

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

OBITUARY

The working class intellectual and the apparatus

Chris Harman, 1942-2009

A prominent figure on the British far left for several decades, Chris Harman, has died aged 66. All that time, he was a member of a single organisation.

Perhaps remarkably, that organisation is the Socialist Workers Party - or its antecedents in the shape of the Socialist Review Group and International Socialists. This is an organisation prone to sharp shifts in political direction, and splits around those shifts. Harman lived through the bulk of this history as an active and enthusiastic participant, yet did not depart with any of the waves of splinter groups that litter the socialist political landscape today.

He first joined the SRG in the 1960s as a schoolboy. At that time, the line was in favour of full Labour Party entry; by 1970, it had moved away from Labour work and embraced a rank-and-file workerism; by 1975, it had shifted from a previously fairly democratic internal culture to a bureaucratic-centralist 'Leninism'; by 1980 the rank-and-file of what was now the SWP was undermined by a new concern for anti-racism, feminism and other such things previously snootily dismissed as the concern of 'people who should be in the International Marxist Group' (the IMG was the British section of the Trotskyist Fourth International and was at its most influential in the late 70s).

Worse was to come - the announcement from guru Tony Cliff that the labour movement was in the midst of a "downturn" left the SWP cadre caught out by the 1984-85 miners' strike, and disoriented within it. Variants of this policy continued until the late 1990s, characterised by a lurch toward the Seattle-generation 'anti-globalisation' movement. Chasing the movements brought the SWP to almost total immersion in anti-war work after 9/11 - a turn which the current leadership says came at the expense of the SWP's own organisational health and also cost it dear in terms of any serious orientation to the working class.

After leaving school, Harman completed his degree at Leeds University. Pivotaly, he followed it up with a PhD at the London School of Economics. At the time, the LSE was a critically important site of campus radicalism, and an inspiring environment for any young revolutionary. This was the time of the Paris *événements*, the Red Army Faction, and a wave of anti-war sentiment not topped in the west until the recent catastrophe in Iraq. Students - provided they attended the right institutions - seemed to have the best view of the barricades.

Harman never finished his doctorate - he became, in 1968, a full-timer for the IS, a role he would fulfil in different ways for the rest of his life. He started out editing *International Socialism (ISJ)*, and working as a journalist for the new *Socialist Worker*. At that time *SW* was edited by Roger Protz, a former Healyite (his editing skills are now put to productive use on *The Good Beer Guide*). Harman was later to be the longest-serving editor in the paper's history, though in the early days the job was rotated somewhat - not least because of the

constant series of splits, which claimed Protz among many others. In this period, he wrote *Bureaucracy and revolution in eastern Europe* (now republished as *Class struggles in eastern Europe, 1945-1983*), and extensive analysis of the eastern bloc from the point of view of Tony Cliff's theory of state capitalism.

In many ways, Harman was unlucky to take up the *SW* reins when he did, first in 1975 and then in 1982. The IS had been heavily involved in the industrial struggles which swept across Britain in the early 1970s. Its rank-and-file posture allowed it to recruit modestly but significantly, and it began to attract experienced class fighters. As these struggles weakened, however, Cliff announced a major change in the class struggle - the now infamous "downturn", which entailed a retreat into propagandism and the kind of "inward-looking" politics that would have today's SWP leaders gasping with shock - had they not all been through this particular somersault themselves.

It is certainly true that after this time industrial struggles faded, and began to be defeated. It is possible for basic labour struggles to carry on at an intense pitch for many years, but not forever. Eventually, escalating disruption will force the issue - either the workers 'get political' in a serious way and address the question of state power or the capitalists beat them down. There is no shame, either, in concentrating on propaganda when this happens in order to retrench cadres and harden people for lean, demoralising times.

The difficulty with the Cliff/SWP version of the "downturn" is that it was too mechanistic. The fact that there is a downturn means that every event must be viewed myopically through its prism. This particular "downturn" was dated to 1978 (similar theses were advanced by the Eurocommunist Eric Hobsbawm at the time), but within the year there was the winter of discontent. Five years later, of course, there was the miners' strike. It seemed to escape Cliff that the balance of class forces could shift suddenly as well as molecularly - there is no way a strike that lasts almost a year can have been doomed from the outset, yet the SWP was only able to emerge from its propagandism by embracing the most narrow form of economism.

It is this phase of the SWP's history which was covered by Harman's time at *SW*. He also produced extensive studies of the German Revolution (*The lost revolution*, 1982) and, later, political Islam (*The prophet and the proletariat*, 1994). Cliff demanded one more wrenching change out of him yet, however, with the anti-globalisation movement heralding a new global upturn in the guru's mind. The reorientation to the anti-war milieu and political Islam in particular fell to his successor, the rather more philistine Chris Bambery; it is difficult to gauge how closely Harman identified with the Respect project, although later editions of *The prophet and the proletariat* included some telling changes to reflect the Rees leadership's new, more positive view of Islamism.

Harman's most significant contribution to the life of the SWP and the British left beyond came in his writings. These include, as we have seen, extensive historical studies, notably of the 1918-23 revolutionary period in Germany, and detailed analyses of the Stalinist countries. At different times, he was called upon to be political economist, anthropologist, historian and more - and with disciplined research and lucid writing, he more or less stepped up to the mark each time.

'Called upon' not by History, or the spontaneous whims of an erudite Marxist imagination, but by the interests of the SWP machine. It is impossible to discuss Harman's legacy separate from that of the organisation he belonged to. Alex Callinicos himself admits: "He was interested in particular problems usually not for their own sake but in order to address political arguments" (*Socialist Worker* November 14). For all his often-valuable work, then, it is difficult to find anything like a slant on something genuinely new within Marxist theory. Harman was a Cliffite to the marrow - some of his most extensive researches amount to evidentiary appendices to Cliff's *State capitalism in Russia*; others (the anthropology, particularly) were embedded in internal spats conducted dishonestly by the *apparatus*.

Harman's role in all this is not an unfamiliar one - that of the 'red professor', who is always ready to spin a yarn to justify the contingent decisions of the leadership. In this, he is in considerable company among communists - Ernest Mandel's mind worked around the strategic shifts of the Fourth International, a host of WRP academics rendered Gerry Healy's gibberings into Trotskyist jargon, and that is to say nothing of the countless Stalinist intellectuals working from the 1920s until the 'official' CPGB was liquidated, of whom Rajani Palme Dutt is the most prominent example.

Yet there is a paradox, highlighted if we compare him with his comrade and eulogist, Alex Callinicos. Callinicos is also a talented scholar; he has published widely, and well beyond the confines of the SWP press. He writes with lucidity and some originality (though not without flaws) on epistemology and economy, education and imperialism. Crucially, he more or less

has his own research programme - he can write what he wants without interference from the (rest of the) central committee. Politically, meanwhile, he is the hack's hack - he has gleefully flitted between contradictory political positions, repeatedly rotated allies, and his backroom manoeuvrings in the SWP's split with its American sister organisation in 2001 earned him the Stateside nickname, 'Stalinicos'.

Harman, as we have noted, was mostly concerned with direct or indirect interventions in the political life of the SWP. Yet while these interventions, to say the least, tend towards the winning side, it would be wrong to dismiss him entirely as a hack. In that rather obscure manner we now associate with the whispering war between Gordon Brown and Tony Blair, it was suggested widely in the organisation that Harman, in his later years, differed significantly with the direction it was taking. Articles in *International Socialism* on popular fronts past - were they veiled criticisms of Respect? I have certainly heard people claim, conspiratorially, that they are on the 'Harman side' of the SWP. He embodies a contradiction - unquestioning fealty to the *apparatus*,

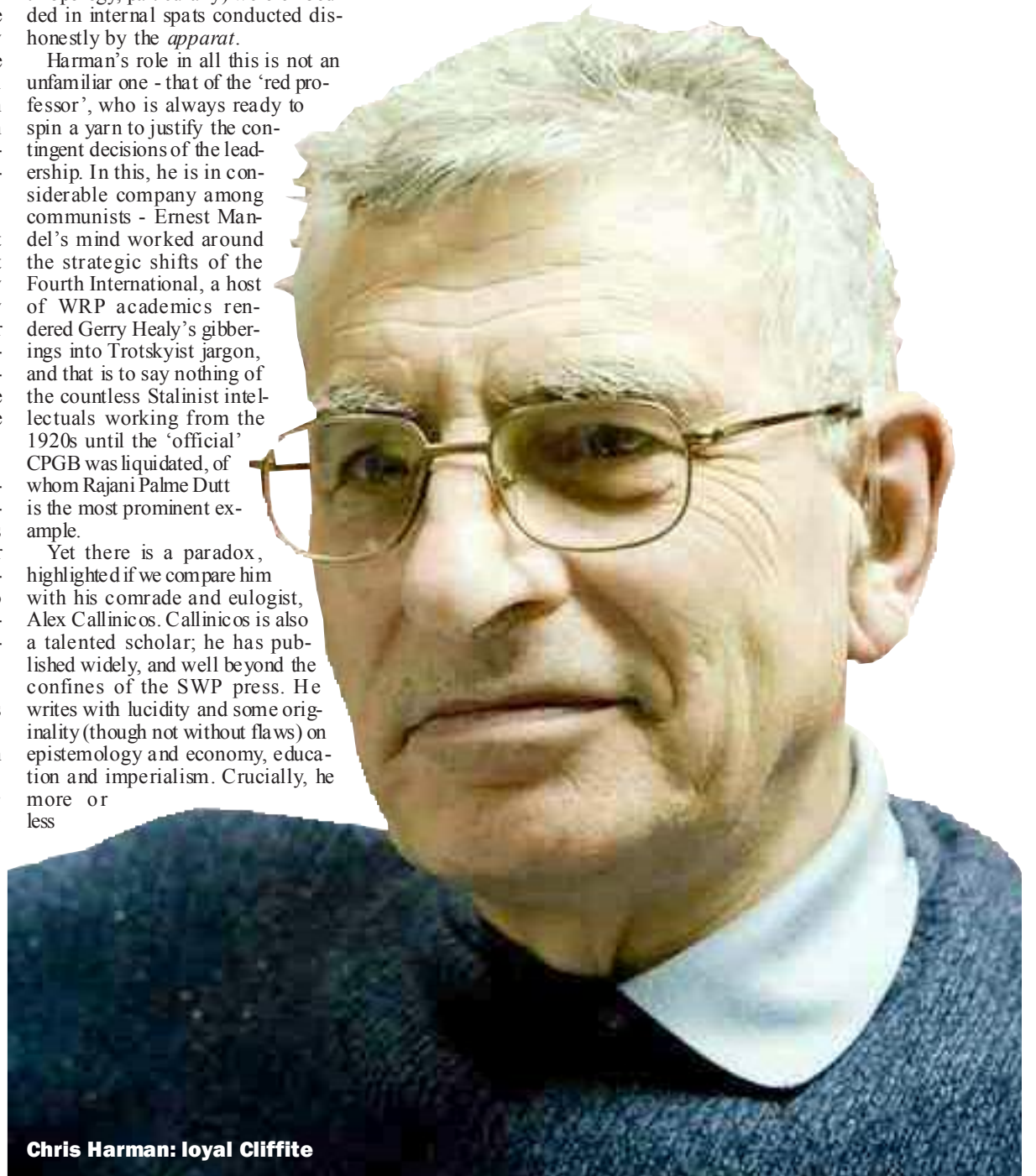
battling with the need to articulate differences somehow.

Finally, a personal note - it is always a difficult balancing act to write an obituary for a comrade in the movement whose views and practices differ vastly from one's own. Recognition of that comradeship is a vital necessity, whose abandonment is the abandonment of solidarity; yet to ignore the political differences is its own betrayal.

For me, Chris Harman was not just any SWPer. His articles in *ISJ* were a serious advert for the 'partyist' left as I was beginning to reconsider anarchism; the general high quality of *ISJ*, then under his editorship, convinced me I was jumping ship to a more intellectually serious politics. But it could never be the politics of the SWP. It was frustrating to see Harman propping up those politics and the regime that sustained them - frustrating for giving tired dogmas and strategic stillbirths a vitality they did not deserve, and for quietly wasting the insight and effort of a serious working class intellectual.

His death is a great loss to our movement ●

James Turley



Chris Harman: loyal Cliffite

AFGHANISTAN

Get the troops out now

Every year on Remembrance Sunday the establishment and its media hypocritically pretend to be against war. As church leaders eulogise, wreaths are laid, solemn speeches given and heads are bowed towards the Cenotaph, the blood-stained past and crimes of British imperialism are written out of history. Dying and suffering hellishly, the millions butchered and sacrificed by the ruling class over the decades becomes obscenely transformed into a noble endeavour for peace and freedom.

This year, though, the ritual had particularly pertinent overtones, and for one simple reason - the ongoing disaster that is the war in Afghanistan, which has seen 230 British army fatalities since 2001. In fact, you could even say that Remembrance Sunday was more like What Do We About The War in Afghanistan Day, as splits and divisions within the establishment become increasingly prominent and visible.

And, of course, there are good reasons for the ruling class and its servants to be worried - very worried. A recent poll of 1,009 randomly selected adults conducted on behalf of the BBC demonstrated that 63% of British people want the troops brought home "as quickly as possible", while 64% believe that the Afghan war is "unwinnable" - up from the 58% who thought the same in July of this year. Furthermore, 42% said they "did not understand the purpose" of Britain's mission, and 52% agreed that the war was "not worth fighting for" due to the endemic levels of corruption in Afghanistan. Given that the fact that there has been a marked escalation in British deaths and casualties over recent months - with no reason to think that the upward trend will not continue - the next batch of poll returns will almost certainly make for even more depressing reading for the government and all those committed to a British presence in Afghanistan.

Unsurprisingly - but maybe a bit foolishly with an extremely unpromising general election for Labour looming darkly on the horizon - the defence secretary, Bob Ainsworth, immediately responded to the BBC poll by saying that the stationing of British troops "could not be determined by public opinion". Similarly, Gordon Brown last week gave a speech in which he insisted that Britain "cannot, must not and will not walk away" from its mission or crusade in Afghanistan. But Brown qualified this bold and resolute-sounding declaration by also saying of the imperialist coalition forces in Afghanistan that "in the end we will succeed or fail together" - which to many within the military and elsewhere has a dismaying whiff of defeatism about it.

Inevitably of course, *The Sun* has used Afghanistan to bash Brown - with mounting British deaths he is easy meat when it comes to Afghanistan, limping, as he seems to be, to an electoral defeat next year. So, mercilessly piling on the pressure, the once again true-blue Tory tabloid launched a highly personalised - if not positively spiteful - blitzkrieg against Brown over his supposedly "bloody shameful" handwritten letter to the mother of one recent British fatality, Jamie Janes. Spitting fake rage, *The Sun* screamed about how Brown had allegedly misspelt Janes's name - as "James" - and that the letter was "littered with more than 20 mistakes" (such as, shockingly, "incorrectly" using the letter 'i' 18 times, "mostly by leaving the dots off them"; but

once "by using two of them" in the spelling of "security"). This, we are led to believe, constituted a "hastily scrawled insult".¹

By an amazing coincidence - it's not as if the *Sun* would ever cynically exploit a grieving mother for naked political point-scoring purposes, is it? - when a humiliated Brown felt compelled to phone Jacqui Janes in a further attempt to console her, the "outraged" mother just so happened to activate the phone's loudspeaker button and also just so happened to have the necessary equipment nearby to record the "amazing late-night phone bust-up", where she "seized the chance to nail" Brown over equipment shortages in Afghanistan: specifically, the lack of helicopters, which Jacqui Janes claims resulted in Jamie bleeding to death from his injuries. By an even more astonishing coincidence, Jacqui Janes was photographed taking the 13-minute phone call from Brown and the tape of the conversation somehow made it all the way to the *Sun* newspaper - which doubtless felt patriotically obliged to print the full transcript of this thoroughly unsolicited tape, concerned, of course, that "our boys" were being put in "peril" by the inadequate levels of military equipment (November 10).

No wonder that on the Army Rumour Service (Arrse) unofficial rank-and-file website forum/blog, one contributor rather cynically - but perhaps with a certain degree of accuracy - summarised Jacqui Janes as: "I feel so emotional about this, prime minister, that I'm going to give the whole transcript to *The Sun*, whilst posing with a phone looking angry", with another even suggesting that she was an "attention-seeker of the highest order".²

Yet, clearly, the Afghan operation - which Barack Obama informed us not so long ago was a "just war" - is unravelling at the seams, with public morale plummeting, the military becoming increasingly dissatisfied and elements of the ruling class beginning to break rank. Significantly, Kim Howells, a former Labour foreign office minister with responsibility for Afghanistan and currently chairman of the parliamentary intelligence and security committee - so not exactly a nobody then - has already stated that British involvement in Afghanistan has effectively "squandered" money and personnel that could be better deployed elsewhere. Hence "sooner rather than later" there needs to be a "properly planned, phased withdrawal of our forces" from Helmand province.³

Naturally, the Liberal Democrats are trying to carefully position themselves once again as the 'anti-war' party of choice for respectable mainstream opinion, whilst maintaining their patriotic credentials - not always an easy act to pull off, of course. So they were noisily 'anti-war' in the lead-up to the Iraq invasion, but as soon as the imperialist onslaught begun the Liberal Democrats instantly became loyal supporters of the war effort - as, obviously, they had to stand by 'our boys' in wreaking bloody havoc and devastation upon Iraqi society.

Once again, with the polls seemingly behind them and imperialist policy in obvious tatters, the Lib Dems evidently calculate that they can afford to step up the 'anti-war' rhetoric. To this end, party leader Nick Clegg has gone on record to flatly state that "failure is inevitable" in Afghanistan unless the "international community" (ie, imperialism) does a sharp about-turn and "change both our current poli-



Death after death

cies and our present attitudes".⁴ Well, then, Nick, should we take this as an *almost* 'troops out now' position - depending, that is, on the vagaries and vicissitudes of internal Lib Dem wrangling and UK electoral politics?

So plainly, as we have seen above, politics in the UK is becoming more and more taken up with the fundamental question: what is the *purpose* of the British engagement in Afghanistan - why exactly are the troops there? The increasing inability of those conducting and supporting the Afghan war to give a clear and definite answer to this question is inevitably undermining the 'war effort' - as communists are delighted to report. In a typical reflection of this deep unease over the Afghan question, and mounting anti-war sentiment, an editorial in *The Guardian* observes that the "growing public opposition to the war is not just the result of the procession of coffins through Wootten Bassett" - but is rather "the consequence" of Brown's profound "failure to say

clearly what this war is about and why it is being run the way it is".⁵

Embarrassingly for imperialism, especially the United States, the recent Afghan elections have turned out to be not quite the advert for democracy - and hence the imperialist intervention - that was so desperately wanted. In fact, the whole affair descended into total farce. Despite the massive and systematic corruption - and blatant cheating - by forces currently (and no doubt very temporarily) 'loyal' to the incumbent president, Hamid Karzai, he was *still* unable to secure the 50% of the vote theoretically needed for him to prevent a run-off and hence declare victory over his main rival, Abdullah Abdullah. However, Abdullah pulled out of the presidential race in disgust at the grotesquely fraudulent nature of the process, so Karzai 'won' the election anyway, whatever the electoral rule book might have said.

The result being, of course, that in the shape of Karzai imperialism is now lumbered with a former protégé - or

presidential client - who lacks all moral or political legitimacy, for all his Afghan apparel and swish suits. In some ways, the situation is particularly excruciating for the British forces stationed in Helmand, as the electoral turnout in southern Afghanistan was even more derisory than for the rest of the country - yet British troops are dying in increasing numbers to prop up a totally corrupt 'governmental' system, which is controlled, and ruled over, by an unsavoury collection of warlords, gangsters and a thuggish police force which in reality is not much more than a glorified extortion racket.

Faced with this developing political-strategic and military catastrophe - confronted by an ever bolder and more confident Taliban, eyes now set on the additional prize of Pakistan - Obama is now 'reviewing' the request by general Stanley McChrystal, the US commander of Nato forces in Afghanistan, to send up to 40,000 extra troops to the area (on top of the 20,000 soldiers deployed earlier this year, making a total of 68,000 US troops).

Whether reassuringly or not, it has been widely reported that McChrystal is of the view that Britain's continued involvement in Afghanistan would be politically more palatable at home if its 9,000 soldiers were moved out of "harm's way" from the Helmand frontline - especially as defence strategists fear that the British death toll could reach 400 by the time of the general election in six months or so. In other words, things will go from bad to worse before they get ... even worse.

It was self-evident from the start that imperialism could never bring democracy or genuine social progress to either Iraq or Afghanistan. Communists always treated with contempt the stupid and criminal fantasies of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty social-imperialists, who told us that the imperialist occupation would provide a "breathing space" for progressive, democratic and secularist forces. Rather it was *inevitable* that the US and UK intervention in Afghanistan would produce the opposite outcome - further disintegration and barbarism, with imperialism courting from day one the most conservative and backward elements in Afghan society, and locked into a low-intensity war with the Taliban.

Now, Kabul is steadily coming under the hegemony of various Islamist groups and factions which are programmatically virtually indistinguishable from the Taliban, and the government of Hamid Karzai - which according to the constitution is duty-bound to ensure that "no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam" in the "Islamic republic" of Afghanistan - is set to continue its attacks on women's rights, persecute those deemed guilty of apostasy, and so grimly on.

But we in the CPGB remain committed to the fight for the immediate withdrawal of all imperialist troops from Afghanistan. Democracy, secularism, women's rights and social advance can only be won by the renewal and intensification of class struggle in Afghanistan and throughout the region, not through the outside machinations of the imperialist powers. ●

Eddie Ford

Notes

1. *The Sun* November 9.
2. www.arrse.co.uk/Forums/viewtopic.php?p=2991780.html.
3. *The Guardian* November 3.
4. *The Guardian* September 17.
5. *The Guardian* November 11.

IRAN

Workers gain new courage



Every year November 4, the anniversary of the 1979 takeover of the US embassy in Tehran, is marked in Iran with a state-organised demonstration outside the building that used to house the American ambassador and his staff. On that date 30 years ago militant Islamic students stormed the embassy and took 71 hostages. Nineteen were released within weeks, but the remaining 52 were held for 444 days.

The ceremony commemorating the 30th anniversary of the 'US hostage crisis' was no different from recent years: a lacklustre ritual addressed by an insignificant minister. However, no-one in Iran will ever forget November 4 2009. It was the day when illegal demonstrations in at least six separate locations in Tehran and 20 cities and university campuses throughout the country overshadowed the state-organised event. As the national broadcasting service was showing live pictures of the gathering outside the former US embassy, shouts of "Death to the dictator" from protesters on neighbouring streets and squares were so loud that it was difficult to hear the minister's speech. In Tehran the six locations were Enghelab Square, Ferdowsi, Haft Tir, Enghelab Square, Vali Asr and Vanak Square.

Revolutionary guards had issued stern warnings that they would not tolerate any protest demonstrations, and the night before dozens of political activists were arrested. On the morning of November 4 itself, government offices closed their doors at around 10am to stop employees leaving their workplace to join the protests. The ministry of the interior deployed special units of anti-riot police, many on motorbikes, as well as the religious *bassij* militia, to block main roads, intimidate potential demonstrators and attack any gathering. Yet despite all these measures, by all accounts - including admissions in the pro-Ahmadinejad press - tens of thousands of Iranians joined the protests against the regime.

Highly significant was the absence of any slogans regarding the rigged elections. Four months and 22 days after the June 2009 presidential poll, demonstrators in Iran have clearly moved on. Even the BBC Persian Service, that staunch defender of the "green movement", had to admit in its broadcasts and analyses what most of the left has been saying for some time: as a result of the impasse within the factions of the Islamic regime the protests are no longer about the results of the presidential elections. Protesters are now challenging the very existence of that regime. 'Reformist' leaders are tailing the masses.¹

The advice of their 'leaders' - most of whom, with the exception of presidential candidate Mehdi Karroubi, did not even dare show their face at the demonstrations - was totally ignored. Fellow 'reformist' candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi had spent the previous 10 days warning everyone against "radical" slogans that would only "benefit the enemy". Yet demonstrators did the exact opposite.

Even the bourgeois media had to admit that the radicalisation of the demonstrations has marked a new phase in the life of the opposition. The main slogans that dominated the day were directed at the supreme leader himself: "Our guardian is a murderer [the supreme leader's official religious title is 'guardian of the nation']. His rule is null and void" (*Vali ma*

ghateleh velayatesh bateleh), plus the usual "Death to Khamenei, death to the Islamic republic".

The crowds were also at odds with Mousavi over the nuclear issue. In late October he and Karroubi met to discuss the recent US-EU offer to Iran, and made it clear that they considered Ahmadinejad's response to be a sell-out. Mousavi was quoted by his own website *Kalameh* as saying: "If the promises given are realised then the hard work of thousands of scientists would be ruined." Yet for the first time in many years, it looked like the nationalist defenders of a nuclear Iran had no supporters amongst the protesters, whose slogans were very clear: "We don't want reactors, we don't want the atomic bomb."

A week earlier, Mousavi, after a lot of dithering, had called on his supporters to back the November 4 demonstrations, yet on the day he failed to show up at any of the protests. His supporters claimed he was prevented from leaving a cultural centre by the security forces, but witnesses deny this. For all his faults, Karroubi, the 70-year-old cleric, showed more courage. He was prepared to join the demonstrations, even though one of his bodyguards was badly injured and ended up in hospital.

In another qualitative development angry demonstrators tore down posters of Khamenei and trampled all over them in what were unprecedented scenes. The man who is supposed to be god's representative on earth (for Shia Muslims) was called a murderer and his image defiled by demonstrators wiping their feet on his posters.

Most of all, though, November 4 will be remembered as the day Iranians realised their strength and found the courage to stand up to the regime's supporters and security forces. A number of bloggers have remarked on how government supporters leaving the official gathering hid memorabilia and photos of the supreme leader that had been dished out at that event when they saw the huge number of protesters in neighbouring streets.

There were many reports and films of the *bassij* and militia attacking protesters, especially women. However, there were also many incidents where demonstrators confronted those forces and actually got the better of them. In some incidents old women defended young protesters and shamed the security forces into retreating.

Some protesters have also taken up a new chant: "Obama, Obama - either you're with them or you're with us." On the face of it, this does not sound like the most radical of slogans. However, this is a country obsessed with

conspiracy theories regarding foreign interference and it was the first time since 1979 that Iranians have directed a slogan at the leader of the hegemon capitalist power in the face of such conspiracy theories. It should be noted that since Irangate² no-one in Iran takes slogans like "Death to America" and "Death to Israel" shouted at official demonstrations seriously.

A number of foreign reporters were detained, most of whom have now been released, together with an Iranian journalist working for Agence France Presse. The stupid leaders of the regime had thought that by making such arrests they would stop the world hearing about the protests, but the reality is that now Iran has millions of reporters, with their text messages, emails and video footage captured on mobile phones. Perhaps the regime will consider banning all electronic equipment in their desperation to stop the 'wrong' news spreading.

The demonstrations have given a real boost to working class opponents of the regime. For the first time in many years they are finding allies in their struggle against the Islamic government. Sections of the left, including Rahe Kargar, have been talking of setting up neighbourhood resistance committees and clearly, given the vicious attacks by security forces on the growing opposition, such committees are necessary. For the first time in many years Iranians are discussing the need for the masses to be armed to confront the state security forces, while maintaining their opposition to 'militarist' tactics.

But the regime will not give up easily. More than 200 people were arrested in Tehran and the provinces on or around November 4, while a number of labour activists from the Haft Tappeh sugar cane company have been sent to prison for organising strikes. There are unconfirmed reports that despite many efforts to save the life of Kurdish leader Ehsan Fattahian, he was executed on November 11 in Sanandaj Central Prison. Ehsan's 10-year prison sentence for membership of an illegal Kurdish organisation was recently changed to execution for no apparent reason.

Hundreds of protesters remain in prison and we must do all we can to support and defend them. Let us step up our solidarity with the working class and democratic opposition ●

Yassamine Mather

Notes

1. See BBC *Newsnight* report, including interview with BBC Persian Service presenter: www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPg1ZUNdql.
2. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran%E2%80%93Contra_affair for a summary of the 'Iran Contra affair', also known as 'Irangate'.

Hands Off the People of Iran

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

November 28 2009
central London
10 am - 6pm

Somers Town Community Centre, 150 Ossulston Street, London NW1. Come along to discuss the situation in Iran and our plans for the future. Speakers include Yassamine Mather, Moshé Machover (founder-member of Matzpen) and leftwing author Cyrus Bina. www.hopoi.org

INTERVIEW

Regime's most persistent opposition

Ali Pichgah is a veteran of the Iranian oil strikes of 1979-81, when he was a representative of the Tehran refinery workers shora (council) on the National Shora of Oil Workers. He spoke to Yassamine Mather about the current situation in Iran



Oil workers: vital

How do you evaluate the recent political protests and the role of the working class in them?

First of all, I think we have to ask ourselves why the protest against the regime's rigged elections took such dimensions. I have no doubt that the majority of the population are opposed to the absence of political freedoms in Iran. In particular the youth, who constitute a high percentage of the population, feel contempt for the way the religious state interferes in their private lives. People are losing patience and in general opposition to the regime has reached unprecedented levels.

All these elements led to conditions such that when the regime fixed its own sham election protesters took to the streets. But let us not forget that there is nothing new in the expression of dissatisfaction with or opposition to this regime and this is not the first time one faction has resorted to fraud during what the regime calls an electoral process. I think what is different this time is the terrible economic situation. Inflation above 25%, mass unemployment, the growing gap between rich and the poor... and from this point of view one can say that the relentless workers' struggles of the last two years against job losses and poverty, against non-payment of wages (which has become one of Iranian capitalists' favoured method of increasing profits), as well as the demonstrations by teachers, nurses and so on against the economic policies of the government, were precursors to the huge demonstrations we saw this summer.

Of course, many of these protests were defensive (wage-earners trying to maintain what little they had), yet the working class has remained the most persistent opposition to the entire regime over the last few years, in the run-up to June 2009.

Coincidentally we see the continuation of the mass protests of early summer in the unprecedented level of workers' struggles in recent weeks, the victory of the Iran Khodro workers (where the regime clearly retreated), the revolutionary tactics of Pars Wagon workers (from ransacking the refectory to mounting hunger strikes), workers bringing their families along to demonstrations...

How do you explain the continuation of these protests when it appears one faction of the regime has defeated the other faction, at least for the time being?

Ordinary people - and here I mean wage-

workers, irrespective of whether they are workers, clerks, teachers or this army of millions of unemployed - have nothing to lose but their poverty. That is why they come out onto the streets as soon as an occasion arises, such as for the recent Quds day [Palestine Day - September 18] or in front of their factory, their workplace, sometimes in front of where they used to work. As I said before, it is the economic situation that has given impetus to the current political opposition to the regime.

In some ways we could say this summer's political struggles took place against the background of an unprecedented economic crisis, which is inevitably linked to the international economic crisis. Any crisis unleashes its own class struggles and, of course, world capitalism has a long experience of transferring the worst effects of such crises to countries of the periphery. But Iran's parasitic and corrupt capitalist economy paved the way for a major intensification of its economic problems. If you add this background to the existing political discontent, it is not difficult to understand why protests are continuing.

I am sure you are aware that people talk of the absence of the working class from the political arena in Iran and it is interesting that you rebuff such views. But I wanted to know what workers, especially in the oil industry, think of the current political upheaval.

Let me emphasise this once again: the working class was not only present in the demonstrations against the regime and the government from day one (June 12), but it was protesting long before it.

However, recent events mean the situation has changed a bit. First of all, the number of workers' protests has increased considerably (and, of course, this has something to do with the worsening economic situation), but more significantly during the last few months their struggles have moved from defensive to more aggressive forms - for example, amongst car workers. You have to remember that participation in workers' protests is far more dangerous than going on a street demonstration. Your name, address, work details are known to the factory owner and the security forces and the minimum problem you face is losing your job - a serious matter when a high percentage of the workforce is unemployed. Yet with all these dangers we see a manifold increase in workers' protests, so no-one should talk about the absence of the Iranian working class.

However sections of the working class and in particular oil workers are well aware of their historic role. Older workers remember the strikes of the late 1970s, which played a crucial role in the people's struggles. The younger oil workers (I should say oil employees, because they all participated) have heard about the significance of the oil workers' intervention in the struggles of 1979 from older workers. But the reason why they haven't gone on strike is quite specific.

First of all, they are concerned that in the current political climate a strike might benefit the reformist faction of the regime and, of course, this faction is our class enemy as much as the conservatives - they only discovered the need to defend democracy when they themselves faced repression. There have been many discussions amongst oil workers about this issue, which are still continuing. The other concern is that the strike should take place only when there is coordination between all the refineries to make sure there is a successful nationwide action.

In 1981 we wanted to go on strike in protest against the political situation [the first mass arrests of leftwingers, the execution of political activists, the banning of secular and left organisations]. Some people were in favour of the strike; others were opposed to it. Of course, even then a section of oil workers were opposed to the regime, but now this opposition is much stronger. Let me tell you, if the political protests continue, I am sure (by that I mean I promise!) that employees in the oil industry will defend the political struggles and will do what is necessary.

My last question is about the proposed sanctions planned by the US, Britain, France and Germany on the export of refined oil to Iran. What is your opinion about such sanctions?

It is clear that sanctions will hit ordinary people. In winter, they will harm the impoverished working class and the poor in general. Essential goods will not reach the cities and villages. All this benefits world capitalism, but it will be an obstacle to workers' struggle and its immediate effect will be to strengthen the regime. We have been working for the revolutionary overthrow of this regime since 1981 and every foreign intervention delays this process - they create conditions that hold back workers' protests.

That is why we can't stay silent: we must do all we can to oppose these sanctions ●

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

**CWU leadership
proves its
loyalty to
New Labour**

Militants condemn sell-out

Did they jump or were they pushed? No doubt various factors exercised the leaders of the Communication Workers Union in deciding to abandon last week's scheduled strike action.

As the CWU's postal executive committee discussions and negotiations with Royal Mail were in closed sessions, we may never know the full facts. Nor is the CWU's national executive committee forthcoming. But despite the pious promises made in return for the CWU calling off the strike action, postal workers have been placed in an impossible position, and their struggle to secure their long-term future has basically been abandoned by their so-called leaders.

Concessions by Royal Mail are minimal. Its promise to negotiate on job security is by no means a guarantee that there will be no redundancies or even no compulsory redundancies. It was certainly far from sufficient reason to call off a strike when the employer was at its most vulnerable, as Royal Mail was when faced with being unable to deliver a sizeable chunk of the Christmas post.

Worse, many unagreed changes locally imposed by management 'executive action' - enforced switches in shifts and delivery rounds, for example, not to mention the 'temporary' transfer of mail centre work to 'out houses' staffed by casual labour - remain in place. In response branch officers are talking about requesting authorisation for fresh local strikes.

When it comes down to it, general secretary Billy Hayes and deputy general secretary Dave Ward have achieved what they have been suggesting to management in speeches for months: we can call off the strikes if you give us something we can sell. One member of the NEC told me that there was a distinct lack of clarity within the union at all levels on the aims of the strike anyway.

Management has therefore not had to give very much away: Hayes and Ward declared themselves amenable to compromise if management would only show itself in similar colours. That is why some of the reasons put forward for the sell-out are more likely erroneous than not. For example, some have suggested that management might have threatened to press on immediately with derecognition of the union, something that a secret Royal Mail plan did envisage.

Or perhaps the Broad Left minority (eight out of 28 voting members on the NEC), the more rightwing Effective Left (dubbed 'Defective Left' by opponents), plus unorganised members - erstwhile militants almost to a man and woman - on leading CWU committees wanted to abase themselves before New Labour to bolster its fading electoral fortunes rather than do the job they were put in place to do: represent the interests of CWU members. As it happens, most of the Broad Left members of the NEC are on the telecoms side.

But neither of these two scenarios appears likely to union militants. They consider it much more probable that union leaders felt they risked losing control of the strikes if they continued

with them. To get more than paper concessions from Royal Mail it would have been necessary to escalate the action, without doubt. This would have involved ceding control over the day-to-day running of the strikes to the mass of the members, who would have needed to organise picket rotas, solidarity appeals, etc. without the involvement of national bureaucrats. Nonetheless, abandoning strikes in

Both sides are well aware that comparatively few items of post are delivered in January

the run-up to Christmas, Royal Mail's busiest time of the year, is at best mistaken and at worst a treacherous turn by CWU leaders. Both sides are well aware that comparatively few items of post are delivered in January, which is the earliest that the union's leadership expects to contemplate further action, should it deem necessary. And why would it not be necessary, since management promises to negotiate previous positions on job losses and speed-ups? Having lost its purchase by abandoning strikes now, the union faces an uphill battle against a belligerent foe in the new year. Is it more likely that postal workers would rather fight now or after the Christmas break? No-one can in all seriousness suggest the second, if they want the workers to win.

One militant postal worker to whom I spoke told me that the mood in the workplace is roughly, "What the fuck are we going back to work for?" As days go by, this is settling into a 'making the best of a bad job' attitude. He said: "It's a sell-out masquerading as something else" - an assessment that is still to be disproved. Nonetheless, postal workers do intend pushing the promises about local arrangements in

the interim agreement as far as they can - and even further.

Of course, the biggest worry about the November 5 interim agreement among the membership is whether it represents a truce or a surrender. Many militants thought that involving the TUC would mean an immediate cave-in by the union; in the event, it took the CWU leaders a week to come up with the interim agreement with management.

Local industrial action by postal workers was the engine that propelled the union bureaucracy into calling national strikes: first one-day affairs, then a planned, but now aborted, couple of days as we started into November. The evident militancy fuelled by the mass of members' anger over Royal Mail's destruction of jobs and speed-ups (euphemistically labelled 'pace' in the recent agreement) now has nowhere to go, given the demoralising effect that the leadership's action will inevitably have had.

Despite calls from some far-left groups for the union membership in the localities to restart the strike under its own control, the absence of rank and file organisation within the CWU means that such calls cannot be fleshed out in any meaningful way. There is no network and no organised debates at any level about the rights and wrongs of the action being taken. No-one, apart from those making the calls, sees this happening. This is a national issue.

The same goes for officially sanctioned local actions (which in any case will clearly not be approved by the NEC). At present, most lower-level union officials at the regional level fully support the interim agreement, so they form a barrier that extends down from national level to any attempt by local union organisations to take back the strike as their own on a large geographical base. Even cooperation across London, which led the way in militancy during the local strike wave earlier this year, is hampered by this regional lethargy.

While the sole Socialist Workers Party member of the national executive, vice-president Jane Loftus, has

pitched up at meetings and in articles to promote the strike, there has been hardly a squeak out of the two national executive members who are members of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, Gary Jones and Bernard Roome. But maybe their silence is because of the extreme compartmentalisation within the union that favours bureaucratic manoeuvring by full-time officials. Telecoms members of the

By settling for mere promises, the union leadership has forfeited any real leverage

NEC are, after all, not expected to interest themselves (or 'interfere') in disputes involving the postal side. On the face of it, this obstacle to internal solidarity is in massive contradiction to the solidarity in the rest of the working class movement that postal workers ought to expect as their right in their current struggle.

What the interim agreement does do is pass things back to the localities on a bad basis. They will be left to their own devices, rather than being part of a nationally organised dispute. Local negotiations may have been reinstated, which is all well and good, but how long will they continue and what can they achieve in terms of binding agreements? The interim agreement calls for fortnightly reviews of progress over the next five weeks. Of course, five weeks takes us close to the end of December, which is pretty convenient for management. If anything goes awry by the end of this period of the cessation of hostilities, then we shall be into a stage when Royal Mail is already breathing easier, having finagled a solution to its Christmas delivery problem.

As for the most important questions concerning job losses and speed-ups, the interim agreement has only plati-

tudes to offer. One paragraph reads: "This agreement between Royal Mail and the CWU, reached under the auspices of the TUC, provides the basis for a 'period of calm' free of industrial action, during which the parties are firmly committed to work together intensively, to reach agreements that will enable further change and modernisation to be implemented from the beginning of 2010 onward."

So "modernisation", though given a different content by management and the CWU, is accepted by both sides. The words "change and modernisation" have a deadly ring about them for the mass of postal workers, however, for they have seen where they have already led: the loss of many thousands of jobs.

It is pretty clear that Royal Mail has sewn up what for it is a great deal in order to buy time - a most valued asset. Management must be cock-a-hoop. At the end of the local review discussions that the agreement document lays down management can quite easily revert to its former positions and again bully, victimise and call for 'pace'.

By settling for a period of no strikes on the basis of mere promises the union leadership has forfeited any real leverage. None of the CWU leaders who have spoken to meetings of union reps since the interim agreement was announced have dared to suggest that it has been accepted because of the union membership's weakness or lack of resolve: this has clearly not been the case. There has been no trace of any drift back to work in the course of the strike.

It may not be exactly a perfidious leadership that has brought this dispute to the pretty pass it has, but the inability of rank and file members to bring leaders to heel by organising themselves independently has taken its toll in allowing the bureaucrats free rein. Unless postal workers organise themselves independently of their officials, they will be unable to change this state of affairs - or inspire other workers who, make no mistake, will also be in the firing line.

Jim Moody

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