



weekly **worker**

**Chris Knight discusses science, the
affluence of primitive communism and
the origins of language and religion**

- **AWL rank hypocrisy**
- **PCS and strike action**
- **Left Convention**
- **Brown hangs on**

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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**Bush administration rushes to save
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LETTERS



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

Negative

Your article in last week's *Weekly Worker* declared in advance that the Convention of the Left would be a "talking shop" aimed at adopting a few "platitudes" ('Convention talking shop', September 18). This was a very negative approach, one which seemed to inform your attitude on the weekend.

The CL in Manchester brought together more than 300 militants, trade unionists and socialists from many organisations and from none. They came together in the middle of the most serious financial crisis for decades and after a traumatic period for the British left - a period that has seen attempts to set up militant socialist alternatives to New Labour end in splits, collapse and recrimination.

In its limited aims of bringing the British left, in and outside the Labour Party, together to start a discussion of the problems that face us, the CL was an undoubted success. If leading members of the CPGB had spent more time in the CL sessions, and less time hanging around their stall outside, they would have heard a serious and very democratic discussion of important issues facing the left.

Where else would you have found an interesting debate between leaders of the Labour Party left in parliament and those who want to break from Labour - a discussion about the trade union link, disaffiliation and possibilities of changing the LP? Where else would you have found leading members of the FBU, RMT and PCS unions engaging in discussion with rank and file militants over the problems of getting a new party, rebuilding the trade unions and fighting the pay freeze? Where else could you have found a lively 90-minute discussion of the state of the women's movement, involving the National Assembly of Women, Feminist Fightback, a female Labour MP defending Labour's record, and the Abortion Rights campaign?

And all these debates were conducted in a comradely fashion, in a structured debate that ensured huge numbers of floor speakers, in welcome contrast to the normal 'top table' domination of such meetings. The debates tested people's arguments, made people think, and informed us all of the different campaigns and discussion forums going on all over the country.

Yet at the very start of this process, at its very first meeting, you dismiss it as a talking shop and "certainly not a serious attempt to forge organisational unity". Maybe the debate did not reach the dizzy heights of the Campaign for a Marxist Party - but doesn't the CMP also do a lot more 'talking' than campaigning? Isn't this the pot calling the kettle black?

Stuart King

Permanent Revolution

Just like the rest

Chris Strafford makes some very good points in his article on the Convention of the Left. He states that over the last decade of a New Labour government, there has been no principled unity of the left within a single Marxist Party. The left groups have aimed to protect their own sect integrity, at the same time as creating electoral fronts, "halfway houses" which they control. I think this is true.

However, he then goes on to say that only the CPGB saw the Socialist Alliance as a possible starting

point for a higher organisation. As a founder member of the Coventry Socialist Alliance in 1992, I remember well that when the SWP closed down the SA those of us who were left formed the Socialist Alliance Democracy Platform. The SADP was divided on one basic principle - and that was whether to campaign for a Marxist party or for a federalist halfway house with no criticism of the left groups, including the Socialist Workers Party, which had just closed us down!

At the final meeting of the SADP, the CPGB comrades present voted for the halfway house solution against the resolution for a Marxist party from the Democratic Socialist Alliance. If they had voted the other way, the SADP would have been committed to building a Marxist party. The resulting halfway house new Socialist Alliance that the CPGB voted for is amongst those groups organising the Convention of the Left, which Chris Strafford is so ably criticising!

Chris goes on to condemn the bureaucratic centralist methods of the left groups, whereby they set up front organisations which their central committees control. Examples are the SWP and Respect and the Socialist Party and Campaign for a New Workers' Party. What is required is democracy, accountability and open discussion. Again I agree wholeheartedly.

However, I would put it to Chris that the Campaign for a Marxist Party has seen the CPGB behaving in a replica manner to other left groups. Instead of opening the CMP up for democratic participation, they have closed it down and used it as a front for their own organisation.

I have noticed that the CPGB make some good criticisms of other left groups in the *Weekly Worker*. However, when you look at their own methods of organisation, they don't seem to know any way of behaving other than the traditional ones they criticise.

Dave Spencer
Coventry

Beach head

I just got back from a few days away and then spent the whole day on Shields beach reading two issues of the *Weekly Worker*. Heavy!

I get the distinct impression that the CPGB is in the process of leaving the traditional left camp and becoming something else - still left, of course, but deeply into what we called the 'third camp' in the days of the old cold war, when we thought most of the world was part of some sort of socialistic get-up, be it ever so bureaucratic. It coloured our view of what was and what had been - even what could be and how it could be.

Now the bets are off, the world is starting to rotate on its head and none of what we experienced and thought we had seen really existed. You are now telling us it wasn't the way we thought it was - none of it. I'm still struggling to grasp what you actually think was happening and why, but, you know, another few days on Shields beach and maybe I'll see - that's if you actually *know* what was happening and why.

David Douglass
South Shields

Puzzling

Whilst your article 'SWP dumps John Rees' (September 18) gave some useful information about the factional divisions on the SWP's central committee, it left me very puzzled about the politics behind the dispute, which I, perhaps naively, assume is

not merely a matter of personality clashes.

I find it very hard to understand the political logic behind the downgrading of Left Alternative by the CC (or its dominant faction) at the very time when the Labour Party is clearly heading for a massive electoral defeat and when the depth and duration of the economic crisis makes it far easier to argue in favour of some form of socialist politics than has been the case for two (or possibly three) decades.

Any new left party, alliance or electoral bloc will only come out of continuous hard work over a relatively long period of time and it is ridiculous to assume that good votes will be obtained in every locality or on every occasion. To effectively abandon the electoral field until after the next general election seems very unwise, to say the least. Disillusioned working class voters breaking with Labour who might have been won over to a left alternative may well be lost to the Tories, to the British National Party (as in Stoke and Barking) or to abstention (along American lines, where a 50% turnout is predominantly a turnout of the wealthier 50% of the population). Such abdication is a betrayal of the class the SWP claims to represent.

The Left List's poor results in the London elections of May 2008 (which you suggest was the reason for Rees's sacking) were the product of a particular conjuncture - namely, the three-way split on the left (Left List, Respect, Unity for Peace and Socialism) and the marked polarisation between Livingstone and Johnson that was such a dominant feature of the closing days of the campaign.

A willingness to engage in serious electoral work in the medium to long term at the national level (or at least in the range of constituencies contested by the Socialist Alliance in 2001) would demonstrate the correctness of the belated decision to break with Galloway and abandon the popular front for the united front, because the underlying tension between Respect's (here I mean Respect Renewal's) socialist minority (mainly International Socialist Group/*Socialist Resistance* and ex-SWPers) and its non-socialist communalist majority (itself an unstable amalgam of genuinely fanatical political Islamists like Ridley and Nasseem and careerist businessmen whose links with Jamiat-i-Islami and the east London mosque are largely instrumental and not ideological) is bound to explode in the face of sustained competition from any force with a consistent commitment to class struggle politics.

In such circumstances Galloway would side with the Islamists and the socialist elements would eventually have to admit the error of their ways. To liquidate the Left Alternative is in effect to give Galloway another lease of political life, perpetuating a road block to a genuine realignment of the class-struggle left.

Toby Abse
email

Staying power

In 'Knitting' (September 18), Robbie Rix says: "... we had 15,566 readers last week - a bit of a drop from our previous high of over 40,000 and something I can't really explain."

One reason for the fall could be the lack of articles on the SWP and concentration on the minuscule and largely irrelevant Alliance for Workers' Liberty. The main article last week, with 'SWP dumps John Rees' as the front page headline, could rectify the situation.

I once met 'comrade' Rees, and his manner (as well as speech at a meeting)

confirmed your assessment of him as a 'control-freak'. There are many good and genuine rank-and-file SWP members, particularly in Manchester, but their deeply hierarchical structure enables people like Rees to rise to the top and stay there - like Bob Labi and Niall Mullholland of the Committee for a Workers' International and Stalin, Lenin and Trotsky in the USSR.

Could your Jack Conrad be similar?

Steve Wallis
Manchester

AWL garbage

The article by Moshé Machover on the Zionist polemics of Sean Matgamna of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty was excellent ('Propaganda and sordid reality', September 18). It was as good a piece of deconstruction of these social-imperialists as I've read.

As to whether Matgamna is a Zionist or merely an outright apologist for them, this is, in the words of Oscar Wilde, a distinction without a difference. The early 1980s was when anti-Zionism and support for the Palestinians began to take off in the labour movement. At that time I chaired the Labour Committee on Palestine (renamed the Labour Movement Campaign for Palestine after a Workers Revolutionary Party take-over), with Andrew Hornung, of Socialist Organiser/AWL as secretary. Andrew was a committed and sincere Jewish anti-Zionist who was as appalled as I was at where his organisation was going.

However, it did not come out of the blue. On Ireland SO had been retreating from support for republicanism into a form of federalism. Indeed Matgamna went further, in one article calling for the repartition of Ireland in order that the majority Catholic counties of Armagh and Tyrone could be incorporated into the free state. Likewise they had an abstentionist policy during the Malvinas/Falklands war.

What is at the heart of AWL politics is not, as the subtitle to Machover's article suggests, the fact that Matgamna has "swallowed a large chunk of Israeli propaganda", which he clearly has, but what has led him to be so receptive to this garbage.

When SO began its move towards a Zionist position in the mid-1980s, I was heavily involved in debating with them. I spoke at their conference on a number of occasions and I debated with both Matgamna and his acolytes. I never failed to point out the alliance that Zionism had always sought with imperialism and its ideological affinity (and worse) with anti-semitism, as a means of 'encouraging' Jewish emigration to Palestine. I dwelt at length on the racist and settler-colonial nature of the Israeli state and Zionism itself, but to no avail, because, as Moshé explains, the standard retort of these ignoramuses was that Zionism was just another form of nationalism. As if that was some kind of excuse.

As Moshé points out, Matgamna's love affair with Zionism is not based on any deep knowledge or understanding. He conflates Israeli and Jewish nationalism, whereas Zionism has always opposed the idea that the Israeli Jews (or Hebrews, as Moshe calls them) are a nation. For David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, supporters of such a position were derisively referred to as 'Canaanites'. Likewise to say that Jews, from China to France, who don't even speak the same language or share the same territory, are members of one nation is to take a leaf out of the *Protocols of the elders of Zion* and anti-semitic conspiracy theories.

When the AWL began to positively support the idea of a two-states

solution, which in essence is one state plus a Bantustan (or series of such), it placed itself in favour of an imperialist solution of the problem. Yet imperialism has no need for a Palestinian state. There are many people (though declining today) who support a two-state solution - not because they support the anti-Arab racism inherent in every aspect of Israeli society, but because they can see no other practical alternative. Norman Finkelstein, who no-one would accuse of Zionism, is one such person.

But Matgamna can see nothing wrong with a state where only Jews can utilise 93% of the land, or where over half the Arabs in Israel live in 'unrecognised' villages liable for instant demolition, or where a Judaification programme is at the heart of internal colonialism.

All this is nationalism and any attempt to oppose it is to "demonise" Zionism. Of course, for the AWL it is not Zionism, but anti-Zionism, which is demonic - hence why they have consistently opposed any attempt to give practical support to the Palestinians. When the campaign for a boycott of Israel took off, the AWL couldn't restrain themselves in their efforts to defend Israel.

We should not therefore be surprised that, just as the AWL supports the occupation of Iraq and previously supported the Mujahedin in Afghanistan, they now *de facto* support any future bombing of Iran.

Tony Greenstein
Brighton

Stalinists

Uncritical Stalinists are very much a rarity these days, but one can still have the dubious pleasure of encountering them now and again if one strays into the wrong place at the wrong time - or regularly peruses the letters page of the *Weekly Worker*.

Much of Andrew Northall's letter was answered by Mike Macnair in the same issue ('Stalinist illusions exposed', September 18). However, there remains the matter of the repression under Stalin's regime, and in particular the period to which Northall refers, when Nikolai Yezhov ran the secret police during 1937-38.

Northall is perhaps a little unusual in that he accepts the figures of the repression during the *Yezhovshchina* that have been released since the collapse of the Soviet regime; perhaps I'm being a little presumptive here, but I can't imagine, say, Harpal Brar using such tainted information. Nonetheless, it is fascinating that he considers that the 1.5 million arrests and 700,000 executions in two years "affected only a minuscule proportion of the population" of the Soviet Union. With a population of 170 million, this would equate in the Britain and Germany of the period to around 400,000 arrests and 200,000 executions.

Now, as truly murderous and barbaric as the Nazi regime was to its opponents, if one looks at the figures for Nazi Germany for that period, they are considerably lower. The first few months of the Nazi regime saw some 45,000 political prisoners being held in concentration camps, mostly for a short (if extremely unpleasant) period. The camp population then fell off considerably, as did the number of deaths of inmates. By June 1935, there were 23,000 political prisoners in state prisons; by December 1938 there were 11,265; those held in Nazi camps were considerably fewer in number. The numbers of deaths were nothing like as large as those in the Soviet Union - a few dozen per annum in each camp, rising to, in Buchenwald, 771 in 1938 and 1,235 in 1939, and these were

mainly the result of casual ill-treatment and disease, not state-endorsed executions.

Furthermore, political prisoners in Nazi Germany were indeed political opponents of Hitlerism, such as members and supporters of the Social Democratic Party, the Communist Party and smaller organisations, sworn enemies of fascism. During the *Yezhovshchina*, there was a popular joke in the Soviet Union about the man who answered the door to the GPU's snatch-squad: 'No, you've got the wrong flat; the communists live upstairs.' Now, whilst this oversimplified matters somewhat, there were a large number of Communist Party members swept up during this period, people who were, unlike those arrested by the Nazi state, loyal Soviet citizens. Some, no doubt, had some minor criticisms of the regime - such is the nature of things - but that does not mean for them, and indeed for the vast majority of those arrested, that their loyalty to the system was in doubt.

The destruction of the organisations of the German labour movement, the arrests of anti-Nazis and the horrific treatment that they received broke the back of the resistance to the Nazi regime, and, although resistance amongst the German population continued, the regime managed easily to contain it. Yet the numbers of those incarcerated and killed were small compared to the numbers arrested and executed during the *Yezhovshchina*. So why was it that the Soviet regime thought it necessary to arrest 1.5 million people, force them to confess to imaginary crimes (Khrushchev alluded to the methods used in his 'secret speech' in 1956), and to execute about half of those arrested?

If the Nazis defeated the opposition to their rule with far fewer arrests and executions, why did Stalin and co feel the need to arrest and execute so many people, not least when one considers that opposition to the Soviet regime was nothing as powerful and extensive as that which had existed in Germany when the Nazis took power in 1933? The "people of the past" whom Northall tells us were the main victims of the repression were indeed that: they had been terrorised, defeated and broken long before 1937. The Soviet regime was by then politically secure: so why the need for such extensive terror?

Finally, we come to the question of the effects of the *Yezhovshchina*. Northall assures us that "the Nazi fifth column had been eliminated". Now, whilst organised resistance to the Soviet regime barely existed, there was an undercurrent of discontent, and the consequences of this emerged during World War II. There was collaboration with the Nazis throughout occupied Europe, but it was particularly severe in the parts of the Soviet Union that the Nazis were occupying: between 500,000 and a million Soviet citizens took German pay, some of them fought against the Soviet partisans and armed forces, and the renegade Soviet general, Andrei Vlasov, led a force of some 50,000 men on the Nazi side. What other occupied European country saw such a level of collaboration?

Paul Flowers
London

Technicist

In his article, 'Stalinist illusions exposed', Mike Macnair was too easy on 'comrade' Stalin and the illusion promoted by to-the-core Stalinists. In the fourth paragraph, where he talks about rightist technicist ('revisionist') and ultra-left voluntarist (Stalinist-proper) tendencies, he forgets that post-war Stalin himself was mainly on the technicist side.

Just as after the civil war, the devastation after World War II left

ample opportunity for 'roaders' to sneak into the system, all with Stalin's approval: Voznesensky (although he got axed), Rodionov, Popov, Povkov and so on. In fact, according to one Yoram Gorlizki (*Ordinary Stalinism: the Council of Ministers and the Soviet neopatrimonial state, 1946-1953*), post-war Stalin, even while chair of Sovmin, was *not* active in 'government' (read economic) affairs at all, never attending meetings of the Sovmin bureau/presidium.

He instead focused on 'national security' concerns (hence the 'kitchen cabinet' meetings of the informal politburo, so, to be sure, Khrushchev was right about Stalin's own flagrant violation of party rules). Meanwhile, that proto-Dengist Beria never wanted party guys to interfere in ministerial assignments and promotions.

Ultimately, Stalin's own technicism culminated in the absence of near-death plans to get rid of Khrushchev or Malenkov (and their technicist patron-client networks), instead focusing on Molotov and Mikoyan (latter on part of the 'Anti-Party Group'), plus Beria (if only because of his notorious NKVD-based patron-client network).

Jacob Richter
email

Anti-alter ego

The idea of building 'socialism in one country' and the *slogan* for the seizure of power that is *socialist revolution* are often confused. Partisans of both Trotskyism and Stalinism are probably equally to blame. Tony Clark's version of this continues the confusion, unfortunately (Letters, September 11).

The common misconception, promoted by the partisans of Stalin, is that calls for socialism equal the call for building the first stage of communism confined to the borders of a single country (namely, Russia).

First, even the worst epigones of Stalin would never argue that 'socialism in one country' was a *slogan*. It was what they believe the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was *building*, and could be accomplished without the advent of world revolution, something they had come to peace with after 1921. They even *dated it*: 1936. *Voilà*, we have socialism!

This is a far cry, in my humble opinion, from what Lenin and everyone else was talking about. Lenin's article quoted by Tony, 'On the slogan for a United States of Europe', is about a *slogan*, not an analysis of whether the development of the productive forces exist within a country and the political devolution of the state could begin. When Lenin states, "... because it may be wrongly interpreted to mean that the victory of socialism in a single country is impossible..." in opposition to the slogan of 'United States of the World' it is *precisely* synonymous with 'socialist revolution', not a 'socialist society', which few then were even discussing (www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/aug/23.htm).

He argues later in the same essay that "after expropriating the capitalists and organising their own socialist production, the victorious proletariat of that country will arise against the rest of the world - the capitalist world - attracting to its cause the oppressed classes of other countries, stirring uprisings in those countries against the capitalists, and in case of need using even armed force against the exploiting classes and their states." In other words, *extend* the revolution to the "rest of the world". Wow, talk about flaming ultra-leftists - Tony ought to consider where he aims his polemical retard next time: Lenin, that dirty little Trot!

In all seriousness, Lenin is arguing

within the generalised socialist understanding that the struggle for socialism is an international one that will start *in one country*. In this, Lenin and Trotsky are alike and share no disagreements here.

David Walters
California

1924, not 1915

The doctrine of socialism in one country had its origins in 1924, not, as Tony Clark states, in 1915. Its author was Bukharin, not Lenin. It was officially adopted by the Communist International in 1926. By 1928, it was associated with Stalin, the consolidation of counterrevolution worldwide and the national interests of the USSR.

The doctrine was a rightwing, nationalist response to the defeat of the October revolution. It was anti-semitic and a form of national socialism. The civil war had wiped out proletarian democracy at home. Social democracy had destroyed it abroad. Bukharin argued that the building of socialism was realisable within the national limits of the Soviet Union independently of the rest of the world, as long as imperialists did not overthrow the regime by military means. It became the defining dogma of Stalinism.

The mature period of the doctrine coincided with Stalin's purges and the elite's attempt to extract an economic surplus from the working class by brute force and atomisation through police methods.

Its decline started with the elite's realisation that repression was an insufficient means of securing stability. Quasi-market forms of competition were also required. The decline of the doctrine gained momentum in the 1950s after Stalin's death. Khrushchev's speech and the invasion of Hungary in 1956 marked the beginning of its end.

The doctrine's terminal phase corresponded to the disintegration of the system prior to the 1980s. This led to a full embrace of the market, the assertion of local nationalism, war and attempts to halt the process of further collapse manifest in Russia and other parts of the former Soviet Union today. There is a large body of literature on the doctrine that readers can consult. They might like to start with Appendix II of Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*. Contrary to Stalinist opinion, it is neither ultra-left nor counter-revolutionary to accept Trotsky as an authority on the topic.

Nonetheless, some readers might prefer to study part 4, chapter 1 of Marcel Liebman's *Leninism Under Lenin*. They will discover from these and other sources that there is absolutely no evidence that Lenin supported the doctrine.

If these sources are accurate, why, Clark asks, did Lenin use the phrase "socialism in one country" in 1915? The answer is that, in 1915, Lenin was preoccupied with hopes of socialist victory, not with despair caused by defeat.

In 1915, Lenin was imagining the period after the proletariat has taken power. This is when the transition to socialism becomes possible. Lenin understood that the tendency for democratic planning to supersede market forces would be more advanced in one part of Europe (for example Britain rather than Russia) than another. He was not imagining, as Bukharin did in 1924, that a particular nation (especially one as backward as Russia) could become socialist in isolation from and in the absence of proletarian revolutions elsewhere. To insinuate that Lenin made this claim, as Clark does, is casuistical and dishonest.

Paul Smith
Glasgow

ACTION

Communist Forums

London: Sundays, 5pm, Diorama Arts Centre, 25B Vyner Street, London E2 (Bethnal Green tube). Study topic, plus weekly political report from Provisional Central Committee.

September 28: Study topic: Hal Draper and E Haberkern *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* Vol 5, War and revolution: 'Pulling the plug' (continued).

October 5: Redrafting the CPGB *Draft programme*: Section 5.3 - 'Transition to communism: communism'.

October 12: CMP monthly meeting (see below).

Sheffield: Wednesdays, 6pm, Sheffield Student Union. Call David for details: 07500 376795.

South Wales: Call Bob for details: 07816 480679.

Communist Students

Central London meetings, Thursdays, 7pm. 07522 408657; ben@communistsudents.org.uk.

Campaign for a Marxist Party

PO Box 61217, London N17 8XD.

London: Sunday October 12, 5pm: Debate: 'Israel and the threat of war against Iran'. Speakers: Moshé Machover, Hopi (personal capacity), Sean Matgamma, AWL, invited. Venue: to be announced.

Art under occupation

Until Friday October 31: Exhibition, 'Riding on fire' - paintings and sculptures by Iraqi artists, Artiquea Gallery, 82 Wandsworth Bridge Road, London SW6 (www.artiquea.co.uk).

Supported by Stop the War Coalition: 020 7731 2090.

Engels: a revolutionary life

Saturday September 27, 5pm: Book launch, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, Kings Cross, London N1. John Green introducing his new biography. 020 7837 4473; shop@housmans.com.

Hands Off the People of Iran

Monday September 29, 2pm: Press conference with Behrooz Karimizadeh and Kaveh Abbasian, Iranian student leaders, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. www.hopoi.org.

Stopping the next Gulf War

Wednesday October 1, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Model Inn, 14-15 Quay Street, Cardiff CF10. Debate, presented by Torab Saleth (Hands Off the People of Iran). Organised by Cardiff Radical Socialist Forum: www.radicalsocalist.org. Further information: Bob (07816 480679).

Public Services Not Private Profit

Norwich: Thursday October 2, 7pm, City Hall, St Peter's Street, NR2. With Ian Gibson MP, Jane Loftus (CWU), Mark Serwotka (PCS).

Manchester: Thursday October 9, 7pm, Mechanics Institute, 103 Princess Street, M1. With Brian Caton (POA), Bill Greenshields (NUT), Tony Kearns (CWU), Jenny Lennox (NUJ), Karen Reissmann, Mark Serwotka (PCS).

Bolton: Thursday October 16, 7pm, Friends Meeting House, 50 Silverwell Street. Speakers to be announced. www.publicnotprivate.org.uk.

National Shop Stewards Network

North East: Saturday October 4, 1pm: Public meeting, Tyneside Irish Centre, 43-49 Gallowgate, Newcastle Upon Tyne. 0771 5881901.

Wales: Saturday October 18, 12 noon to 4pm (registration from 11.30am): Conference, Temple of Peace, King Edward VII Avenue, Cardiff CF10. Speakers include Bob Crow.

robbo@redwills.freereserve.co.uk.

Free Miami Five

Tuesday October 7, 6pm: Vigil - 10 years on, US embassy, Grosvenor Square, London W1 (nearest tube: Bond Street). Bring candles. Organised by Cuba Solidarity Campaign: www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk.

Stop the War Coalition

Balham: Sunday October 12, 7.30pm: Film screening, Rageh Omaar's *Welcome to Tehran - a journey*, The Bedford, 77 Bedford Hill, Balham, London SW12. Followed by Q&A with Elahe Rostami, Golriz Kohali, Chris Nineham. www.wandsworth-stopwar.org.uk.

Norwich: Thursday October 23, 7pm, Friends Meeting House, Upper Goat Lane, NR2. With Jonathan Neale and Carol Turner. www.norwichstopwar.org.uk.

Stand up for your rights

Saturday October 18, 2pm to 8.30pm: Festival, drawing on the great struggles of the past. Waterloo Action Centre, 14 Bayliss road, London SE1. Sketches, music, debate, exhibition. Speakers include John McDonnell MP, Paul Feldman and Bill Bowring. Tickets £10 and £5. Organised by A World to Win: www.aworldtowin.net/about/standup.html.

Stop Trident

Monday October 27, 8am to late: Big Blockade, atomic weapons establishment, Aldermaston, Berkshire. Organised by Trident Ploughshares: www.tridentploughshares.org.

The kick inside

Lawrence Parker's book on the revolutionary opposition in the CPGB, 1960-1991. £5.15 (UK, including p&p); ask for international cost. Order from vorzedia@yahoo.co.uk.

CPGB wills

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

RDG

To contact the Revolutionary Democratic Group, email: rdgroup@yahoo.co.uk

Bluster and lies

As Alliance for Workers liberty patriarch Sean Matgamna continues to excuse an Israeli attack on Iran, his organisation is descending further and further into irrationality, writes Mark Fischer

The latest charge against us from Sean Matgamna - the self-proclaimed Zionist who controls the Alliance for Workers' Liberty - is that "the unprincipled little scoundrels who run the *Weekly Worker* group - Mark Fischer and Jack Conrad, the Chickenshit Kids" - have "turned shy and bashful" and are trying to duck a debate with AWL on Israel and Iran (see '*Weekly Worker* chickens out of Israel debate': www.workersliberty.org/story/2008/09/20/weekly-worker-evades-israel-debate).

Now, it is true that Matgamna's favoured polemical device is to produce huge volumes of nonsense, of palpably untrue accusations and lies piled one on top of another to generally befuddle and divert the reader.

This specific charge, however, is so ludicrously and transparently untrue that I am baffled as to who he thinks he might convince with it. Or rather I would be if I and other CPGBers had not spent so much time approaching and aggressively engaging with AWLers over the weekend at the Convention of the Left in Manchester - a practical example, as if it were needed, of just how "shy" the CPGB is of debating Matgamna and his dismal troops! It is clear from their reactions that Matgamna is consciously playing to their sect patriotism and willingness to be lied to if it blackens the reputation of the CPGB.

Both on the small Stop the War march on September 20 and at the Convention of the Left the following day, our comrades went out of their way to engage with the small number of AWLers we encountered. There were two things to note about this.

First, they came across very much like members of the Socialist Workers Party in their sullen and surly demeanour, in how quickly they would take mock-offence with some imaginary 'insult', 'lie' or 'patronising' behaviour by our comrades. Indeed, AWLer Ed Maltby appeared at one stage to be anxious to provoke a physical confrontation of some sort - or, at least, a verbal version of a ruck. He suggested that our position that the ideas defended by Matgamna should have no place in the workers' movement was in effect a call for the organisation to be *physically* removed from the demos, meetings and general activities of the left.

Of course, I contradicted this nonsense and referred him to Peter Manson's article, which explicitly stated: "We shall strive to defeat the ideas of first campism and seek to drive them out of the workers' movement. Hence we not only fight the AWL minnows, but the rightwing and Blairite parasites who dominate the Labour Party, the TUC and many trade unions. Of course, that does not mean witch-hunting the AWL (as they accuse us of wanting to do). We are against proscribed lists, bureaucratic bans, etc. But, yes, because we recognise that the AWL's politics represent alien, reactionary, anti-working class ideas in our movement and have a terrible and treacherous logic, it is quite right to clear out those leaders who insist on upholding them" (*Weekly Worker* September 4).

However, while I was actually explaining this to him, Maltby



Moshé Machover: ready to debate

began to talk across me, stupidly claiming: "So you're going to turn our stall, over are you, Mark? You're going to get us removed from this demo and banned from the trade unions, are you?"

Many readers will be familiar with this sort of crap. It is exactly the type of nonsense we have had to put up with from SWPers who get flummoxed by our arguments. It is instructive to watch AWLers turn to this kind of lurid make-believe world when they are under pressure from the left.

Which brings us to the second and

related feature of AWLers' response to the CPGB - again very SWPish in its nature. Once a firewall of irrational hostility is established, behind it almost any lie can be disseminated and believed in a sect (expediently 'believed', perhaps). Thus, I was confidently informed by various AWLers:

- That leading AWLer Mark Osborn was "banned" by the CPGB from coming into the opening session on Iran at this year's Communist University - that is, the exact *opposite* of the true course of events! The

man was invited in, offered a stall and guaranteed a generous 10 minutes to make his case from the floor. As readers will recall, he lamely responded: "Why would I want to come into your shit event?" ... and instead carried on his lonely task of distributing leaflets to the participants as they rolled up (see *Weekly Worker* August 28).

- That Hands Off the People of Iran has explicitly defended the right of the Iranian theocracy to acquire nuclear weapons!
- That the *Weekly Worker* has stated

Hypocritical evasion

The story of our attempt to organise a debate with the AWL on Iran underlines that organisation's fear of direct confrontation with our ideas.

The AWL was originally contacted on May 30 to provide a speaker on the issue for this year's Communist University. Typically, it took some prompting from us to get a response, but eventually AWLer Tom Unterrainer wrote to tell us that they still had no confirmed speaker to offer us, but that they were "keen" to debate "Imperialism and Afghanistan: then and now" (email, June 13). That is, a discussion we have had a number of times with this organisation in the past - including at CU!

In my reply I doubted "if there will be much appetite in our ranks for a rerun" of this debate. However, on July 1 wrote again suggesting a "compromise": I floated the idea that "space is made for a debate with us" at the AWL's school, starting on July 11, on either Iraq or Iran ("you choose which one"). With that covered, "we would be more than happy to debate you on Afghanistan once again" at CU (email, June 27).

On July 5 - at the SWP's Marxism 2008 - we were verbally informed by

Unterrainer that this was out of the question, as the timetable for the AWL's event had been "settled" for some time. This confirmed once again the organisation's extreme sensitivity when it comes to this issue. After all, back in 2007 we invited a member of the AWL's 'troops out now' minority (David Broder, who has since quit the AWL) to speak at CU. The AWL apparatus objected - ostensibly because we invited the comrade directly rather than going through its central office.

So this year I did approach the central office and asked for "an AWL speaker" on the question of Iran at CU, making it clear it was up to them to choose who they wanted. The AWL declined the invitation.

After Matgamna's "discussion piece" excusing an Israeli attack on Iran appeared in *Solidarity* on July 24, this paper savaged him the following week (July 31). He was soon demanding "a public and unequivocal apology"; "the same space as that taken by their libellous fantasy-piece about me to reply"; and a debate on ... Israel-Palestine! (www.workersliberty.org/node/11011). Note the almost desperate attempt to discuss any question other than the one the AWL was

invited by the CPGB to debate at this year's Communist University - Iran, the prospect of war against that country and the attitude Marxists should take.

In fact, we actually phoned the AWL office several times *during* CU (August 9-16) to offer a slot: we were either fobbed off or ignored, despite the fact that the leaflet AWLer Mark Osborn distributed on the first day of this school challenged the CPGB "to debate us [on Israel-Iran] at a time and place and with a chair acceptable to both sides".

Laughably then, on September 19, leading AWLer Martin Thomas emailed our office: "Am I right: that you are willing to debate the issues about Israel and Iran?" Er, yes - how did you guess?

Since then, there has been a lot of toing and froing over a date for such a debate - apparently Matgamna and the AWL were unavailable for a weekend debate until mid-October. The haggling was cut across by the organisation of a meeting on the same subject - broached by the AWL itself - between Moshé Machover and Sean Matgamna.

CPGB comrades will be present on October 12. But will Matgamna show? ●

that the AWL is *advocating* an Israeli nuclear strike on Iran.

And, again like the SWP, when CPGBers did manage to nail AWLers on these flimsy lies, we got variations of the old line - 'I don't have time to talk to you sectarians'; 'I have really important work to do'; 'Now leave me alone to sell my papers'; etc.

Similarly, the latest offering from Matgamna is equally fragile and easy to knock down - but then it really is not designed to convince anyone other than wilfully credulous AWLers - people anxious to believe almost *anything* negative about their chief tormentors, the CPGB.

Thus, the patriarch suggests that, having "meekly agreed" to debate his organisation (see box below for evidence of how 'timid' we have been about confronting Matgamna in a face-to-face), we began "squirming and backsliding". We "are now proposing a debate between AWL and a shadowy outfit in which they are the main stakeholders, called the 'Campaign for a Marxist Party'. Their side is to be represented by Moshé Machover, a member of the 'campaign'."

This truly is an odd assertion, even for someone with as flakey and tenuous a general grasp on events as Matgamna.

Originally, the London CMP (a "shadowy outfit" - what earth is that meant to imply?) unanimously agreed at its September 5 meeting to try to host a debate between the CPGB and the AWL. Then, on September 12, the AWL's Martin Thomas directly approached comrade Machover to debate Matgamna, initially in an AWL meeting. Comrade Machover - a CMP member, who was present at the September 7 meeting - was understandably less than keen to engage with Matgamna on his home turf, and so the CMP agreed to host the proposed Matgamna-Machover debate (and also agreed to move it from October 5 to October 12 after the AWL complained that the original date was inconvenient).

So Matgamna's assertions that (a) we are trying to avoid a CPGB-AWL showdown and (b) we are proposing a debate between the AWL and the CMP as such is a lie. The CMP is willing to *host* a debate that the AWL itself sought with a comrade who has written two crushingly effective polemics against its scab line (*Weekly Worker* August 28 and September 18).

Comrade Machover is not representing the CPGB in this debate - although there are considerable areas of agreement between us. Thus Matgamna's claim that "[Machover] and the *Weekly Worker* group have different positions on the Israel-Palestine question!" is totally irrelevant. I can assure the AWL that CPGB comrades will be very much in evidence at the October 12 debate (assuming the AWL finally agrees to it), will make their views of Matgamna's scab, pro-imperialist line very explicit, will record the proceedings for wider dissemination and will write an extensive report for the following issue of our paper.

After this meeting, Matgamna and his supporters in the AWL can judge for themselves whether the CPGB is actually composed of "such god-awful wimps" ●

CONVENTION

Left doesn't unite



Good to talk

“It’s official - the left unites!” That is the bold claim made by the Convention of the Left in its September 22 bulletin. Those present agreed to the statement of intent that was developed by the CL organising committee. The declaration was put forward by John McDonnell MP and supported by Respect councillor Salma Yaqoob.

While the convention brought 300 or so people together in the same building, that, unfortunately, is not

quite the same thing as the left uniting. The CL postponed any discussion on motions or decisions on actions, etc until the recall conference some time in November. We said that the CL would be a talking shop and we were right.

It is true that the convention did see some debate and it was organised in a way that was more open and inclusive than most left events. The problem, however, is that the so-called ‘20% that divides us’ was skirted

around. It is only by tackling our differences head-on that we can hope to achieve real unity. And, of course, there is no intention on the part of the organisers to aim for that unity to take party form.

After the weekend the number of participants dropped considerably, yet sessions were reasonably well attended for weekday meetings. The CL made space for discussions on a wide range of issues, but what was missing, and indicative of how the

majority of our movement approach unity, was the lack of time given over to assess what has gone wrong and how we are going to fix it. The view that if we stop arguing about what our disagreements are and just get on with working together on the basis of the ‘80% where we agree’, then everything

The problem, however, is that the so-called ‘20% that divides us’ was skirted around

will be fine. In reality it is a recipe for unprincipled lash-ups and inevitably splits further down the line.

Despite this lack of clarity the CL is seen by some as the start of a process to rebuild the base organs of our class. They hope that the spread of the CL across the country could begin to build up better coordination and confidence amongst the working class and its campaigns. For this to happen, it would need not only the full commitment of the main left groups, but the drawing in of thousands of others. Neither of those things are about to happen - the Socialist Workers Party and *Morning Star’s* Communist Party of Britain have hardly thrown themselves into the CL, while the Socialist Party stayed away altogether.

A more likely scenario will be the holding of a few poorly attended local conventions, set up by comrades

who might have or might not have participated in the Manchester convention. A recall conference will hardly be a mass event and will perhaps be even less representative of our movement. It would certainly lack the organisational clout needed to move it forward, given that nobody involved at the top is even aiming for a principled Marxist party.

The CL ended on September 24 with a session entitled ‘Question time of the left’. The panel was made up of an ‘official communist’, the CPB’s Robert Griffiths, Mark Serwotka, the shibboleth-dropping Lindsey German of the SWP, left nationalist Colin Fox (Scottish Socialist Party), the left’s favourite Green, Derek Wall, the ever-present John McDonnell MP and left liberal Hilary Wainwright (*Red Pepper*). Unfortunately George Galloway MP did not attend and was replaced by Manchester Respect member Clive Searle.

The whole affair was well-mannered, inoffensive and illustrated perfectly the problem the left faces. Everyone agreed on the need for better public services, a windfall tax and opposition to war. What no-one touched upon was the chronic failure of the left to come together in a single, democratic party of working class socialism. Just what went wrong with Respect, the SSP, the Socialist Alliance, Socialist Labour Party ...? Why has the left shrunk even further into the political wilderness? Far from being the ‘historic moment’ that was claimed by some, CL ‘unity’ is built on such a fragile and superficial basis that it is destined, just like its forerunners, to fall at the first hurdle ●

Chris Stafford

Apologetics versus solidarity

The CL hosted a debate between Campaign Iran and Hands Off the People of Iran on September 24 - though it took time to convince some on the organising committee that a session featuring two organisations with such different approaches would have anything at all going for it.

SWP member Naz Massoumi opened the meeting for Campaign Iran by outlining the continuing imperialist threats against Iran and the growing media offensive aimed at justifying a military strike. Comrade Massoumi declared that Iran was definitely not trying to develop nuclear weapons and was under threat because of its oil reserves.

He claimed that the “victories of the Iranian people” (he meant the establishment of the Islamic republic) constituted a massive blow against the US. What he did not discuss was how the 1979 revolution ended in counterrevolution which eventually resulted in the slaughter of thousands of leftwing militants. He repeated the tired old argument that any criticism of the Iranian regime at the moment is tantamount to aiding the imperialists as they prepare for war.

Chris Stafford (Hopi and CPGB) responded by stressing the need for a twin-track approach - while

imperialism poses the greatest threat to the Iranian people, the theocratic regime is no progressive force. It is essential to do all in our power to stop the drive to war, while simultaneously acting in solidarity with the working class and democratic movements in Iran in their struggle to defeat theocracy.

Vicky Thompson (Hopi steering committee and Permanent Revolution) also emphasised that the greatest threat to the Iranian people is posed by US-led imperialism. She spoke about the developing movement of workers, students and women that is breathing fresh hope into the struggle against both imperialism and the Islamic republic.

The debate was sharp, with several comrades damning the SWP and Campaign Iran for its lack of solidarity with the Iranian working class and social movements. Peter Grant from Aslef spoke about how his union was internationalist and was committed to building links with workers across the globe as well as fighting the drive to war. Other comrades tried to get the meeting to take a vote on whether Hopi should be allowed to affiliate to the Stop the War Coalition, but the chair refused point blank to allow this ●

Robbie Folkard

Rethink needed

On Saturday September 20 the Stop the War Coalition, in conjunction with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Military Families Against the War, held a demonstration in Manchester to coincide with the Labour Party conference. It called for troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan and an end to the continuous US-UK threats of war - in particular against Iran. At the halfway point outside the conference venue, there was a two-minute silence in memory of those killed in Iraq and Afghanistan and a letter of protest to Gordon Brown was handed in.

According to figures provided by the STWC, 5,000 protesters turned up to march. Had this been accurate, it would have been unsatisfactory enough, especially given the warm sunshine. But in reality the true figure was about half that quoted by the STWC (and repeated by *Socialist Worker* and the *Morning Star*). By the end of the short rally this had been further reduced to just a thousand or so, listening to what was largely a rehash of old speeches - if you had been to any previous anti-war demonstration you would already have heard them.

You would also have recognised most of the faces. Speakers included Lindsey German, Tony Benn, Rose Gentle, Andrew Murray and Seamus Milne. Highlights included Tony Benn, arguing that now it was more crucial than ever that we “lose our sectarian attitudes” and work together to achieve our common



Less and less

goals; and Rose Gentle (Military Families Against the War) who showed her determination to keep on marching - “If we have to, we will continue for another four years.”

That was also the message of comrade German, who emphasised once again that imperialist war is not good. Not exactly a sophisticated message, but in any case the crowd was almost exclusively made up of people involved in leftwing politics who did not need telling (although maybe she had just noticed the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty).

Around the time of the Iraq invasion large numbers of young people entered left politics. This pool of recruits has now almost

completely dried up - as, march after march, rally after rally, support for the anti-war movement continues to decline. The huge turnouts of 2003 are just a memory and even the left has fallen into demoralisation. The Socialist Workers Party had urged its comrades to organise a coach to Manchester from every STWC branch, but it failed to persuade even its own members to turn out.

Carrying on as before is no longer an option, comrades. It is not just the anti-war movement, but the revolutionary left itself that needs to undergo a root and branch rethink ●

Mohsen Sabbagh

CRISIS

Drip-feed capitalism

The past week has seen the spectacular collapse of giant financial institutions and unprecedented state intervention. **Hillel Ticktin** spoke to Peter Manson about the likely outcome

The immediate question in relation to the current crisis and the US government's response is whether the funds to be authorised by Congress are going to be sufficient to stabilise the world financial system and in the short term capitalism itself.

A number of measures have been taken. Companies have been taken over, but Lehman has gone bankrupt (the US authorities now probably realise they made a mistake in allowing this). What is effectively being done is the buying up of the so-called 'distressed loans' or 'toxic debt', but, even according to official figures, the sum on offer does not represent the total of all the loans that have stopped performing. A figure of \$1.5 trillion has been mentioned (even if \$0.3 trillion of this has already been dealt with). In fact nobody knows the true amount.

Cash has been pumped into the US money markets funds (a \$3.5 trillion market), which had previously been regarded as a haven for pensions, etc. Most importantly, \$700 billion will be supplied to the banks by Congress, but everything depends on the terms. Institutions previously regarded as safe, where many ordinary people had their savings, are now in trouble. In addition the USA has supplied and is supplying funds to international markets, including central banks.

The reaction of the market shows that investors are not 100% sure whether the government intervention will work or whether the measures will get through Congress. There was a rise in the price of gold and commodities and a decline in the dollar, and this implied that no-one is certain as to the outcome. There has been a subsequent decline in the stock markets. In other words, it might just work, but it will not resolve the whole situation beyond the short term. It will do no more than hold the line for a time.

The only comparison that can be made is with 1929 - with the difference that this time the bourgeoisie is not prepared to allow a deep depression to occur: They are only too aware of the consequences, which would be much greater for them than in the 30s, when they were not really threatened politically in the United States.

Second phase

The question is, though, is it going to work? I do not know, but there is a chance that it will. If so, I would say that we are at this moment somewhere between the middle and the end of the first phase of a crisis. We are certainly not in a full-blown crisis yet. The first phase has to be financial - that is what happened before the great depression and it is what is happening now. The next phase, assuming there is a degree of stabilisation, will be the overall economic downturn.

That will mean closures, redundancies and relatively high levels of unemployment. Indeed sales are already down. In the United States, which is, of course, the crucial economic centre. Car sales, for example, have decreased from a peak of around 18 million per year to about 12 million. The major American, as opposed to Japanese, car companies - General Motors, Chrysler and Ford - are all in trouble. Congress has voted to give them all a loan, which shows that the administration is prepared to support industry as well as the financial sector.



Finance capital

If there is some success in stabilising the financial system for the time being, I expect the second phase of the crisis to focus much more on industry, resulting in a fall in employment and declining real wages.

The other aspect of the overall downturn is one of deflation. Although the price of food and raw materials has gone up, in my view that is very largely a question of speculation. Why is that happening? The overall reason for the downturn is that the surplus capital within the system has been unable to find an outlet and is consequently turning on itself, as it were. This situation produced the multiplication of derivatives - \$596 trillion at the end of 2007.

The question is, where can capital be invested in order to make a profit? It is not clear that there will be a return to investing in industry. There is no point in doing so if what it produces cannot be sold. So a high share of the surplus value produced is going to finance rather than industrial capital, which in itself creates a problem. The problem arises because the poor are getting poorer, which means that the ordinary person cannot actually buy the goods produced.

This aspect is intensifying. Wage levels have dropped and this results in a vicious circle. People will then not be able to pay off their loans or meet their credit card payments, which produces another financial crisis. Just as it was impossible to predict the details of the current financial crisis and how the government would react, so it is impossible to predict how the US or UK governments will intervene next time.

If money is pumped into the system, the question is, how far can governments go, how much can they spend, without causing higher inflation? In Britain the government is under attack for presiding over a large budget deficit, but in fact there is no objective reason why the deficit should not be increased from 3%-4% to 6%-7%. This is particularly so while interest rates are low, which means that government loans are less costly. The budget deficit is very high in Italy and Belgium, for example. It is also perfectly possible for government debt to be increased - in the United States it is rising exponentially. The question is, how far can both the budget deficit and government debt be allowed to rise? Certainly a lot further without causing any great grief to the system.

The argument against following such a policy is that this would produce an increase in inflation. That would be true if there were full employment, but in current circumstances inflation would be unlikely to be pushed up by very much. The current rise is caused by increases in the price of food and raw materials (which are, as the government claims, external factors) and that, as I say, results from speculation rather than a boom.

But this speculation is actually part and parcel of the downturn, not some extraneous feature, as the government alleges. The capitalist class, finding nowhere to invest, resorts to speculating on the price of oil, which might produce a fairly high return. Last week the government actually helped the distressed

commodities sector because prices had fallen so rapidly.

As long as there is a downturn, the government will continue bailing out companies in trouble. In principle it is possible for the government to pump in a lot more money without causing a large rise in inflation - although in fact it would, I think, still be forced to intervene in this way even if it resulted in some increase.

A caveat, though. The bourgeoisie is prepared to bale out the system, not reflate it. If they felt that the current course of action would produce full employment and therefore stronger unions and a more threatening working class, they just would not do it.

We cannot predict where things will be in, say, a year's time - that will partly depend on the class struggle. We should expect much worse living conditions. So far people have not been affected in the way that is likely in the near future. While the standard of living has declined slightly, most people have kept their jobs. Of course, in Britain there is a knock-on effect when workers in the financial sector are sacked, unlike in Europe, which does not have such a huge proportion of its workforce employed in finance. Even in the United States, the effect is not so marked.

Turning point

What is slowly being played out is a turning point for capitalism. We will be witnessing what is effectively the third great depression - the first was at the end of the 19th century and the second was that of the 30s. The question is not so much why it

is happening, but why it did not happen before.

The answer I would give is the effect of World War II and the subsequent cold war, which maintained a political-economic stability. Capitalism has only limited means of doing this - imperialism, war (including cold war) and the welfare state. With the end of the cold war has come the end of stability. The forms this can take are now more limited than they have been at any time over the last 60 or 70 years.

The end of this period is producing effects which nobody expected would be quite so spectacular. This has already changed the mood among the whole population from top to bottom - maybe for ever. People now see that the market constantly malfunctions and it is absolutely clear that some form of planning or government intervention in the economy is essential.

And now Marx is making a reappearance in the newspapers. For example, Peter Jay - Jim Callaghan's son-in-law who became ambassador to the United States - now wants to apologise to Paul Foot for having dismissed Marxism. One of the papers quotes a woman who recalls being warned by the Workers Revolutionary Party that the crisis is coming. The fact that they are now printing this stuff is in itself interesting.

Obviously, then, the opportunities for the left are growing. Its reaction ought to be to stress the fact that the system does not work, the need for planning and for the working class to take power, for socialism. Instead we have had comments about 'socialisation for the rich'. The point is not so much propaganda about the rich having their fortunes secured through state intervention, but demands for workers who are dismissed to have their wages guaranteed. Nobody should be evicted from their homes for non-payment of rent. These are demands that would protect the ordinary person. Of course, the state could not meet such demands - it would cause more bankruptcies.

It is not true that there is socialisation for the rich - this form of state intervention has nothing to do with socialism. In any case, for most of the rich, a company collapse hardly affects their personal wealth. The state is not bailing them out: it is bailing out the system. And it is the system against which we ought to be directing our fire rather than a small number of 'greedy people'.

It is clear that the collapse of HBOS cannot be blamed on 'short selling', although such action might have accelerated its takeover. Of course, it is true that there are always a certain number of people in the know who can take advantage of that knowledge, but their actions are not the cause of the crisis.

It is like saying that the problem is that capitalists are greedy and should pay their workers more. They cannot do so if they are going to run their companies at a profit - they have to compete and reinvest. Similarly the US banking firms really had no alternative but to sell as many mortgages as they could, given the nature of finance capital. Whether or not they were greedy, they had to do it. The focus on individuals, such as 'short sellers', is a deliberate attempt to distract attention from the system itself ●

We can't win alone

A united campaign across the public sector is needed to break through the government's pay limit, writes PCS militant **Dave Vincent**. But Labour-loyal union leaders are holding back the struggle

In a Channel 4 *Dispatches* programme this week it was revealed that child poverty is as bad as it was in 1997, 73% of people are concerned about their financial future and personal insolvency has gone up by 336% since New Labour was elected to the theme tune, 'Things can only get better'. Personal credit debt has gone up from £84 billion to £231 billion.

Unemployment is now rising fast and house repossessions have doubled since 2007. Pensioners are in dire straights. RPI inflation is 4.7%, but the cost of living for many people has increased by far more than that. For example, the food bill for a family has gone up by more than £1,000 over the past year.

Low paid civil servants who oversee benefits and tax and run every government department face these pressures too. Their union - the Public and Commercial Services union - is currently balloting them on the question of taking further strike action to achieve pay rises to at least match inflation, with the result to be announced in mid-October.

The national executive's proposed strategy requires members to take three separate days of unpaid strike action on as yet unspecified dates over the coming months, and the NEC asks to be given maximum tactical flexibility in a variety of circumstances. There will be the usual initial national day of action across the civil service, followed by coordinated action with other unions (hopefully) and possibly multi-departmental action on a rolling regional basis.

In recent years PCS has called more strike action - and carried it through - than any other union. However, four years into the PCS 'national campaign' under a continually re-elected left NEC and socialist general secretary, we seem no nearer to securing a return to national collective pay bargaining. Whilst the NEC boasts of its 'job protocols' agreement with the treasury (supposedly making compulsory redundancies harder to implement), tens of thousands of jobs have been lost (and continue to be lost) by simple natural wastage, with no opposition from the union.

By contrast it has continually called action over pay, but the tactics employed have not produced any real victories. This has resulted in a situation where there is now a huge risk of falling support for the next action (some departmental managements are already claiming this is the position now). It is easy to foresee a vicious circle where the left loses credibility, activists become demoralised, we register further defeats and support for industrial action further diminishes. There is an air of desperation both in the circulars and publications issued by the NEC and in the various activist meetings called - with long-serving (long-suffering?) members querying the effectiveness of the overall strategy. PCS does face a number of difficulties compared to other unions.

Firstly there is often very little coverage in the national media when

members do take action. This is not for want of trying on the part of the union - the PCS press office issues dozens of press releases in advance of any strike. PCS members saw, for example, the National Union of Teachers getting substantial coverage just for its announcement of a ballot. That was followed by full reporting of the result and lead-up to the action, and blanket coverage on the day. The Prison Officers Association action (admittedly illegal) was front-page news and featured prominently on television bulletins. PCS members see hardly a mention of the repeated action they take and start wondering aloud why they should lose another day's pay for so little publicity and even less result.

Secondly, PCS is not affiliated to the Labour Party (and I agree it should not be). That means there is less scope for the behind-the-scenes wheeler-dealing that occurs with unions affiliated to Labour.

Thirdly, we are directly employed by the government itself - unlike, for instance, those public sector workers who are employed/funded by local authorities, which have a degree of leeway in fixing council tax rates and deciding on spending priorities.

Brown and co see it as essential that their pay policy is fully imposed on civil servants. Even during an economic upturn above-inflation pay rises would see everyone else demand parity with civil servants. Then, when the economy takes a turn for the worse, it becomes even more imperative for the government to prevent a decent pay rise - it must be seen to be keeping down its own employees' wages when urging 'restraint' for everyone else.

Fourthly, the fact that the left controls the PCS makes the government even more determined not to give in.

That we need to break through the two percent limit and fight for a real pay rise is not in doubt. But there is a world of difference between action taken enthusiastically and that undergone out of resigned loyalty. The latter is finite. In the department for work and pensions (DWP) members have had 21 separate days of action and, despite the rosy picture continually painted by Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party comrades, all the non-party activists I know tell me members are getting fed up. Imagine the difference if those 21 days had been taken all in one go (would 21 days have been necessary?). Members are also up for paid selected action - used intelligently. But the NEC will not sanction it anywhere in the civil service.

Why let the employer know what weapons you will *not* use in advance? We saw what could have been achieved during the public sector pensions battle, which was abandoned far too soon, when just the threat of united action had obtained concessions.

What is really needed, however, is united, public sector-wide action - as PCS continually calls for, of course. I have held 30 workplace meetings of members in my area of the ministry of justice and the only action they have had any enthusiasm for is public

sector-wide. The mood is against PCS going it alone.

But the fact that most unions remain affiliated to the Labour Party, in defiance of the wishes of their membership, militates against such united action. They continue to hand over millions of pounds in subscriptions, whilst holding back industrial action against attacks by that party in government. How else can you explain the fact that Unison, Unite and the GMB called for united action in Scotland, where there is a Scottish National Party administration, on September 24? This followed a similar action on August 20. Yet the same unions refuse to act in England, keeping their members in the dark for months on end.

The NUT is also balloting for action over a similar period as PCS, which means that both unions could be on strike simultaneously, as occurred on April 24. But this time twice as many civil servants can be brought out. So why don't the other unions call out council workers alongside teachers and civil servants now, while the government and Gordon Brown are on the ropes?

Labour-loyal union tops are loath to do so in case it harms the party's chances of re-election. If there were a Tory government, however, they would still be reluctant, because their association with Labour might be used to harm its chances of replacing the Conservatives. Knighthoods for retired union bureaucrats is the reward for a long career of betraying their members' interests.

When economic circumstances are now causing millions of working class people to question capitalism's priorities, the left is in a mess and cannot provide any electoral alternative. Time and again attempts at left unity have either split (Respect, Scottish Socialist Party) or been sabotaged (Socialist Alliance), all the while keeping out anything approaching revolutionary socialist politics. No wonder we are unable to carry much weight with union members.

Numerous left organisations keep calling for the rebuilding of a shop stewards movement and town committees to be set up to facilitate closer links between unions. The SP has supported the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), while the SWP went for Organising for Fighting Unions (OFFU), but both of these were token attempts to organise.

I have attended events in Manchester called by both NSSN and OFFU, but they have been top-down talking shops. No motions are called for. Platforms are staffed by union tops, contributions from the floor are limited.

A real shop stewards network, organised by rank and file activists, is needed. It must be independent of party control and union leaderships. It should be free to discuss the Labour-union link, the anti-union laws, and how to win disputes. The NSSN operates on the basis that it must not interfere in the affairs of individual unions - which is exactly what is wrong with it! We should all be 'interfering' where the interests of the working class are concerned ●

Communist Party books



■ **Which road?**

The programmes of 'official communism' were designed to serve those in the workers' movement who had no interest in revolution, those who preferred compromise with capitalism rather than its destruction.

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THEORY

Science, religion

What does it mean to be human? This is an edited version of the speech given by **Chris Knight** of the Radical Anthropology Group to Communist University 2008

I would like to start by saying something about science in general, before going on to address the work of Marx and Engels as anthropologists. Finally, I will talk about the origin of language and religion.

Science

I sometimes hear it said that Marxism is a science - and when I hear those words I always shudder. There is an article in the *Weekly Worker* called 'The science of Marxism'; I wrote the piece, but completely disagree with the title it was given. I do not think that Marxism is at all a science. That is an entirely incorrect way of putting things; it has nothing to do with what Marx or Engels ever said.

In my view - and I think in Marx's and Engels' view - there are two types of knowledge: science on the one hand and ideology on the other. Both are knowledge and all knowledge confers power. So what is the difference between science and ideology? It is quite simple. Ideology confers power on *some* people, at the expense of others; but science is empowering for everybody. If you are a human being, you can get power from science. Engels put it beautifully when he wrote: "The more ruthlessly and disinterestedly science proceeds, the more it finds itself in harmony with the interests of the workers."

So science has to be autonomous, working for itself, with a community of scientists putting science first and not any political agenda. Putting a political agenda first would obviously be at the expense of science and would damage the revolutionary potential of autonomous science. There is no form of knowledge more revolutionary than science.

Why do I think it is so wrong to say that Marxism is a science? Why do I think it is so dangerous to play that trick on what Marx and Engels stood for, as was done throughout the period of Stalinism? When I hear it said that Marxism is a science, I think of Lysenko and all those attempts to cut off Marxism from science and make a science of Marxism. It is dangerous because it can lead Marxists to think that they do not have to know anything about the real sciences, because, after all, they are Marxists and Marxism is itself a science.

This is the exact opposite of what Marx and Engels themselves actually thought. They believed it was essential to keep abreast of every scientific development. We too have to put science first and wage a political battle to maintain and defend the political autonomy of science itself.

In the present period no task could be more urgent, especially in view of what capitalism is doing to the planet. It is no good having a 'position' on climate if you are not engaged in the *science* of climate. Of course, there are controversies about this subject, but they actually fall within a very narrow band - the scientific community is broadly in agreement that if the global temperature goes up by more than two degrees, that is probably the tipping-point beyond which the future of life on earth is put in doubt.

Science *matters*, and what we in the Radical Anthropology Group do is try to put the big picture together.



Primitive communism: fun

Anthropology is the study of what it means to be human, but that question cannot be addressed without asking lots of other questions. For example, what it means to be almost but not quite human, such as chimpanzees - intelligent, politically organised creatures. There is no better way of getting to grips with what it means to be human than by experiencing life with creatures that are so close to being human.

Primitive communism

Sometimes I encounter comrades who do not quite get what Marx and Engels meant when they described hunter-gatherer, pre-capitalist, egalitarian societies as "communist". There is a view which says, 'It's sort of communism, but

it's a bit primitive' - on the basis that such societies have so little wealth that they could not *be* anything other than communist. This view also maintains that we cannot understand the meaning of communism by living with contemporary hunters and gatherers.

But that is not at all the message I get from reading Engels in *The origin of the family, private property and the state*. It is not just that hunter-gatherers are egalitarian, that they share and they do not have private property. The key thing for Marxists and communists is that there can be no communism without abundance - in fact without superabundance. Scarcity of any kind leads to conflict, which itself leads

to inequality.

I sometimes meet comrades who think that hunter-gatherers lived in poverty and scarcity. They are so, so wrong. That misconception was put right long ago - for example, by Marshall Sahlins in his brilliant book *Stone Age economics*. One chapter is about "the original affluent society". The crucial point is that hunter-gatherers live in abundance. Yet too many comrades conceptualise everything through western ideology, leading them to conclude, for instance, that if people do not have televisions they must be living in poverty.

Some of the tribes we have been living with and studying have access to both worlds - they can go to the flesh pots and get a taste of

western life. They tire of it and go back home. All I can say is that they have the world's best diet, the most healthy possible nutrition and plenty of spare time to enjoy all the pleasures of life. The world's wealthiest people spend a fortune to enjoy a week's safari and hunting. But the Hadza of Tanzania and others like them have this all the year round and, once you live with them, you can understand why they have no desire at all to go down the road of so-called 'development', any more than in the distant past, our hunter-gatherer ancestors actively wanted to get involved in agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry and eventually class society.

So these people have an experience of real abundance. Of course, they do not have televisions and so on. If you or I personally cannot do without a television I can understand that. But the Hadza would see it as a reflection of the vacuum in our own lives, a vacuum drawing us to all this fantasy stuff in the absence of the real thing.

Marxists in any case are not supposed to see wealth in these ridiculous, absolutist terms - wealth is relative; it is social. By any standard, hunter-gatherers are up there, living in an economy of abundance, where they cannot be corrupted by honey, berries or game animals. But they can be and are corrupted by money - very easily. Give some money to the Hadza and they will immediately fall for it and spend it on drink. But in their own environment the things that they value cannot be used to corrupt or divide their egalitarian social structure.

Religion

I saw an anarchist sticker on a lamp post the other day, proclaiming that religion is stupid, murderous, bigoted, sexist crap. I feel an immediate, instinctive solidarity with the people who wrote that. The most important scientist conveying that view these days is, of course, Richard Dawkins, who thinks that religion is a kind of cultural virus which infects our brains.

Dawkins says that, the more absurd the belief, the more valuable it seems, because if you can believe something patently absurd it shows your commitment to the group far more convincingly than if you believe something credible and obvious. So, for example, anyone can believe that a piece of bread can be *symbolic* of Jesus's flesh. However, if you believe that the bread and wine taken at communion *are* actually Jesus's body and blood, that is so stupid that believing it carries an enormous cost, which demonstrates beyond doubt the Christian's commitment. I have to say that, when I look around at some of today's leftwing groups, that rings bells. The more absurd the belief, the more it proves your commitment to the sect.

That is not Dawkins's main argument, however - though I personally would buy it. His main argument is that religion is a parasite, which replicates itself in the way that a computer virus does.

and language

Marx puts it rather more cleverly: religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its moral sanction. Marx goes on to say that there is no way of abolishing religion without realising it. And that there is no way of realising religion without abolishing it. Those two formulae to me just sum up everything. If you go back in history, it seems that society gets more religious. Hunter-gatherers are the most religious and yet they are the most emancipated, the most communist. If you think religion is stupid, then, as a Marxist, you have a paradox, because you say that hunter-gatherers are communist and they are stupid. The paradox is resolved when you realise that, the more you *practise* your religion, every day of the week, the more you regard everything as sacred, the less it is religion. In a way, the more it is religion, the *less* it is religion.

So when Marxists talk about abolishing religion, we mean abolishing the illusory communism which religion is. But you cannot abolish the illusory communism without realising communism. The argument we put forward in the Radical Anthropology Group is that the human revolution - the process of becoming human, with the establishment of communism - involved the idea of the sanctity of things as an essential component. The ultimate idea of religion and the point about it which perhaps all of us could accept is simple: some things are sacred. For capitalism, *nothing* is sacred. Everything has a price.

For hunter-gatherers some things are sacred and that part of religion is, if you like, essential for Marxists, because for Marxists too some things are sacred. For example, never cross a picket line. For RAG, that principle is the foundation of culture, language and religion - never cross a picket line.

Engels explains it beautifully when he says that the first form of class oppression was sexual oppression: the female sex was the productive class or proto-class. By contrast, the leisured sex - the sex that does not have to do the work of producing the next generation - was the male of the species. Following Engels, our argument is that, with the emergence of humans living in larger groups with more complex social demands, brain size had to increase. With babies requiring an enormous amount of investment in terms of childcare and so on, females could no longer afford the costs of males who behave badly by getting them pregnant and then running off.

Increasingly the females had to ensure that males did not have that option. The strategies which led to religion and language were strategies designed to seduce, reward and tempt males into doing their share of investing in the future generations, evolving into what we call the sex strike (although that is an inadequate term for what we are talking about). This sex strike was more than just resistance: it turned into a general strike which could be repeated. This female resistance against male exploitation culminated in a revolution. The logic of strike action established the principle that some things are sacred. If the body is not recognised as sacred, then

nothing else can be sacred either. This was a fundamental principle, especially for women, simply because males would always be a little bit better at violence than the other sex.

Language

It is impossible to discuss the origins of language without referring to Noam Chomsky, because he is a giant and everybody seems to think that he is a scientific revolutionary on a par with Einstein, Darwin and Galileo.

Briefly, Chomsky is a Cartesian. Descartes believed that language was located in the pineal gland, through which the soul communicated with the body. Of course, Chomsky does not quite put it that way, but he has a Cartesian outlook and sees language as the product of a tiny organ in the brain. His theory of the origin of language is that, in a sudden, random mutation in one individual maybe 100,000 years ago, the 'language organ' appeared from nowhere.

As a result, the first person with this organ started talking to herself. So, according to Chomsky, 'you can use language even if you are the only person in the universe who has it', and this was useful because the person concerned could at last think, articulate ideas, plan and so on through inner speech (which is most of speech). This is essentially Cartesianism - 'I think, therefore I am'. Everything happens in the individual. Chomsky absolutely insists that language is not for communication, just for thinking in private, with communication only an optional side effect.

I think that is completely ridiculous. My view is that Engels got it right when he wrote about the development of cooperative labour. When people began needing each other in this new way, they eventually "arrived", as Engels puts it, "at the point where they had something to say to one another". If Engels is right, then pre-modern humans lacked language not just because they lacked the requisite organ. The more fundamental point was that in the absence of labour - in the absence of joint action toward a common goal - they had nothing to say to one another.

Of course, animals communicate with one another and cooperate in all sorts of ways. But Chomsky is right about one thing: language is right off the scale from the standpoint of animal communication. You cannot make an argument that language evolved gradually from some sort of vocal signalling system employed by our ape-like ancestors.

The principle of Darwinism is 'descent with modification'. That means there must be something to start with - fins becoming legs, for example. But the problem with the origin of language is that we do not have a precursor. Language is utterly different. First of all, the format. The phonology of language is digital, with about six articulators in the human vocal apparatus. All animal communication is analogue, where the point of interest is the quality of the signal, the loudness, the size of the animal which must be making that signal, where each of the animals involved is sizing up the other's strength on an analogue scale. With language, not just the phonology is digital, but so too are

the semantics - and that just cannot happen in animal communication, with the possible exception of honey bees and some other social insects.

With language there is also duality of patterning - where one level can organise another. And there is displaced reference, which is very important. As we speak, we are making interventions which do not produce physical changes, but changes in virtual reality. The language we hear and read can take us to new places; it means moving around in a virtual world.

Language and religion

Which brings us back to religion. We humans inhabit symbolic culture, and symbolic culture produces a very weird world of objective facts, which depend entirely on subjective belief. There are two kinds of facts: institutional or social facts, and then, on the other hand, brute facts, which do not rely on belief. The global currency system is built entirely on faith or belief: the moment that faith collapses, the insurance companies vanish into thin air. But brute facts are different. They are true whatever you believe or do not believe. Faith has nothing to do with it. Even if you do not believe in gravity, walk off the edge of a cliff and you will fall. So there are a whole lot of facts that have nothing to do with faith - 'brute facts'. But there are also a whole lot of other facts that are entirely dependent on subjective belief.

As soon as you realise that, you understand something very important about religion: that it is something more than what you do on Sundays or in a certain building called a church. Imagine that religion has been abolished and that its principles of brotherhood or whatever are practised not just in sermons or prayers, but as central to what we do every day, as communists living as hunter-gatherers.

Our world is then a world of institutional facts, a world of interconnecting meanings and relationships, which can be experienced as magical, but are absolutely *real*, not hallucinations. They are real for the people that believe them and it would be foolish to say that these beliefs are irrational fantasy or superstition.

In the same sense that I said that hunter-gatherers live in a world of abundance, not feeling scarcity, in the same sense, with a dialectical shift, these beliefs are science because they are empowering. Any person in this environment will be empowered by this way of looking at the world. We do not know everything in science down to the last quantum detail and we do not really need to know everything in order to get things done.

At any stage science is information which confers power and it goes as deep as it needs to go. Let me give you one example, which confirms Engels. His theory about the early forms of human kinship was that they were matrilineal and he also argued that the first form of marriage was group marriage. Early human kinship involved a concept which we nowadays call 'partible paternity' - a belief system found in many parts of South America, whereby a pregnant woman who wants to do

well by her baby has sex with a number of different men.

The question about this belief is whether it is scientifically true - does a woman who has sex with a number of men, adding to the number of 'fathers' her child has, increase the chance of her child surviving to adulthood? Yes, it is true. Women who have sex with extra men, giving their babies extra 'fathers', do better. There can be all kinds of reasons for this, but it does not alter the fact that the women who believe this about partible paternity do have more and healthier children. Western scientific ideas about a single sperm fertilising a single egg would actually be damaging to the women we are talking about in their particular society.

So we live in a world of institutional facts as well as brute facts. Only a creature that has to navigate within this virtual landscape either needs language or can possibly have language. All institutional facts are digital. There is no such thing as a more or less institutional fact. If you ask who is that person who is sticking a penalty notice on your badly parked car, you will not be satisfied if he answers that he is 'more or less' a traffic warden. Either he does have that right or he does not. Because institutional facts rely on agreement and agreement cannot be reached on a slippery slope, they have to be cut and dried - either/or. As soon as there is any doubt, then the fact starts to collapse.

Because language relates fundamentally to institutional facts, semantics is also concerned with institutional facts, not with brute facts. So that only a creature that has become immersed in a world of shared fantasy - in a sense only a *religious* creature - can have language. As we became human, as we turned the world upside down through revolution, that communist world was a world of fantasy in a sense, but shared fantasy. When fantasies are shared, when they are generalised in the power that they can give, then that is a very different thing from fiction, from lying or

hallucination. Children learn language and the use of words fundamentally through fantasy. If a young child does not get into fantasy worlds, if it cannot get the idea of 'let's pretend', then that is some cause for concern. Lack of pretend-play capacity is one of the diagnostic features of autism.

I will end with this - Jerome Lewis has shown in his study of the Mbendjele that religion is actually play. The point about this play is that, as with all children's games, it is quite serious. When you are in the playground, the most important thing about a person you are fond of is that they let you play with them. Likewise, the rules of the various games that the forest people play are very important. They are sacred.

Play, ritual, collective work and religion are the same thing for the forest people that Jerome is studying. The point is that they play in a way that allows them to continue playing through childhood, adolescence and into adulthood. When they play the same games as adults, that is religion. It does not matter what you call it. If you think religion is stupid, then that is fine. You can then call what the forest people do something else - maybe magic or whatever.

The crucial point is that monkeys and apes do not do this. They do play. When they play at fighting, taking turns to chase each other, that is about as near as they get to symbolism or language or religion. It is an imaginary fight. However, as primates become sexually active, something happens, and the play-fight ends up in a real fight. The playfulness of earlier years does not survive that transition into adulthood and therefore life as a whole is no longer governed by play.

Our ancestors won the human revolution by turning the relationship between sexual violence and play on its head. They managed to become human by extending the joys and the shared fantasy of play into adulthood. And they did this by incorporating sex itself into the game ●

For further reading, see C

Knight, M Studdert-Kennedy and others (eds) *The early emergence of language* Cambridge 2000.

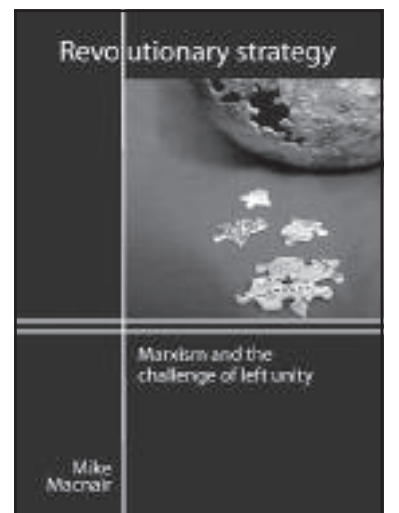
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The free-market triumphalism of the 1990s is over. Early 21st century capitalism looks like Karl Marx's description: growing extremes of wealth and poverty and irrepressible boom-bust cycles. So far, however, the beneficiaries of growing anti-capitalism are various forms of rightwing religious and nationalist nostalgia politics.

The centre-left, insofar as it has not joined forces with the neoliberal right, clings to nationalist and bureaucratic-statist nostalgia for the social democratic cold war era. The far left clings to the coat-tails of the centre-left. It is barred from uniting itself - let alone anyone else - by its unwillingness to think critically about the ideas of the early Communist International, especially on the 'revolutionary party'.

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TORIES

Nice guy Dave?

Since he became prime minister, Gordon Brown's standing in the polls has plummeted - but can *that* guy really be benefiting? **James Turley** looks at the Camerons

It is a good time, it seems, to be a Tory. The Conservative Party is consistently obliterating Labour in the opinion polls.

Despite Gordon Brown's 'unifying' speech at the latter party's conference, it is difficult to shake the impression that little short of mass hypnosis of the entire nation can save the flagging prime minister. Should the smiles on Tory lips waver for a moment, it will only be because Brown's predicament recalls uncomfortable memories of no-hoper former leader Iain Duncan Smith's last days.

Then as now, a hypocritical show of unity at conference barely concealed blatant moves towards a palace coup. In the end, Duncan Smith fell to a vote of no confidence, and even those bitterly opposed to this bumbling reactionary felt an involuntary tug of pathos at their hearts.

That said, it is not immediately obvious that a Tory victory should follow. Indeed, the hatred towards the Conservative Party was - until recently, at least - so broad and deep that it seemed they could do nothing right. David Cameron has changed that - but how much?

Birth of a faction

It was under the tenure of IDS's successor, Michael Howard, that Cameron first rose to prominence in his own right. He, and a loose group of young and photogenic allies, then called the 'Notting Hill set', became very close influences on Howard. The latter's opening gambit - presumably at the behest of Cameron and co - was to take out a full-page advert in several newspapers, consisting of various statements beginning "I believe ..."

His 'beliefs' at this time appeared to be down-the-line right-libertarian - this audacity was noted with interest, but largely derided by a public and commentariat still familiar with his hard-authoritarian history. This was a man whose maiden speech in parliament was, after all, to demand the reinstatement of the death penalty.

Howard's campaign for the 2005 general election was characterised by, in one discourse, a weak, opportunistic lurch to the right and, in another, an atavistic resurgence of the 'classic' politics of this hard-Thatcherite ogre. He resumed gypsy-baiting and declared that, if there was a conflict between 'political correctness' and 'common sense', he was firmly on the side of the latter. He recycled his old hard lines on prison and drugs.

In short, Howard ended up playing to precisely the same gallery as his more openly populist predecessors, and his libertarian pose ended up barely lasting a few months.

A superficial look at this story, in the light of Cameron's subsequent career as party leader, would produce a backstage narrative along these lines: Cameron and the Notting Hill set provoke Howard to shift away from nastiness, in the form of a libertarian pose; when it fails, Howard turns to more conventional Tory influences and more conventional Tory politics.

But the most interesting fact about this whole story is that Cameron did *not* fall from favour; in fact, it is far more likely that he instigated this shift



David Cameron: selling an image

to the hard right.

This brings us to the most well known thing about Cameron, the politician, but something which we must baldly state in order to bring out its full consequences - his political practice is about *image*. He may have no distinctive politics of his own; if he does, they are likely to be typical of an Eton-educated Tory: chauvinist, elitist, authoritarian.

He works not through positions, but *positioning* - making his policies look to the left, or to the right, or (most commonly) just 'nicer' than they actually are. Gordon Brown still talks in the jargon of high finance; Cameron's language is the banality of the motivational speaker.

Everybody with any political awareness already knows this, of course. The left - and even the hard right of New Labour, in these humbling times - often ridicule Cameron for barely concealing beneath his PR mask a grotesque Thatcherite visage; *The Guardian* have nicknamed him 'Call me Dave'.

Indeed, if we compare the kind of platitudes beloved of Cameron with the two 'phases' of Howard's leadership mentioned above, it is clear that he is closer to the gypsy-baiting dope alarmist.

His repeated references to the breakdown of families and The Family, of communities, of the need to fix the Broken Society are *explicitly* patriarchal, and implicitly tick every authoritarian box going. His veneration of the voluntary sector borrows the cheap prestige of charity for a very Thatcherite hatred of public-sector provision. His environmental 'commitment' goes no deeper than those of our comrade economists on the left, who have taken recently to haphazardly bolting on unreconstructed bits of official greenism to their sub-Keynesian programmatic constructions.

This is often taken - particularly by Labourites in dire need of a morale boost - to imply that Cameron is not *really* that serious an enemy anyway, and if we could only get our act

together we could pull the scales off people's eyes and reveal Cameron for the bumbling goon he is. This is wrong. Simply because Cameron is not pursuing hard *policy* does not make what he does a 'nothing', an insignificance.

What he is doing is actually far more profound - selling an ideology, demanding an identification with his views. Yes - society really is broken! Yes - the family really is under intolerable pressure!

These views are consummately unverifiable; almost any social phenomenon can be viewed through 'broken society' spectacles and come out looking like Cameron wants it to. It is rather similar, in a way, to the *Spiked* insistence on viewing everything (from *Top gear* to the credit crunch) through the matrix of its 'culture of fear'.

Will people fall for it?

Cameron's ideological offensive is an inspired move, and comparisons to Tony Blair's early days are not

unwarranted - although it has to be noted that Blair was far keener (and more successful) in slaughtering 'sacred cows' than Cameron - note the amazing reaction to his attempt to apologise for the Tories' denigration of Nelson Mandela and support for apartheid, which revealed quite how far behind mainstream bourgeois politics large elements of his party remain.

In another conjuncture - indeed, it looked this way but a couple of years ago - Cameron's spin-heavy ideological approach would have simply failed.

The credit crisis, however, has revealed that all Cameron's rivals - with the partial exception of the British National Party - are ideologically impoverished. New Labour's managerialist bent was tolerated in Middle England as long as the economy ticked over; now the Brownite technocrats seem pitched, as it were, somewhere between the bureaucracies of Kafka and Gogol - between incomprehensibility and absurdity. The Liberal Democrats appear still to be gripped in an identity crisis, which has dogged them almost their entire time as the third party.

The field is open, then, for Cameron's Tories to wipe the floor with everyone. But it is not a foregone conclusion. Governments, it is said, lose elections, rather than oppositions winning them. It is possible that the political collapse of the Labour Party, combined with its systematic self-disembowelling in terms of the semi-democratic institutions that once allowed the rank and file and unions some input on policy, has already doomed it to failure at the polls - Brown or no Brown.

But it is also possible that this has not happened - and, either way, Cameron will have to fight a hard campaign. Whether he has the party truly behind him or not will be revealed largely on the campaign trail, as will the resilience of his 'nice guy' image. Cracks are already appearing - George Osborne refuses to be held to Labour's spending plans, for instance, and the Tory leadership has vacillated rather than taken a firm line on the financial crisis.

That crisis, indeed, is the best and the worst thing that could have happened to Cameron. It is the best, as it has inevitably rocked the Labour administration; and the worst, as it is almost as likely to expose divisions in the Tory Party. The latter is, among other things, a machine for producing big-bourgeois hegemony over the petty bourgeoisie - such divisions are therefore inevitable, and sharpened by the division in class interests that a crisis entails.

It is unlikely, furthermore, that large swathes of working class people will switch to the Tories, as happened during the Thatcher years - simply because the character of the New Labour regime is widely considered to be rightwing and a continuation of Toryism. Depending on how Labour play their cards, they may yet claw back a few percent of the disaffected - not enough to save them, perhaps, but enough for a hung parliament.

At any rate, it is safe to say that whatever comes out of the next election will be bad for the working class ●

PROGRAMME

Socialism and democracy

Phil Kent reports on recent discussions amongst CPGB members on our draft programme



Things should be as local as possible

The September 21 London Communist Forum discussed section 5.2 of the CPGB's *Draft programme*, 'Socialism and democracy', as part of the continuing redrafting debate.

Democracy is the political mode of socialism - not only is it a crucial part of the minimum programme of the Communist Party in the struggle for power: it is also the only method by which it can govern. The organs of working class power are democratic, as is its seizure of power. The new working class state is democratic in its pursuit of working class interests. The state's aim is the achievement of communism, which can only be done over a period of time.

Section 5.2 highlights two essential

concerns which need to be addressed from the beginning "to prevent the new state turning against the people".

Firstly, it is inevitable that administration will initially be in the hands of specialists - and specialists tend to follow their own interests, not the interests of the masses. The masses need to aim for control of these jobs.

Secondly, to make it possible for workers to take control of the administration without becoming specialists themselves the "necessary working day" has to be "radically shortened". That will ensure everyone has the time to become administrators for a period before returning to some other job, thus abolishing the division of labour between the administrators and the administrated.

Comrade Stan Keable, who introduced the discussion, raised a question regarding the current wording, which specifies that, following the revolution, workers will need democracy in the organisation of the state apparatus, the political system and the economy, as well as in international relations.

Don't we need democracy in the workers' movement too? But in my view the state *is* the workers' movement under socialism and it *is* democratic - but it urgently needs to tackle the domination of specialists in the above areas if it is to remain so.

Comrade Keable also noted that this section does not mention the right to form parties - only "platforms and oppositions for the presentation of different views". That right is, however, specified in section 4.2, 'The socialist constitution'. John Bridge said that, although the working class should not need more than one party, the right to form them must be guaranteed.

I brought up the fact that there is no call for a constituent assembly in our programme - yet the organs that seize power are not necessarily the best to run the state. But comrade Bridge argued that it was impossible to predict whether a constituent assembly would be necessary, which is why it should not be included in the *Draft programme*.

Finally, comrade Mary Godwin raised the question of local autonomy and centralisation, which is not mentioned in this section. Comrade Bridge defended the view that decisions should be made as locally as possible. He gave the example of the Bolshevik Party deciding in Moscow which variety of wheat to plant in the Ukraine. Wouldn't it have been better to leave it to the farmers? ●

Fighting fund

Mistakes welcome!

A few handy donations have come my way over the past seven days. Thank you, comrades RH (£28), PV (£25), SD (£20) and CK (£10).

Both RH and CK added their gifts to their subscription cheques (actually in RH's case it was a card payment made via our website). RH, a reader in Ireland, admits that his donation was initially an error - he paid £88 instead of £8! That's the kind of mistake I like.

He was actually the only one to make use of our PayPal facility, even though we had 15,820 readers last week (still a low figure, by the way, compared to the

heights we have reached over the last year or so).

Mind you, the extra standing order donations (compared to 2007) received last week add up to a tidy £155. That takes our September fighting fund total to £720 - but there are only five days left to reach our £1,000 target.

How I could do with a few more 'mistakes' ●

Robbie Rix

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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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Labour Party conference - media circus

Brown hangs on

While he was chancellor, Gordon Brown was happy to take credit for the 'good times' that the economy was experiencing from the 'up' part of capitalism's cycle. Now that the economy has gone into a downturn and he is prime minister, Brown seems less keen to take the blame. Brown's mantra was "It's the global economy, stupid" during an interview with the BBC's Andrew Marr on September 23.

Later that day Brown delivered his much awaited conference speech. He was introduced by his wife, for heaven's sake! Very American. His main message was that he alone has the experience and expertise to steer Britain through troubled waters. This is no time for novices: ie, the two Davids, Cameron and Miliband. The latter's allies were said to be furious.

Apart from promising to act in concert with other world leaders when it came to the world economy, it was one platitude from Brown after another: "transparency ... sound banking ... responsibility ... integrity ... global standards". Nothing urgent, nothing original, nothing decisive. Though it earned applause from the conference faithful, programmatically it was business as usual.

Neither Brown nor the advisers around him seem to have caught up with the fact that the market system has visibly failed and that in the US the Republican administration of George W Bush is desperately trying to put in place a trillion-dollar Keynesian programme to rescue finance capital. A turning point for world capitalism. And as soon as the economic downturn really starts to bite, with massive increases in unemployment, house repossession, industrial closures and a slump in demand, people will be looking for an alternative. Clearly they are not going to find one in Brown.

Leading leftwinger John McDonnell is quite right. The Brown government has "no apparent strategy to deal with the recession other than to blunder on". What is more, it is prone to an ever-present threat of destabilisation from another by-election loss, depressing poll figures and backbench panic (*The Guardian* September 16).

Though for years Brown yearned and manoeuvred to replace Tony Blair, the differences between the two men and their supporters was far more about ambition and clique dynamics than policy and programme. The only change is that now it is the Brownite insiders who are on the defensive against the Blairite outsiders.

Blair and Brown were the two main architects of New Labour, which continued the Thatcherite counterreformation. They kept the Tories' anti-trade unions laws in place and at the same time gave a free hand to finance capital. Both Blair and Brown saw to it that Labour abandoned its pretended connection with specifically working class aspirations. 'Socialism' became

a dirty word and the super-rich were courted and celebrated.

Brown turned nasty 20 minutes into his Manchester speech, obviously trying to curry favour with the *Daily Mail* constituency: "We will be the party of law and order," he thundered and, in a naked attempt to out-right the right, he said he

Now it is the Brownite insiders who are on the defensive against the Blairite outsiders

wants to force everyone who is physically able to work. Shades of the 1930s, when benefits were withdrawn from the 'work-shy'.

Hypocritically, this dogged defender of market capitalism insisted (to cheers) that, "Nobody should get to take more out of the system than they are prepared to put in." Strangely, he was not referring to the CEOs, the bank directors, the short-sellers, the commodity traders and the whole system of profit and exploitation. Instead, this statement was his entrée into banging the xenophobic drum once more and announcing another attack on workers coming to Britain in the form of an imminent "migrant charge for public services".

Although in his speech Brown did not name Iraq or comment on the one million deaths for which he shares culpability, he was eager to associate with the US "dealing with immediate challenges" in Georgia and Iran. So Brown is determined to line up with America in what could be the next war. An aerial blitz on Iran remains very much on the agenda - possibly to save 'poor little Israel', possibly to prevent Iran becoming a 'global threat' if

it insists on pursuing its nuclear programme in spite of UN sanctions.

Brown and his ministers were in overdrive in the week before the Labour conference, talking up how government was 'getting alongside' working class people as they face adversity, what with rising prices and loss of jobs. They claim to know how it feels. They say they are showing empathy. That is what the passage in Brown's speech about the NHS and his eye operation was all about.

But it hardly washes. The lot of them are highly-paid lickspittles of capital! Brown gets (officially as first lord of the treasury) £127,334 in addition to his MP's salary of £60,277; and that is without his £87,276 staffing allowance, £20,440 incidental expenses provision and £22,110 additional costs allowance. The London supplement of £2,712 hardly seems worth mentioning on top of that lot. That is a grand total of £320,149 - more than 13 times the median pay for full-time employees in the UK (£23,764, according to the office for national statistics). Cabinet ministers too lead a life completely removed from that of ordinary workers.

Labour Party internal democracy has taken a further nosedive over the Blair-Brown years of New Labour. The annual conference is but a shadow of its former self, deciding nothing and resembling more and more the vacuous conventions beloved of mainstream Republican and Democrat 'politics' in the USA. This has been quite deliberate and was crafted by Blair and Brown, together with other New Labour leaders over the last decade or so.

Incredibly, those currently looking for Brown's head agreed that the boat should not be rocked during conference. News of Ruth Kelly's coming resignation as transport minister was, to begin with, widely seen as breaking this unofficial

agreement. However, it is quite possible that she really *does* want to "spend more time with my family".

Anyway - and this is the real point - the gulf separating what the Labour tops say in public and what they say in private has never been greater. In private there is war between them. On the conference platform they all heap

Conferences are not for the membership, not for real debate, not for real votes. They are a show for the media

praise on the 'great leader'.

Surely conference is exactly the right place to have these matters out and honestly decide whether or not to drop or keep him. That would be the procedure in any normal democratic organisation (from a chess club to a darts team). But no, not in the Labour Party. Like the Tories 'those who matter' believe in palace coups, plotting in the bars, lavatories and tea rooms of parliament and dark deals done in the ministerial corridors of power. That and spin, of course.

Hence conferences are not for the membership, not for real debate, not for real votes. They are a show for the media. Not least the Murdoch empire. In other words, a real turn-off. Such 'politics' shut out delegates, shut out ordinary members and are by definition thoroughly undemocratic and elitist. No wonder the Labour Party has lost something like half its membership since 1997 and constituency and ward organisations are nothing but empty shells.

In the lead-up to the Labour leader changeover last year, John McDonnell failed to get sufficient MPs to nominate him, even though he had significant support from a rolling grassroots campaign in which he vigorously engaged. Brown walked in unopposed as a result. Without receiving one vote, he became party leader and prime minister.

Of course, this is exactly what the Labour right want. Beginning with Neil Kinnock's purge of the Militant Tendency in the 1980s, democracy in the Labour Party has been rolled back to the point where now it barely exists. As readers will doubtless recall, when Blair resigned, he and his cohort at the top, Brown included, had in place a system whereby only a minimum proportion of current MPs can even nominate a candidate for the party leadership - not groups of members, branches, CLPs or affiliated organisations, as might be expected in a democratically set up organisation.

Then, even when there is an election for leader, members of the party and political levy-paying members of affiliated trade unions find their votes devalued dramatically compared with the weight given to the votes of MPs in the electoral process.

The lack of democracy in the Labour Party, the virtual absence of the left at the Manchester conference, the massive decline in membership, the rightwing politics carried out by Blair and now Brown - does all this mean that now is the time for those activists who remain to leave? Should the unions disaffiliate? No, not in our opinion. Certainly not in order to join those fragments of the left still dreaming of a Labour Party mark two or a halfway house like the Scottish Socialist Party or the old Socialist Alliance that blurs the distinction between revolution and reform ●

Jim Moody

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