



weekly
worker

**Olivier Besancenot
makes call for unity of
workers across Europe**

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Tory conference: Cuts and cat-fights



LETTERS



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

Left rut

I don't want a discussion of what was initially about the question of how to defend workers' jobs, such as those at Bombardier, simply to become a discussion about the history of the miners' strike. I will, therefore, keep my responses to Dave Douglass in that regard to a minimum (Letters, September 29).

Dave begins by telling us the basis of the National Union of Mineworkers' argument in 1984. But this is irrelevant. What I explained was the basis on which the National Coal Board, and behind them the government, had set out to close pits. That basis was surplus capacity, and if capacity was to be reduced it made sense to begin by closing the most marginal pits. Dave repeats the statement that British coal was, and remains, the cheapest coal mined, but, as I pointed out previously, that overall figure hid the fact that some pits' production was far more expensive than this average.

Kathy O'Donnell, in an article in *Capital and Class* ('Brought to account: the NCB and the case for coal', summer 1985), does a good job of uncovering the economic arguments put by the government and NCB, and by the NUM and Andrew Glyn, in the context of making a case for British coal. As she points out, in 1981-82, 141 out of 198 collieries made a financial loss, but 90% of the NCB's losses were accounted for by just 30 pits. And, from the time of nationalisation, despite the successive 'plans for coal', it was the continuing reduction in demand that had been decisive. The 1950 target of 230-250 metric tonnes for the mid-1960s had fallen to 200-215mt by 1959, actual production in 1965 being 187mt. Demand continued to fall during the 1960s and after 1979 coal consumption fell by 15mt a year.

After nationalisation, there was a massive closure of pits and a reduction in jobs. Between 1960 and 1969, 420 pits were closed with 50% of the workforce (322,000 miners) losing their jobs. So, as I pointed out, it was the overcapacity of coal compared with demand that was the issue, as it always had been, and, under those conditions, the NCB would always seek to close the highest-cost pits.

I am not a miner, but I grew up in a mining village. Both my grandfathers and many of my friends were miners. I was secretary of my miners' support committee, and on a picket line each and every day of the dispute. But I remember also writing an article for *Socialist Organiser* at the time setting out why I thought it was wrong to make the economic argument. This was the closest thing to an all-out class struggle there had been in decades. Whether the economic argument stacked up or not was, in reality, irrelevant. The real basis of the dispute was a political struggle of our class against theirs. On that basis, in the short run, it was necessary to defend the jobs, whatever the economic argument.

I think Dave's argument that the NUM was still strong after 1985, and that this left the government with only the option of closing down the industry, simply will not wash. He knows as well as I do that, on return to work, militants were being disciplined and persecuted left, right and centre, as management got its own back. There were no doubt many disputes during that period, but the NUM won virtually none of them. By this time, there was no need for the NCB to close the industry if the only aim was to discipline the miners.

Dave refers to the loss of demand for coal coming from the downturn in steel and elsewhere, but surely he isn't arguing that Thatcher closed these industries down solely to discipline their workers. It seems a very strange argument to suggest that capital seeks to make profits by more effective disciplining of the workers, and disciplines the workers by closing itself down!

Dave's arguments about workers' control actually do spell out only the kinds of arrangements that were introduced with 'mutuality' and, perhaps, more closely with the kinds of post-Fordist arrangements that managements have introduced with workgroup systems, designed to increase productivity. They in no way represent any kind of dual power, and the reality of that was exposed with the closure programme. No-one doubts that safety and conditions improved under nationalisation. But this was just another example of the shift towards Fordist production.

The closure of hundreds of small, expensive collieries after nationalisation, and the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs, was also the cost of introducing the investment in new machinery, which in turn required the introduction of new safety regimes. The bosses would not want to lose millions of pounds of equipment in a cave-in, would they? It was not nationalisation *per se* that led to these improvements, but the shift to a modern mining industry which was responsible. The same has been seen in many other industries that were not nationalised.

I was not suggesting that cooperative mines could have worked in every case. My point is that it is wrong to simply say that co-ops could not work, and the answer to economies of scale is to link the co-ops together - not just in mining, but across the economy - as the basis for a real workers' plan for coal, and energy in general, in a way that can never be done under state-capitalist control of any industry.

This brings me to the main point in relation to defending jobs such as those at Bombardier. The real issue here was about the insecurity of all jobs within the context of a capitalist economy. The starting point is to oppose the job losses, full stop, in the short run, whatever the economic arguments. I am obviously for defending workers' jobs at Bombardier, but I am opposed to defending them by calling for other workers to lose their jobs or by suggesting that this group of workers has a right to jobs above the rights of some other group of workers. That is the road to class division, not unity.

However, I do not go along with the Fabian/Lassalleian arguments put forward by most of the left in such cases, arguing for nationalisation, let alone the ridiculous calls for nationalisation under workers' control, for the reason I have already set out. Nor do I believe that, in anything other than the short run, is it simply possible to oppose such job losses on principle, without putting forward an alternative. In a case like Bombardier, what is really required is for the workers to have their own plans for how they could run the firm themselves and produce goods and services that could have been sold in order to keep the firm going under their ownership. The more we build such a worker-owned sector of the economy, as is happening with the Mondragon co-ops, the more demand is created within this sector and the more production can be planned rather than left to the vagaries of the market.

In that respect, I'd ask Dave what his attitude is to the job losses at BAe? Is he, as with the NUM position in 1984 and his position now in respect

of Bombardier, in favour of adopting a purely trade unionist position of defending existing jobs on the basis of defending the status quo? What that really means is defending the production of means of destruction - effective killing machines sold to every tinpot dictator and tyrant around the globe with which they will suppress their workers. Surely, no socialist can defend that, but it does not mean we cannot argue for defence of those jobs. We can defend them on the basis of arguing for direct workers' ownership of the business as a co-op and for the establishment by those workers of an alternative plan of useful production.

The left really has to get out of the Lasalleian/Fabian rut of thinking within the existing system, confining itself to a trade union consciousness, and begin thinking like socialists who are actively - here, today - trying to transform the means of production and social relations and to construct socialism within the existing capitalism.

Arthur Bough
email

Greenwash

Again, David Douglass avoids the issue and misrepresents my point of view. I wrote that "coal kills, and kills more than any other form of energy ever known to have been developed by humans" (Letters, September 22). Miners' deaths are a small percentage of the numbers. I wasn't saying, or even implying, that the killing of people was the issue of coal mine/pit safety (albeit it is one, obviously).

Secondly, uranium miners, what few there are, generally work in safer, open pit mines than underground coal miners. Additionally, a lot of uranium is 'mined' as a *secondary by-product* of other metal mining, such as copper. We can look forward to a day when advanced breeder reactors completely eliminate the need for any mining whatsoever with regard to uranium. On this, uranium is not a 'fossil fuel', as Dave wrote, as it wasn't created by dead animals and vegetation like coal and petroleum.

Thirdly, 'clean coal' (a term invented by the US coal industry in 1987 as a marketing sleight of hand, and a scientific oxymoron if there ever was one) is still an expensive pipe dream. I actually endorse the application of CO₂ mitigation where possible, but clearly, after the failure of several experiments in this regard, coal remains quite dirty, quite the killer. The Chinese are the most serious about this and have some real programmes to see if it can be done, given their massive use of coal. But despite those like NUM president Arthur Scargill, who goes to 'green conferences' trying to greenwash coal, it's made zero headway in the environmental movement.

Fourthly, we know that coal kills tens of thousands of people every year in the US alone, the existence of technology to mitigate this notwithstanding (dubious at best anyway). Coal is increasingly being mined with ever fewer miners but with deadly environmental mountain-top removal or open pits in the US. There exist no plans at all to retrofit generating plants to make them any cleaner than they are now. Coal is the largest single source of heavy metal contamination in the US with dangerous, chemically toxic material like mercury, uranium, thorium and other material unregulated and literally spewing from every smoke stack where the substance is burned.

While there is a huge debate over nuclear energy, there is almost no debate over the continued use of coal. I agree, it will be burned for some time. But long-term planning means planning to end it, completely, and some countries are attempting to do

this or at least mitigate it with nuclear and renewable energy (the latter, of course, can't replace coal's density or on-demand loading of power plants).

Lastly, on nationalisation, I raise this because, while Dave is correct that this doesn't mean a nuclear future, it does open the debate for society to say 'How do we want to go?' It's a basic working class right that something as important as energy be taken out of the hands of the profiteers and speculators. The struggle for a socialist society will require a lot more energy than we use now, even to get off fossil fuels, like coal. Socialism means the expansion of the productive forces, not its restriction, and for this we need vast amounts of cleaner, cheaper and usable energy. If this means more coal, it's dead in the water. As Lenin stated, "Communism equals soviet power and electrification." He couldn't have been more correct.

David Walters
San Francisco

Energy primary

It is an amazing fact that most Marxists continue to ignore the present unfolding energy crisis related to the peaking of global oil production - otherwise known as 'Hubbert's peak', or simply 'peak oil' - when trying to explain the predicament in which capitalism now finds itself.

This attitude however, is not entirely new. When the Opec embargo led to the quadrupling of oil prices in 1973, which triggered the deepest post-war recession up to that time, Marxists explained the recession in terms of the falling rate of profit, or overproduction and underconsumption theories. These same explanations are being rolled out once again to explain the current crisis. In other words, most Marxist and bourgeois economists are completely unaware that the content of the present crisis is the peaking of global production, leading to the end of economic growth for capitalism.

There is a warning which needs to be issued to those who are new to the peak oil debate, or who are not familiar with its intricacies. There are two sides to it, with those who oppose the peak oil thesis being referred to as cornucopians. This side believes that the peaking of oil output is years away and that there is plenty of oil left, and when oil does peak, technology will be able to solve the problem effortlessly. The cornucopians are led by free-market academic economists who are in the pay of the oil companies. Their job is to mislead those who are aware of the importance of the energy issues for as long as possible in order to protect oil company shares.

Those who defend the peak oil thesis do not claim oil is running out and therefore we are all doomed. We say that cheap, easily accessible and best-quality oil, referred to as conventional oil, will soon be in decline. Only if we fail to make a transition to a steady state society will we face social disintegration. One of the problems we face is that the collapsing world economy will bring oil prices down by cutting demand. This leads to the illusion that there is no oil crisis, and these lower prices also discourage investment in alternatives. Alternatives though can only mitigate the problems posed by oil depletion. At the present time renewable energy can only produce a tiny fraction of what we get from fossil fuels. What is needed is a complete reorganisation of society on the basis of production for need, not to increase profits to service a debt-based economy, which requires ever increasing supplies of energy.

While Hillel Ticktin is right to point out, for instance, that the falling rate of profit or underconsumption do not explain the present crisis (neither does overproduction), he makes the mistake

of seeking Lenin's authority to explain this crisis in terms of the existence of surplus capital lacking investment opportunities, which then leads to a financial bubble that must eventually burst (*Weekly Worker* September 8). Indeed, both Marxist and bourgeois economists have failed to locate the real sources of the present crisis, which is leading to a depression from which capitalism will not recover.

Why is it that Marxists like Ticktin, and most bourgeois economists, fail to identify the true cause of the present economic downturn? In my view, it is no accident that both Marxism and bourgeois political economy have got it wrong about the true nature of the present, unfolding depression. Both were formulated at a time when political economy had no need to pay any special attention to the question of energy and the role it plays in society. Consequently, it is not surprising that Marxist theories about capitalist decline or disintegration have nothing to say about the role of energy in the process, although everyone knows that no economic activity can proceed without energy. In the 19th century depletion was not an issue for economists, as far as I know.

While most people on the left will agree with the idea that Marxism remains useful in its critique of capital, what is generally not understood is that it is actually inadequate to explain the present unfolding depression. The reason why Marxists are explaining this crisis in terms of the falling rate of profit, overproduction or underconsumption - and in Ticktin's case the existence of surplus capital - is because Marxism's origins as a critique of classical bourgeois political economy lead to viewing all crises as emanating from the circulation of capital. By not realising that energy is primary, bourgeois and orthodox Marxist economic theory misleads people about the real causes.

To understand why this crisis is the first of its kind in the history of capitalism, it is necessary to realise that what we call the industrial revolution, which led to the birth of bourgeois political economy, was a qualitative break from all previous human civilisations, in that this transition to modernity was in essence an energy revolution. In their economic activities, humans began to replace renewable energy with non-renewable power. In other words, we have built a civilisation which is almost completely dependent on non-renewable, fossilised energy.

The energy transition which we call the industrial revolution also led to the idea of economic growth - or at least made it central to bourgeois economic thinking. Growth was and remains the number one mantra of the advocates of capitalism, which unlike previous societies cannot exist for long without constant expansion. While Marxism helps us to understand the laws of motion of capitalist society, this process of capital accumulation or economic growth requires abundant supplies of cheap energy, which capitalism first found in coal, followed by oil, gas and nuclear fuel.

The problem is, without increasing supplies of cheap energy economic growth becomes increasingly problematic or even unattainable. This is the stage we have reached now. The whole of bourgeois economics is based on the notion of promoting economic growth, and the political competition in bourgeois political discourse is mostly about which party can best secure it. Traditional political economy, particularly in its neoliberal guise, does not recognise any limits to growth and it would seem too that through Marxism the socialist left has taken this idea on board. When Stalin, in his *Economic problems of socialism*

TORIES

Cuts and cat-fights

The Conservative Party's annual conference produced a lot of empty rhetoric, a few concessions for the right and one clanger from the front benches, writes **James Turley** - but no surprises

As I write, commentary on the ongoing Conservative Party conference is focused not on David Cameron's 'can-do optimism', not on the news that effectively the wheels have fallen off George Osborne's economic strategy, with the estimate for UK economic growth over April-June cut to 0.1%, and not even on the impending euro zone catastrophe. No, it has been focused on a cat called Maya.

The young moggy, who would no doubt be astonished to find herself the centre of a minor spat among cabinet ministers, is owned by an anonymous Bolivian immigrant and his girlfriend; the man faced a deportation order, and fought it successfully on the basis of his human right to a family life, enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights. Part (I stress *part*) of the supporting evidence was that he and his girlfriend owned and looked after a pet cat.

The judge, in his summary, referred to 'Maya the cat' as one indicator among many that this was a serious relationship covered by article 8 of the ECHR. This was enough for *The Daily Telegraph* to run a story rather scurrilously headlined "Immigrant allowed to stay because of pet cat" (October 17 2009). In fact, as representatives of the judiciary were keen to point out, the case was ultimately decided on a completely different point of law, rendering the cat defence redundant.

Now, home secretary Theresa May has dredged this old myth up so as to tout yet more restrictions on illegal immigration - precisely on the point of whether one does indeed have the right to a "private and family life", particularly when that right conflicts with the need for cynical politicians to throw a few scraps to the slavering reactionaries snapping at their heels.

The likes of *The Guardian*, of course, were prompt in debunking this myth, before the closed circle of their readerships at least. More embarrassing for May was the prompt response of justice secretary Kenneth Clarke. "They are British cases and British judges she is complaining about," he pointedly commented. "I'll have a small bet with her that nobody has ever been refused deportation on the grounds of the ownership of a cat." May's staff tamely hit back by selectively quoting the *Telegraph* article, but this must surely be chalked up as an embarrassment.

Behind 'Catgate'

This dispute, to be sure, is not exactly going to rock the government to its very foundations. The participants will blush a little and move on. Yet it is in a sense a pretty clear example of how the Tory Party actually works, and the contradictions inherent in its purpose.

The Conservative Party is the self-styled 'natural party of government'. It is the party most closely incorporated into the British state; apart from Tory politicians in the strict sense, the judiciary and the monarchy clearly enough have institutionally persistent Tory leanings, and the House of Lords even in its current form consists of Tories and those members of other parties who most resemble them. Its job, on one level, is to rule 'in the national interest' - that is, take decisions on the basis of what serves British capital in the world market and



Theresa May: caterwauling

British interests in the state system.

In order to do so, *any* party needs a social base *beyond* the bourgeoisie, which - after all - is hardly a numerically large class. While the Labour Party finds this social base primarily in the labour bureaucracy and the passive consent to its hegemony in the workers' movement, the Tories base themselves primarily on the assent of the petty bourgeoisie. It actively cultivates in this layer the most reactionary prejudices, from patriarchal 'family values' to little-England xenophobia; it does just enough to sustain its existence as a class, perpetually under threat from the big bourgeoisie.

Theresa May's tirade on the immigrant's cat is an exercise in petty bourgeois button-pushing. There are, in this case, two buttons. The first is immigration: according to the feverish imagination of the reactionary petty bourgeoisie, there is no point in recent history that we have *not* been swamped to breaking point with immigrants (the stubborn persistence of British society in failing thereby to collapse is rarely taken into consideration).

The second, and more substantial, factor in present circumstances is Europe. Euroscepticism rates as a substantial phenomenon among the bourgeois mainstream from the treaties of Rome and Maastricht - in other words, when closer union among the European states began to conflict in any kind of serious way with the Atlanticist commitments of the British state. This rational basis provided a shot in the arm for all manner of anti-EU irrationalisms.

Of course, now the Eurosceptics consider themselves quite vindicated. Monetary union across diffuse and

unevenly developed sovereign states has led to a situation where a poor cousin like Greece could quite conceivably bring a muscular patriarch like Germany into bankruptcy with it. Disengagement from the euro will not save anyone; but the alternative - greater centralisation of political power - would seem to prove all the jeremiads of anti-EU nationalism.

In reality May launched a quite mild attack on the EU through the supposed tyranny of its 'human rights' law, and its conflict with good old British common sense (that is, ignorant petty bourgeois prejudice). Yet *somebody* had to, because appeasing the peddlers of reactionary mumbo-jumbo is quite necessary for any Tory government.

Kenneth Clarke, meanwhile, is probably best described as an old-style Tory; over the years, he has been on hand to administer the bitter medicine on Europe and now on criminal justice. His career, indeed, has suffered; his best chance at assuming Tory leadership came at a time - the five years following Blair's election victory - when the Tories were most at the mercy of their rightwing lunatic fringe, to whom his pro-European leanings and stolid, one-nation realism were anathema.

The government, as Liam Fox made quite clear, will not join a Franco-German defence force, but there is no prospect of it calling a referendum on withdrawing from Europe, or triggering a constitutional crisis over 'human rights' on top of the mess already engulfing the EU, which buys 40% of British exports. Clarke has delivered a diplomatically worded attack on the demagogic raising of false expectations, because it interferes with the affairs of state

that are more properly the concern of a Tory government.

Business as usual

As far as those affairs of state are concerned, then, we can expect more of the same. Dave Cameron's "stick to it" speech, as expected, confirmed his government's commitment to the busted strategy of austerity as the way to growth. Yet cracks are obviously appearing.

Osborne ridiculed calls from the Tory right for tax cuts as the flipside of Labour's vague mumblings about growth. And, desperately trying to show that he has not given up on growth himself, he promised to introduce 'credit easing' - without hard detail. Supposedly, it involves funneling credit to small and medium-sized businesses via various largely undetermined mechanisms, including

underwriting bank loans. The treasury is quite insistent that this is not at all to be confused with 'quantitative easing' (that is, printing money); but it also purportedly does not involve any increase in public borrowing - which really begs the question as to where the money is supposed to come from.

The other keynote policy pushed by Osborne is rather less fraught with ambiguities. Employees will now have to be employed for two years rather than one before they can challenge employers for unfair dismissal. If you do manage to bring a case to a tribunal, you will have to pay a deposit, returnable should you win the case. The bourgeoisie is rubbing its hands with glee at this one, naturally. Reasonable people with half an eye on reality will wonder how making it easier to throw people out of work is a useful legislative contribution during a time of mass unemployment.

In some ways, the government should be in a weaker position than it actually is. Its flagship policy is very obviously failing; come conference season, the senior partner can only rehash Churchill-type clichés about "what Great Britain really means", and Nick Clegg's Liberal Democrats are restricted to impotently kicking against looming historical oblivion.

Yet - as we argued from the start, against our more wide-eyed comrades on the left - this was *never* a weak government. Cameron may face grumbles from the Lib Dems and cat-calls from the Tory right, but the truth is that he and his allies are in the perfect position to play each against the other. This government was never going to be blown over by the first mass protest or the first strike; it will still be in place on December 1. Left to its own devices, it will stick to this suicidal austerity programme and the masses will pay the price.

To really put the fear of god into this government and the class it represents, we need to give them at least a glimpse of their overthrow. That means providing a coherent *political* alternative to their programme, which fundamentally means *an alternative to the continuation of capitalism*. Warmed-over 1960s Keynesianism will not cut it. It also means uniting the defensive actions of the working class *across Europe*, even if only symbolically at first. Let us give the Eurosceptic right something worth worrying about ●

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ANTI-CUTS

Besancenot: go beyond outdated national borders

Last weekend's Europe Against Austerity event adopted the aim of a 'day of industrial action' across the continent in 2012. **Peter Manson** reports on the conference's strengths and weaknesses

The October 1 Europe Against Austerity conference in central London was a good initiative, bringing a sorely needed international angle to the necessary fightback against the bourgeois cuts assault.

The organisers - the Coalition of Resistance headed by John Rees's Counterfire group - say that 600 people were present, with a range of speakers from across the continent. Impressively there were two-way interpretation facilities for French, German, Spanish and Italian - although in truth I would say there were very few attending who would have required translation from English: it was activists living in Britain who made up the overwhelming majority of those present.

Although I counted platform or top-table speakers from 12 different countries, including the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (France), Die Linke (Germany), the Left Bloc (Portugal) and Sinn Féin (Ireland), none of them are in a position to actually deliver the necessary coordination of the resistance across Europe that everyone agreed was necessary.

Nevertheless, the conference was useful in bringing together representatives from across the continent who share the aim of defeating the austerity drive. Perhaps inevitably, however, the dominant politics that was proposed was hopelessly inadequate. I say 'inevitably' because of the basis upon which the Coalition of Resistance believes the fightback must be conducted. COR secretary Andrew Burgin hoped that the initiative would "go further than the European Social Forum process" - this time we must "include all those who say they oppose austerity" (my emphasis). That obviously means non-working class bodies, such as Sinn Féin and the Green Party - Darren Johnson, the Green London assembly member, was amongst those addressing the final rally.

It is correct not to exclude such people, but it would definitely be incorrect to allow them to determine the extent and nature of a common fightback, not to mention the type of programme that guides it. Those who say they are Marxist put the

case as strongly as they can for an independent working class alternative across Europe - and I do not mean by that some kind of left Keynesianism.

It has to be said, however, that it is not only the likes of Sinn Féin and the Green Party who are proposing the latter non-alternative. There were several speakers from the Attac international network, Transform (the "European network for alternative thinking and political dialogue") and the 'official communist'-dominated European Left Party, all of which uphold such politics. And it is also shared by the trade union lefts. The chair of the opening plenary, Jeremy Corbyn, called vaguely for "unity for a totally different economic strategy", but it was pretty clear what such a "strategy" will entail: in the words of Billy Hayes, general secretary of the Communication Workers Union, we must organise across Europe to achieve "action by governments for growth". For him, "Governments have to lead".

As well as the opening and concluding plenaries in the Camden Centre, there were three batches of five or six "parallel sessions" held mostly in the school opposite (at least they were not called 'workshops'). This allowed not only for more guest speakers, but for numerous interventions from the floor. The drawback to this, however, is that many comrades feel they must get everything in they want to say, irrespective of its relevance to the session's topic. Not that this interferes with anything much, of course: it is not as though any decisions can be taken.

Judging from the sessions I attended, I would say that many of those present were on the soft left. The

biggest single organisation represented was undoubtedly Counterfire and the only other members of far-left organisations I recognised were comrades from Socialist Resistance and a handful - including central committee members Alex Callinicos and Joseph Choonara - from the Socialist Workers Party. Counterfire comrades we talked to were complaining about the SWP's demands for more top-table speakers (in addition to Weyman Bennett in the session on the far right, and Mark Bergfeld on youth and students), while refusing to even advertise the event.

More left than SWP

As I have said, there was a substantial consensus around an alternative politics of a certain type. So Pierre Laurent, president of the European Left Party, called for an end to "policies that rely on the banks and the market" and urged the setting up instead of a "European development fund". Steffen Sierle of Attac Germany wanted a "common European policy on taxing business" - there should be debt audits to determine which part of sovereign debt was "legitimate", he said.

In one particular way, however, these reformists are more progressive than, for example, Alex Callinicos of the SWP. Speaking from the floor in one early session - to the dismay of many present - he rather apologetically declared that campaigners in countries such as Greece must demand a break with the euro. Yes, he said, "we need another Europe" and there are "nationalist dangers", but "the logic of national struggles means breaking with the euro".

This was answered effectively by the European reformists on the platform in their replies. Elisabeth Gauthier of Transform pointed out that "You don't have the euro in the UK", so how does that make us better off? Instead of "leaving a currency or territory", we ought to be advocating "class confrontation across Europe". She concluded by saying: "Don't leave Europe: change Europe."

Michel Husson of Attac France implored: "Don't make a fetish of the euro - that's the way it's pushed by the nationalist right." The fight has to be pursued on the basis of an alternative Europe, not "going back to old forms". Michael Burke of Ken Livingstone's *Socialist Economic Bulletin* - another platform speaker in the session - pointed out that doing what comrade Callinicos suggested would "leave nothing changed. You haven't dealt with the primary problem: your own capitalist class."

In this at least, all of them were far to the left of the SWP. Apart from this comment, however, I found comrade Burke's contribution less than convincing. He was speaking at two sessions I attended and basically gave the same speech in both. I will summarise it by quoting from an article he wrote recently: "The banks contain the resources to correct the slump, yet refuse to do so. They are in public ownership. All that is required is a

government instruction to fund the large-scale investment that is required to produce a recovery" (*Socialist Economic Bulletin* September 24).

At the Europe Against Austerity event he accused the capitalists of having initiated an "investment strike". If we "get hold of the assets of the private sector" and, say, "instruct RBS to invest in construction", it would "alter the relationship between the public and private sector" - which can only be good, obviously.

Speaking alongside him in the second session was James Meadway of Counterfire. According to a Coalition of Resistance publication being distributed on the day, comrade Meadway is "a senior economist with the New Economics Foundation. He works principally on the modelling of a just and sustainable macroeconomy as part of the Great Transition initiative. He previously worked as a policy advisor to HM Treasury and as a senior policy advisor to the Royal Society" (*Coalition of Resistance Broadsheet* No3, October 2011).

Perhaps it was unsurprising then that he agreed wholeheartedly with comrade Burke's state-capitalist Keynesianism, while also advocating that the government should employ weapons such as the freezing of bank accounts and the implementation of capital controls.

Someone from the floor commented, in response to the speeches of the two comrades, that "Keynesianism by itself" is insufficient. I responded by saying that it is not a question of being insufficient - it is actually a way of attempting to run capitalism more rationally. Why don't we put forward the Marxist alternative?

I went on to regret the absence of any hint of a Marxist programme for Europe at the event. Instead of leaving the euro or the EU, we should be looking to make the "alternative Europe" slogan real. It is excellent that there is now talk of a European day of action next year, but how about looking further and adopting a programme to take some practical organisational steps - all-Europe trade unions and, most of all, a Communist Party of the European Union?

Comrade Meadway was not pleased at my suggestion that he was putting forward a programme to manage capitalism - and especially coming from someone who wants to "prop up the euro", he mocked. True, there is "no Keynesian solution to the crisis," he said - but then went on to contradict himself: obviously if you're against austerity "you have to be for reflation", but we would "soon get beyond a Keynesian solution".

Comrade Burke, for his part, pointed out that we are "not at the stage of overthrowing capitalism". We are "at the stage of making demands" - like "Peace, land and bread", he added rather contradictorily. Comrade Burke then went back to his earlier theme: the demand has been to nationalise the banks, but now we have nationalised banks and the question is, what do we do with them?

Europe of workers

There was further controversy in the session on the November 30 strike.

Here former Socialist Labour Party apparatchik Brian Heron was speaking on behalf of the Communist Party of Britain-sponsored People's Charter in a debate with COR and the SWP's Right to Work.

Comrade Heron's contribution was rather too downbeat for the SWP and Paul Brandon of RTW. In order to bring down the government, said comrade Heron, we need, in addition to union militancy, a "mass movement similar to Stop the War". But this second factor is "not there". In fact not even the structures and organisation we enjoyed in the 60s and 70s are present. Last week's Labour conference was "a joke". His implied conclusion was that, instead of wild talk about an indefinite general strike, we have to grasp the need to "rebuild the working class".

Comrade Brandon, not unexpectedly, disagreed about the lack of a mass movement. Yes, we need to "put pressure on the labour movement", but we should not rule out a repeat of 1926 with its councils of action. For their part, SWP comrades were keen to raise their (apparently) now unanimously accepted slogan of "All out, stay out". Sean Vernell said that he had successfully put a motion advocating it at a University and College Union meeting. In explaining his interpretation of "stay out", he thought it meant for something like "a week". I also heard Joseph Choonara raise the slogan in a session that was supposed to be on 'The roots of the crisis'.

In my view, easily the best speaker of the whole day was Olivier Besancenot of the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) and former leader and presidential candidate of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire in France. He combined communist militancy with genuine internationalism. Yes, we need solidarity, he said, but we also need common action, including "a Europe-wide strike". The big capitalist powers are "in decline" and it is futile to look to solutions within the system. We must look beyond national borders and national states to a "Europe of workers and the people".

In the closing session Andrew Burgin put forward a statement which he said had been drawn up by the "joint preparatory committee". This conference must have "an afterlife", he said: we should aim for "permanent European coordination". The statement put to the conference ended in this way: "We also pledge to work towards a common day of action against austerity in 2012 and call on the trade union movement across Europe to prepare a day of industrial action against austerity."

Despite the dismal programmatic alternatives raised throughout the day, the event concluded with this welcome practical call. Let us hope that the day of action does indeed take place and that it will be the beginning of a united fightback across the continent. Let us also hope that, as the militancy of the working class develops, so too will its internationalist class-consciousness, backed up with a vision of a genuine Marxist alternative ●

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Olivier Besancenot: stirring

IRAN

Explaining the longevity of the theocratic regime

It is riven with contradictions, corrupt, internationally isolated and opposed by the majority of its own people. Yet the Iranian regime survives. **Yassamine Mather** looks at the long history of struggle against the Islamic Republic

At a time of revolutionary upheavals in Arab capitals, the burning question is, how did the Islamic regime in Iran survive the mass protests of 2009-10, when millions took to the streets of major cities to express their opposition to dictatorship?

However, a more fundamental question concerns the 33 years' longevity of the Iranian government - and, of course, the two issues are related. Starting with the easier question - the regime's ability to survive the protests of 2009-10 - I echo the reasons given by comrade Mohammad Reza Shalgouni of the Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran: regimes that are politically independent of the US and the west are less sensitive to international pressure regarding 'human rights abuses', etc and this is true to varying degrees of Syria, Libya and Iran. In addition, the leaders of such regimes have no escape route: their foreign bank accounts are all frozen. Unlike Egyptian or Tunisian officials, no-one associated with the Iranian government can expect asylum in Saudi Arabia or the Gulf states. In other words, Iran's rulers, like Bashar Assad of Syria and Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, have nowhere to go and no fortune stashed abroad. Hence their tenacity and determination to fight for their survival.

I have spoken in the past about the political reasons behind the failure of the 2009-10 protests. One should remember the abysmal leadership of the 'reformists', Mir-Hossein Moussavi and Mehdi Karroubi, and their inability to address the protest movement's anti-dictatorial demands and calls for an end to the rule of the *vali faghih* (supreme leader), ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The anti-dictatorial movement evolved considerably between June 2009 and the winter of 2010 - from a protest against electoral fraud during the presidential elections to a movement challenging the very existence of the religious state. However, the leadership of the green movement had no intention of questioning the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic. In addition, the complete dependence of the protest movement on the 'reformist' media and networks became one of its main weaknesses - the youth wanted to continue the protests, while the green leaders became concerned with saving the regime.

Another factor was the late arrival of the working class movement. There were few slogans for workers' rights during the protests of June-July 2009. This had changed by the end of the year, but by that stage the protest movement was facing massive repression. The frustration of the Iranian youth at the lack of major protests this summer in Tehran and other cities is palpable, as expressed in this joke: "In 2009 we asked, where is our vote? In 2010 we asked, where are our leaders? In 2011 we are asking, where are the protestors?"

However, I want to concentrate on why the regime has survived more than three decades.

In fact there are a number of



Khomeini: counterrevolutionary

recurring themes throughout the period of Iran's Islamic Republic. One of the most important is the fact that the rulers of the clerical regime thrive in times of crises: if there were no crises, they would have to create them in order to survive. Of course, the constant imperialist threat has helped - the danger of war and sanctions throughout the last three decades has inflamed patriotic sentiments, allowing the regime to blame 'foreign enemies' for all its shortcomings, and to justify repression.

Another recurring theme is that of terror, repression and the imprisonment of large numbers of political opponents, which have helped the regime to survive.

Last, but by no means least, is the fact that the Islamic regime has always benefited from the support of a solid base amongst sections of the population, albeit of a mercenary nature in recent years. This base started as devoutly Shia, but in my opinion there is nothing religious about what remains of it. Those who currently support the Islamic regime in Iran benefit materially from this support, either as paid members of various institutions or as beneficiaries of foundations, and so on. The future of this section of the population is totally tied to that of the regime and it will remain loyal to the Islamic state to the bitter end. This base is regularly used in confrontations with the protest movements, both as organs of repression - the *bassij* militia, the revolutionary guards - and in state-organised counter-demonstrations.

It is important to remember that this regime came to power after a revolutionary uprising that lasted more than two years. Yes, it hijacked the movement, misrepresenting its slogans and aspirations, and was counterrevolutionary from the day it took over. But this is not a government that came to power through a *coup d'etat* or foreign intervention. The

regime was able to consolidate its base amongst the bazaar community, in rural areas and sections of the urban poor.

Two key events

The Islamic Regime has benefited and still benefits from an adventurist foreign policy. I have never used the term 'anti-imperialist' in referring to Iran - it is an insult to genuine anti-imperialists. However, despite its total economic integration into the world capitalist order - it pays more attention to World Bank directives than koranic verses - in foreign policy Iran follows its own nationalist-religious agenda, which is at times anti-western.

We Iranians have a long history of 'shame'. Alexander the Great defeated Persia in 334 BC (we don't consider him that great for burning down Persepolis), and the Arab conquest of Persia in 644 is not something we are proud of. In more recent times Iranians faced the partition of the country between tsarist Russia and the British empire, then Soviet and allied occupation during World War II, and the CIA coup of 1953. In a rather perverse and crude way the foreign policy madness of the regime has appeared to some Iranians as revenge for all this 'shame' - a cleaning of the slate: we were not going to remain the only idiots in the Middle East with a special relationship with Israel, as we had in the 1960s and 70s.

Iranians felt a sense of shame regarding the shah's subservience to American foreign policy and in this respect two events in the first years of the Islamic regime play a significant role - not only in fooling the masses, creating a false sense of national pride, but also in shaping the organisation of the religious state, its structures and the way it would behave in future. Those two events are the takeover of the US embassy in 1980 and the war with Iraq.

As far as both events are concerned,

Iranians were not alone in being fooled by the Islamic regime. The Soviet Union, the Tudeh Party, the Fedayeen Majority and almost the entire Trotskyist left were united in hailing the November 1979 takeover of the US embassy in Tehran as an anti-imperialist act. It was nothing of the sort. On the contrary, it was a deliberate move by the Islamic regime - at the height of class struggles by workers continuing the strikes of the revolutionary period, at a time of protests by students, women and national minorities against the regime - to divert attention from these struggles and to use the excuse of an impending US attack (to free the US hostages held in the embassy) in order to increase its repression against revolutionary forces. When the embassy was taken over, workers who went on strike were told they were CIA agents, women who protested against the forced wearing of the veil or misogynist legislation were labelled foreign agents, and so on. This event certainly demonstrated to the regime the value of an external enemy.

After that came the Iran-Iraq war - in some ways a continuation of the US hostage saga. Let me make it clear that I do not share the widely held view that Saddam Hussein attacked Iran. In the first weeks after the war started Marxist groups such as Peykar and Fedayeen Minority were right to point out that wars are the continuation of politics by other means and that the Iranian regime's incitement of rebellion amongst Shia Iraqis amounted to aggression. In some ways Saddam saw this as preparation for war and fell into the trap of starting the conflict - not unlike his intervention in Kuwait.

Nevertheless, ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini had turned the entire Kurdish population against the Islamic regime. This led to unrest and civil war in Iran's Kurdish provinces, weakening considerably the ability

to defend the western borders against an Iraqi invasion. But the war, when it came, was a gift to the Iranian regime, allowing it to build up its organs of repression, the Revolutionary Guards and *bassij* (to complement the forces inherited from the shah's time: the army and the secret services).

Despite the negative effects in terms of destruction of infrastructure and the death of half a million Iranians, at the same time the war strengthened the state's ability to control day-to-day affairs. There were major food shortages and rationing, and the state became the provider of food, distributing fuel coupons and later introducing subsidies (some of these were only ended a couple of months ago under International Monetary Fund pressure). The new religious state created a social security system, especially benefiting the families of the 'war martyrs' - we are talking about a few million people. Already one could see a section of the population becoming dependent.

Iran's main weapon during the war against Iraq was its larger population - the regime was encouraging a higher birth rate. Ironically this later created problems, as the youth born during the war are today amongst the regime's most ardent opponents. Their teenage years coincided with a different period in Iran's contemporary history - the 'reformist' presidencies of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami - during which they began to develop their opposition to the religious state.

It should also be noted that the majority of the left supported Iran in this war - even after 'Irangate', when it became clear that Iran's 'anti-imperialism' was a sham. In 1986 it was revealed that Iran was buying weapons from the US - it instructed the Lebanese Hezbollah to release US hostages to smooth the deal and payment for the weapons were made into a Swiss account belonging to the Nicaraguan Contras (who were, of course, supported by the CIA).

Ironically a war that was supposed to be fought to spread Islam was portrayed by Khomeini and other Islamic leaders in a *nationalist* way. Battle names were taken from the Sassanide wars against the (Islamic) Arab invasion in the 7th century - in fighting Iraq we were supposedly avenging the defeat of the Sassanide dynasty. An opportunist, 'pro-Iran/anti-Arab' stance adopted time and again by the Shia clergy to benefit from patriotic/pan-Iranian sentiments.

Cannon fodder

The war consolidated the base of the regime. I have always maintained that throughout the last decades - prior to the revolution, during the revolution, during the war - the regime was not supported by the urban working class, which remained opposed to fundamentalism. However, the Islamic state had support amongst slum-dwellers, sections of the peasantry and the bazaar community (shopkeepers and stallholders, but also bazaar employees).

French sociologist Olivier Roy describes these classes, some recently

LEFT CULTURE

Imputed consciousness and left organisations

Andy Wilson was part of a panel of three comrades who addressed the CPGB's Communist University in a session entitled 'They fuck you up, the left'. This is an edited version of his speech

I am an ex-member of the Socialist Workers Party, from which I was expelled in 1994. I then helped form the IS Group - a short-lived organisation that mostly made propaganda directed towards the SWP, critical of its internal regime. More latterly I am a member and founder of the Association of Musical Marxists.

There are plenty of horror stories about the left's culture, of course - some of those about Gerry Healy and the Workers Revolutionary Party are enough to give you a bilious attack: they go far beyond humour. The result is that the left seems to a lot of people to be made up of self-important, puffed-up bullshitters. John Sullivan's pamphlet, *When we leave this pub* - his round-up of the different groups of the left, which I see is on sale at a bookstall here - is so funny because much of it is true in terms of the picture it paints of the left's foibles. I would agree with Simon Pirani's general proposition that one problem with revolutionary groups is that they are purely political ('Leninist assumptions and cult hierarchies', September 29).

People talk about revolutionary consciousness - and this question was connected to my relationship with the SWP and my falling out with them. One question I love asking revolutionaries is, what is this consciousness that you are talking about? What does it consist of? Is it party slogans or agreeing with items in a programme? What is the content and nature of revolutionary consciousness? That is a really important question.

I will come back to that later, but first I will just say a little about my expulsion from the SWP. There is one thing about it that was extremely unpleasant. It is only recently that I found out, for example, the number of hours Tony Cliff put in phoning people, to drag out of them the names of any friends or associates I had, so they could be 'minded' as well. I was largely ostracised by people I had known for years - but even to this day I cannot tell you exactly why I was expelled.

Ostensibly it was because I wanted to start an independent cultural magazine, *The Assassin*, that would involve non-SWP members. This was considered deeply factional. In a sense they were right, because the reason I wanted to write about culture is that I worked out that if you went to an SWP meeting entitled 'Should the troops get out of Ireland?', well, we all knew what the answer was. But if you asked, 'Was Madonna [the pop star] a good thing for women or not?', you would get 50 different answers from people who all supposedly agreed with each other politically. I found that a really interesting field to explore, because I thought it might allow you to begin to address the real ideas and feelings of people rather than what they had learned by rote from educational and party meetings. I believed that these latent ideas could be turned against the elements of bureaucratism I found in the party. So in that sense there was indeed a sort of factional intent.

Not that this should be grounds for expulsion from a revolutionary group.

But I was told that I was being expelled because the central committee had ordered me not to produce this independent cultural magazine and I had refused to back down. They said an independent publication of that kind could not be allowed within the SWP. I pointed out that such things already existed: for example, there was an independent, socialist, cultural publishing house called Red Words - in fact, one of my accusers, Lindsey German, was involved in running it. She and Tony Cliff told me at my disciplinary hearing that there was an important difference: "If we told them to stop, they would, whereas if we tell you to stop, we feel you will not."

So I was expelled - for life. I remember asking the control commission: "Don't you think expelling me for life is an error on the part of the central committee? It places limits on your own powers, because you may want to change your mind at some point in the future. Why don't you just make it 'indefinite'?" But they insisted it was 'for life' and so it remains in force, since I am still alive - fortunately for me!

Because I do not know exactly why I was expelled, it is very hard for me to put my finger on some of the arguments behind it. Ultimately, it seems, I was expelled for arguing with a layer of the leadership about something connected with the direction of the party, its philosophy and politics. Some people were not prepared to tolerate that, so they put a lot of pressure on me and manoeuvred to get me out.

Lukács

Some of these arguments touched on the nature of revolutionary consciousness - in particular around the philosopher, Georg Lukács, which I debated with John Rees and his supporters over a number of years. I am going to run through them as briefly as I can, but by doing so I am not trying to intimate that solving the problems raised by Lukács, or taking the correct position on them, will somehow enable anybody magically to avoid the kind of dramas we are talking about. Nevertheless they bear on important questions for all of us.

The gist of it is this. In Lukács's great early work, *History and class consciousness*, there are two important dimensions. One of them is something that is widely celebrated: Lukács's application of Marxism in a way that Marx had not directly applied it. Lukács produces a critique of reification connected to a particular form: the commodity nature of production under capitalism. It is the way that ruling ideas assert themselves - and they assert themselves across the whole of society. So you do not have a working class with working class ideas, confronting the ruling class with ruling class ideas, in a direct showdown. What you have is the domination of ruling class ideas.

Now, that aspect of Lukács is tremendously important. Were you to pursue it, you could develop it to

explain the way in which ostensibly revolutionary groupings and parties become bureaucratized themselves, and ultimately the way that theory is often turned into an ideology by these groups - and that would be a very useful thing to do.

On the other hand, Lukács is also concerned about the objectivity of our ideas. If ideas are created by reification, how can the working class break through that to achieve something like the truth? The key point, I think, is what Lukács says about reified consciousness: there is also such a thing as an *imputed* class-consciousness - the consciousness that the working class *would* have, if it were aware of its objective situation and interests. This imputed class-consciousness is, if you like, the 'objective truth' moment of his philosophical system. The really interesting thing is that Lukács says repeatedly in his book that the revolutionary party *is* the imputed consciousness of the working class. He also says that by this 'imputed consciousness' he means the socialist ideas that Lenin, in *What is to be done?*, says must be injected into the class *from without* - a formulation which the International Socialists tradition, culminating in the SWP, had always rejected.

This is a philosophical problem which gets at the essence of the culture of left groups. Fascist groups have the *Führerprinzip* - they must be created according to a hierarchical structure, at the top of which is the *Führer*. I am not saying that Trotskyist groups have anything like that idea, but what I will say is this: if you have an idea of imputed class-consciousness, which you more or less identify with the revolutionary party, then, wherever the members of the revolutionary party are interacting with the world outside, they are being pulled in a different direction. They are being pulled *away from* imputed class-consciousness. Sectional interests are defined as antagonistic to this correct class-consciousness.

Things get interesting when you go a little deeper. If the correct, imputed class-consciousness resides in the revolutionary party, and yet the members of the revolutionary party are in fact pulled in different directions by their day-to-day experience, *where* in the revolutionary party does it actually reside? Well, of course, if the members at the 'periphery' of the party - where it makes contact with the world outside, so to say - are being pulled by the class, then the correct consciousness must lie at the point furthest away from this periphery - it must reside at the 'centre' of the party. That is why all the groups have their 'centre', and 'centralised' leaderships.

However, in reality the central committees are also torn apart by ideological differences; by outside allegiances, prejudices, whims - whatever it is that drives these people. Therefore, ultimately possession of the correct consciousness comes down very, very

often to one person (though a member of the SWP central committee once confided to me that, in her opinion, only two people in the SWP had the correct revolutionary 'instincts' - herself and Tony Cliff). The way that Gerry Healy dominated the WRP, the way that Cliff dominated the SWP, and so on, is perhaps not merely down to their talents or the force of their personalities, but has been prepared by the logic of a particular mindset. So, while there is no *Führerprinzip* involved, in practice these groups are nevertheless generally dominated by powerful individuals, or powerful cliques.

Unity

A friend of mine who is active in a revolutionary group that shall remain nameless was telling me this week that the word going around the party he belongs to is that he is becoming increasingly cynical. That struck me as very interesting. Cynical about what? Nobody felt the need to say precisely *what* he was being cynical about: it was just obvious. He was becoming unreliable. The idea that a revolutionary group should be wary of people who are cynical is incredible, because to me cynicism is an important revolutionary virtue.

I have talked about Lukács because that is the way I thought about this problem when my expulsion was taking place. But I think what we are waiting for is a change of circumstances that will allow us an opportunity to start to overcome these distortions. The recent upsurge in militancy should at last focus the attention of the various groups of the left on creating some greater revolutionary unity, and perhaps creating an actual revolutionary working class party, which we certainly do not have at the moment.

However, there is another aspect: knowing your own history as a movement is incredibly important, but in certain circumstances it can become a fetter. I was actually the SWP organiser in Liverpool for a few years, and I engaged at some level with the Militant. My experience of this

that people become embedded in their party positions in a way that precludes the necessary rethinking that is usually needed to make progress. As a young cadre you are taught how to defend your own group; theory almost becomes synonymous with the history of your own group, including its ideological struggles and the conclusions arrived at. You become a loyalist to those positions and therefore hemmed into your own party position.

I said at the beginning that I helped form "the IS Group". Note that it was not called 'International Socialists Group': the name was a nod towards the old IS (International Socialists) that became the SWP. Our idea was that, as the SWP had progressed, it had actually lost something quite valuable that had been in the early IS - its much greater ideological openness. Hungary, what happened in the Communist Party, Khrushchev's secret speech - in the 1950s all those things created an ideological ferment among small groups on the far left.

Last week I met Ken Weller, who decades ago had been a member of the Communist Party. He later joined the WRP, then helped form Solidarity, which was a sort of anti-Leninist group and became increasingly anarchistic. But in its early days, Solidarity was engaged by Tony Cliff and Mike Kidron in unity talks, with the idea that its members should join the early IS - still the Socialist Review Group at that time. Not only that, but members of Solidarity sat on the editorial board of *International Socialism* for a while. The point is that things were open-ended - people were genuinely rethinking their own traditions. I do not think that we have seen that for 20 or 30 years in any meaningful sense.

Leaving aside the philosophy and Lukács, I believe it is now becoming increasingly possible for us to talk more meaningfully about unity on the revolutionary left. About building a left that can slough off this awful culture we have inherited. So, despite my carefully nurtured cynicism, I am actually quite optimistic about the possibility of beginning to address some of these issues ●



Andy Wilson: expelled for life

DEBATE

Saving labour or capital?

Does the rate of profit tend to fall? The traditional Marxist argument upon which this theoretical proposition is based is badly flawed, argues **Moshé Machover**

Comrade Hillel Ticktin has argued that the present global crisis is not due to a fall in the average rate of profit.¹ Moreover, he is also quite sceptical (to say the least) of the claim, made by Andrew Kliman and others, that the average rate of profit has actually displayed in recent times a tendency to fall. I think he is right on both counts. However, I would go much further: I wish to refute the traditional Marxist *theoretical* argument claiming to prove that the average rate of profit has a long-term tendency to fall.

A faulty chain

That traditional argument consists of the following chain of propositions:

- A. Under capitalism, the productivity of labour tends to rise due to technological innovation, motivated by competition.
- B. Rising labour productivity due to technological change tends to increase the organic composition of capital.
- C. The average rate of profit has an inverse tendency to that of overall (economy-wide) organic composition; other things being equal, a rise in the overall organic composition of capital tends to lower the average rate of profit.

(Actually, the claim that the average rate of profit has an inherent tendency to decline was made before Marx, by David Ricardo. Marx accepted Ricardo's claim, but thought he could provide a *theoretical proof* of it using the chain of reasoning just outlined in simplified form. Marx's original presentation is in chapters 13-15 of volume 3 of *Capital*.)

I assert that, while propositions A and C are true, proposition B is false; and therefore the entire argument breaks down.

Before I proceed to disprove proposition B, I must explain the terms I will use. First, *organic composition*. There is no generally agreed definition of this term. Marx himself uses it in several, somewhat different senses, not exactly equivalent to one another. But for the purpose of the present discussion it does not really matter which of these senses is used: proposition B does not hold under any of them. However, to fix ideas, I mean by organic composition (on a given day) the value of invested capital used in or for production during that day (including means of production, buildings, stocks of raw material waiting to be used, half-finished products, and finished products waiting to be sold), divided by the amount of labour (measured, say, in worker-hours) employed during that day in putting that capital in motion.² Organic composition can refer to a given firm, or to a given sector, or even to a whole economy. In any case, it is time-dependent: it changes over time.

Second, I just referred to the *value* of capital goods. By the *value* of a commodity I mean its exchange value in Marx's sense of the term: the amount of labour necessary to reproduce it. However, for the purpose of the present discussion it would make little difference if we understand value as price, measured, say, in pounds or dollars (adjusted for inflation - ie, so-called constant price). The truth or otherwise of propositions B and C is not affected. The reason for this is that, while there is no determinate relationship between the price of a single commodity and its value, there is a *statistical* relationship: if we take large, diverse samples ('baskets') of commodities, the ratio between their



Law of the tendency of the rate of profit to decline

respective total prices and total values is very nearly constant.³

Third, *labour productivity* is hard to define (and is possibly meaningless) as a global quantity. But it has a clear meaning in relation to each specific type of product: it is the inverse of the value of a unit of this type of product. For example, if the total (direct and indirect) labour time needed to produce a car of a given type is halved, this means that the productivity of labour producing this type of car is doubled.

Productivity and organic composition

Analytically speaking, technological advance, leading to increased productivity of labour, can take place in two ways: saving labour and saving capital.

- A labour-saving technological change increases productivity (other things being equal) by reducing the amount of labour used *directly* in producing each unit of output.
- A capital-saving technological change replaces means of production, or raw materials, or other non-labour inputs by less valuable ones. Other things being equal, this increases the productivity of labour because the value of each unit of output consists, in addition to the amount of 'living' labour employed directly in producing it, also of the amount of 'dead' labour, the value of the material inputs used up (ie, consumed) in producing it.

In reality, these two kinds of technological changes often occur together. It is even possible for the productivity of labour to increase by a technological change that is labour-saving and involves *negative* capital saving, or is labour-wasting and capital-saving. For example, an increase in the value of the raw material used for a given product can be more than offset by reducing the amount of labour per unit of output. Or, conversely, an increase in the amount of labour per unit can be more than offset by using much cheaper raw materials. Labour productivity will increase if the *net result* is a reduction of the total amount of living and dead labour embedded in each unit of output.

But for the purpose of analysis it is convenient to separate the two kinds of technological change. This is why I keep saying "other things being

equal".

Now observe that, other things being equal, a labour-saving technological change tends to increase the organic composition of the capital of the firm in which the change takes place. This is because such a change increases the ratio between the value of invested capital and the amount of employed labour. The opposite holds for capital-saving technological change: it tends to *reduce* the above-mentioned ratio, and hence the organic composition of the capital of the given firm.

In the early stages of the agricultural and industrial revolutions, technological changes were predominantly labour-saving. Think, for example, of the introduction of agricultural machinery, or of the replacement of the hand loom by the power loom. These obviously resulted in an increase of organic composition of capital in these branches of production, and hence also contributed to increasing the overall organic composition in the entire economy. It was quite natural to assume in the 19th century that technological change would always be of this type. Marx took it for granted, and hence believed in the truth of proposition B.

But in fact not all technological change is of this kind. As an illustration, let us take one of the oldest branches of capitalist production, where mass production was pioneered: printing. This industry has undergone at least two major waves of technological innovation. For several centuries following the invention of printing with movable types, printing was done sheet by sheet using a hand press: the press had to be tightened and loosened for each sheet of paper. Typesetting was done manually, each individual letter-type placed by hand in a printer's form. Then came a series of changes: the hand press was replaced by a fast, mechanical press into which the paper was fed automatically; and most typesetting was now done by linotype (and later monotype) machines, using hot lead. These machines (as well as the lead needed for machine typesetting) were very expensive, but they made possible a huge saving in labour. Undoubtedly, these technological changes resulted in a considerable increase in the organic composition of capital in the printing industry, and hence contributed to its increase in the entire economy.

However, quite recently printing has been revolutionised by capital-saving changes. The *Weekly Worker* is typeset on a desk computer - very much cheaper than a hot-metal typesetting machine (plus the lead needed for it). Printing is done on electronic photo-printers, which are considerably cheaper than the old printing machines, especially where not very large print runs are concerned. For a small number of copies, most of us use domestic desk printers, which are very much cheaper than the machines needed to produce a similar quantity and quality of output using the technology of yesterday. These recent changes have involved little if any saving in direct labour per unit of output; the saving is predominantly in capital (indirect labour).

Thus the effect of increased productivity of labour in a given branch of production on the organic composition in that branch is in principle *indeterminate*: the latter can go up or down, or be unchanged - depending on whether the new technology is labour-saving or capital-saving. And there is no law that says that technological change must always, or for the most part, be labour-saving.

Indirect effects

In addition, there are technological changes that tend to *reduce* the organic composition - not necessarily in the industries in which these changes take place, but in other branches of production, and hence in the economy as a whole. This kind

of change was in fact mentioned in passing by Hillel Ticktin in his article.

I am referring, of course, to technological changes that increase labour productivity in what Marx called 'department one', which produces means of production (including raw materials). Suppose that labour productivity increases (as it always tends to do) in the industry that produces printing machines. Whether this is achieved by labour-saving or capital-saving in this industry, it will in any case tend to reduce the organic composition of capital in the printing industry. Similarly, an increase in the productivity of labour in steel production, no matter how it is achieved, will reduce the organic composition in industries that use steel as input; for example, the car manufacturing industry. Consequently, sufficiently large increases in labour productivity in department one, *no matter how they are achieved*, will tend to reduce the overall organic composition in the entire economy. Therefore, even if all technological change were labour-saving, overall organic composition can still go down, provided the productivity of labour in department one increases sufficiently fast.

Since it is impossible to predict the course of future technological change - whether it will be mostly labour-saving or capital-saving, and how much of it will take place in department one, proposition B, and hence the traditional Marxist argument for the historical tendency of the average rate of profit to decline, is untenable.

Of course, this does not necessarily mean that the average rate of profit does not in fact tend to decline in the long run. This is an empirical question. My feeling is that, based on existing data, the evidence for it is quite weak. But it is quite possible that such a tendency will emerge in future. It is even conceivable that there is some theoretical argument pointing at such a future tendency; but, if so, it is not the traditional argument, which is fallacious, as I have shown •

Notes

1. 'The theory of capitalist disintegration' *Weekly Worker* September 8.
2. Another definition of this term takes, instead of the amount of labour, the wages paid for that labour. But this will not make any difference to the present discussion, provided we assume that the wage rate does not change very much in value terms.
3. For details, see E Farjoun, M Machover *Laws of chaos* London 1983. This book also contains a detailed technical analysis of the behaviour of the rate of profit.

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OUR HISTORY

A second go at unity

A beginning had been made. The first congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain had forged the unity of the British Socialist Party, the Communist Unity Group - a trend from the Socialist Labour Party - the South Wales Communist Council and others. But the job of forging a single Communist Party in Britain was only half done.

Outside the new formation were a variety of revolutionary groupings that declared loyalty to the Communist International, to Bolshevism and the lessons of October 1917, but were still reluctant to sacrifice their sect identities. The Comintern would have none of this. It urged the calling of a second unity congress: another chance to create a strong, united party of Marxists in Britain.

The item below is from the CPGB's weekly, *The Communist*. In stark contrast to the putrid, petty insularity that prevails on our contemporary left, it is animated by a constructive, non-sectarian and business-like approach to the pivotal question of communist unity.

Thoughts on unity

Why does the executive committee of the Communist International insist on a new unity conference?

Because, in the first place, it is devoting its energies at present to the realisation in every country of the world of the principle laid down at the Second Congress that one powerful Communist Party - or rather one section of the Communist International, and one only - should exist in each country. Its efforts are causing at present a radical cleansing of the Italian Socialist Party; they are driving the French Socialist Party towards a definite break with its ambiguous and opportunist past; they have split the great Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany from top to bottom, and have created, with one hammer blow, the largest Communist Party in the world. It is obvious that where the party allegiance of hundreds of thousands is being thrown into the melting pot elsewhere, the comrades at the centre of the International are justifiably impatient at what appear to them to be the petty squabbles, petty bickerings, petty regards for prestige which keep the British communists divided into several groups.

Secondly, while they recognise that, all things taken into consideration, our Communist Party is the "orthodox" organisation for Britain, they insist that no stone must be left unturned, even at the expense of our own self-love, to bring onto the right track other elements that are not so orthodox, but nonetheless are sincere revolutionaries and genuinely devoted to the cause of communism.

To quote Zinoviev, "We have to fight against both right and left; but not at all in the same way or with the same methods." The first are our class enemies, with whom there can be no compromise; the second are "communists of tomorrow," who only mistakenly call themselves 'left' because they do not understand that nothing can be more 'left' than communism.

In Bukharin's words: "If there are only 30 of them and you bring them in, it will be worthwhile." In this respect, of course, we at any rate are under no illusions as to the numbers in question. The problem, however, is one not of



Arthur McManus: one country, one party

numbers, but of principles.

The Communist November 25 1920

We have previously looked at the leftist politics of Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers' Socialist Federation, which set up the "Communist Party - British Section of the Third International" in opposition to the CPGB. The CP-BSTI comrades eventually accepted the position of the Comintern EC and joined in the new party at the second unity congress, which took place in Leeds at the end of January 1921. Pankhurst's scheme for a 'left' bloc within the party, with a separate organisation and newspaper, was not taken on board.

In September 1920, the Communist Labour Party was set up in Scotland by a number of shop stewards and various revolutionary groups, including members of the Socialist Labour Party rump that had previously refused to join the CPGB. Just back from the Second Congress of the Comintern and his talks with Lenin, Willie Gallagher was able to win the majority of the CLP back to unity negotiations with the CPGB, and they too joined the enlarged party at the Leeds congress. A small number refused, either from the leftist position of rejecting any use of parliament or, like John Maclean, putting Scottish nationalism above the need for communist unity.

The National Shop Stewards and Workers Committee Movement took part in preparations for Leeds and in the congress itself. Born out of industrial struggles during World War I, when the official trade union leaders backed the bosses and their imperialist war, the SSWCM went on to take a lead in the Hands Off Russia campaign. Its leaders joined the CPGB, bringing it considerable influence among militant workers.

The Left Wing grouping within

the Independent Labour Party also took part in the congress, though its comrades did not join the party right away. This report of the congress, with its fraternal address, appeared in the party's weekly paper.

Leeds Unity Conference

One hundred and seventy delegates representing the branches of the Communist Party (BSTI), and various independent communist groups assembled at the Victory Hotel, Leeds, on Saturday and Sunday, with the object of merging the various organisations into a united Communist Party. Jack Tanner (SSWCM) was voted to the chair.

Certain preliminary matters, such as the appointment of a standing orders committee, having been disposed of, the chairman briefly addressed the delegates, telling them they were assembled to carry out the first duty to the international communist movement, and to the working class of Britain in particular. They were proposing to bring about a united Communist Party. The work of the conference was to construct a machine, and there should be no question in the mind of any delegate as to what the purpose of that machine was. It must be constructed to carry on an intensive and ruthless fight against capitalism and reaction wherever they manifested themselves. This was probably the most important task that the revolutionary movement in this country had yet to face, and the trusted delegates would concentrate as never before their efforts on the task before them. The conference would be an index from which comrades in all parts of the world would be able to judge the earnestness, determination and understanding of the communist movement in this country.

JV Leckie (CLP) moved the adoption of the Unity Committee's report, taking the occasion to speak of the position of the Communist Labour Party.

T Watkins (CP-BSTI) seconded the resolution. As representative of his party he would say they had been

acted throughout with the spirit of unity that was necessary to make the conference a success.

A MacManus (CPGB) supported the resolution. He said that his party had to all intents and purposes wound up its affairs; its members would be party to any decisions arrived at by the present conference.

The resolution was then put and carried, and, on the suggestion of the chairman, certain other matters of a rather formal nature were included in it.

GH Brown (fraternal delegate from the Left Wing of the Independent Labour Party) then conveyed hearty greetings from the communists he represented to the conference. He said that a fortnight or three weeks ago the national committee of the Unity Convention Arrangements Committee had carried a resolution that the left wing should continue to work inside the Labour Party until Easter, and that if then the communists lost on the floor of the conference at Southport, they should come for advice to the executive committee of the united Communist Party. If that advice should be to the effect that the left wing should leave the ILP and come into the Communist Party, he along with a great many others were determined to take that advice.

JT Murphy (fraternal delegate from the Shop Stewards and Workers' Committees) said that he wanted to do more than merely welcome the congress: he wanted this to be the introduction to the practical task which the Communist Party had before it in relation to the rest of the movement in this country. The NAC of the shop stewards' movement had played an important part in the negotiations which had culminated in the present conference, yet the movement itself was not in the same category as a political party, but embraced workers who were not communists.

The fact that the NAC of the shop stewards had played the part it had done with regard to the development of the Communist Party arose out of the fact that the movement had come into being as a result of the revolutionary impulses which had been given to the industrial movement. Revolutionists had dominated the situation throughout, and now practically every member of the national committee of the shop stewards was a member of some Communist Party. It was because the national committee was of the character it was that it was possible for it to play the part it had done in helping on the negotiations for the development of a united Communist Party. It would stress the necessity for its active members to join the Communist Party, and reciprocally would expect all industrial workers who were members of the Communist Party to participate in the work of the shop stewards movement.

Many people who did not understand communism were being impelled to move in that direction, and it was our duty, while clearly organising our own party, to see that we harmonised on every point we could all those tendencies in a revolutionary direction which manifested themselves inside the workshop.

When the congress reassembled in the afternoon, the first business before it was the resolution to merge the Communist Party of Great Britain, the Communist Labour Party, the Communist Party (BSTI) and the independent communist groups

represented at the Congress into a united Communist Party.

William Gallagher (CLP) moved this resolution. He said there had been numerous delegates from Britain at the Moscow conference, but the British communists there had not made a creditable display. Each section had seemed more anxious to impress the congress with its own revolutionary fervour than to get together with the other sections and do something really valuable. Thus, the unfortunate position had been arrived at where the executive committee of the Communist International had been obliged to take matters out of the hands of the British delegation, and make arrangements for bringing the communists of this country together and getting a definite and well organised party started. We had failed in the past because so many of us had been too concerned with personalities rather than with principles; but from now onwards the one thing that must count was the world movement.

William Paul (CPGB) seconded the resolution, saying that at that conference we had forged a weapon which we were going to use in the near future in order to upset and eliminate the capitalist class. We thanked our comrades in Moscow for showing us that not only could communists fight successfully in the industrial battlefield, but for showing mental courage in the realms of international policy and social reconstruction. On the battlefield the Russian communists had shown a heroism outshining that of any army ever raised in the past.

A lengthy discussion was naturally anticipated by some, but the general feeling of the congress was that further speech upon this resolution was unnecessary. It was agreed that the vote be taken at once; the whole assembly rose, sang 'The Internationale' and cheered, and, the vote then being formally taken, the resolution was carried unanimously with renewed applause.

... [then] came the most dramatic moment of the conference. From the chair it was announced that comrade Friis, a fraternal delegate from the executive of the Third International and representing also the Norwegian comrades, had arrived in Leeds despite the fact that a passport had been refused him.

Friis immediately mounted the platform and was greeted by a volley of cheers and the singing of 'The Internationale', then after he had spoken in terse, effective sentences of admirable English he left the hall, and, by the way he came, set out again to Norway.

He said: "I come here in a double capacity. First at the instruction of the executive of the Communist International. From it, I carry hearty greetings and congratulations. I come also as a delegate from the Norwegian party to offer fraternal salutations.

"The fact that I'm here is a proof of our determination to defy, and our ability to overcome, bourgeois laws and regulations. This movement of ours has friends at every frontier, comrades on every ship, helpers at every station.

"By your resolution you have become a living link with the revolutionary movement all over the world, with Moscow and Norway ..."

As he left the hall, at the end of his speech, Friis was again given an ovation, and again 'The Internationale' was sung ●

**The Communist
February 5 1921**

DEMONSTRATION

Building for November 30



Manchester protest: more out

On Sunday October 2 over 35,000 workers, students, pensioners and anti-cuts campaigners marched outside the Conservative Party conference. This is a sizeable increase from the 7,000 demonstrators at last year's conference, underlining the growing, yet still sluggish, moves to resist the austerity measures. The conference itself was ringed by steel walls, barricades and hundreds of police. Despite this, the demonstration was peaceful and no arrests took place. At the start the Liverpool Socialist Singers led the demonstrators in 'The Internationale', with many left activists and trade unionists joining in.

Earlier in the day hundreds of students gathered at the University of Manchester before joining the demonstration. They marched behind a banner which read, 'Students and workers, unite', pointing to the fact that some students at least are making the necessary connection between the austerity attacks and the importance of unity in organising the resistance. Another feeder march brought hundreds of activists and trade unionists from Salford. There were calls for a general strike from the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party in England and Wales, and other small Trotskyist groups - though when this chant went up it was largely confined to the student contingent led by the SWP.

Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the Public and Commercial Services union, speaking at the rally, said that mass strike action will be taking place on November 30 and "If you never fight, you lose every time". His view was: "Now's the time to fight, now's the time to defeat the government." The majority of speakers not only condemned the attacks on their members, but went on to call for an alternative plan for growth. Notably Association of Teachers and Lecturers general secretary Mary Bousted pledged further support for strike action and warned Ed Miliband's Labour Party that if it "doesn't support us Labour will be a disgrace as well". Which got one of the loudest cheers at the rally. Len McCluskey from Unite declared that coordinated action could be considered a general strike and asserted: "We need civil disobedience - the oldest form of democracy. We should take the lead from the students." Tony Lloyd MP was heckled by some local trade union activists, as he failed to oppose Miliband's

anti-strike rhetoric and the vicious cuts being brought in by Manchester's Labour-run council.

A couple of conclusions can be drawn from the demonstration. Firstly, it has been clear for some time that the baton of leading the struggle has well and truly passed from the students to the organised working class. Secondly, there is growing support for a strike - a change in mood across the working class is taking place, as the reality of the Conservative-led government's assault begins to bite.

Thirdly, the movement is still relatively weak compared to those in Europe.

As we move towards November 30, the revolutionary left needs to strain every sinew to help organise workers to ensure that as much pressure as possible is placed on those union leaders who have not yet organised to join the action to do so without delay; and on those who have to stand firm - if they pull out, we must fight for strike action to go ahead without them ●

Chris Strafford

Fighting fund

Web of intrigue

"What is happening about the CPGB website?" I was asked the other day. Well, comrade, although it is over two years since our site was subject to a vicious cyber attack, there is still no firm date for our promised relaunch.

This is an ongoing handicap that the *Weekly Worker* has to endure. Although our online archive going back to 2000 has been available for some considerable time, it is still riddled with errors. However, there is light at the end of the tunnel. After all the other 'firm dates' for a relaunch I don't want to be too specific, but ...

A couple of years back we were regularly attracting 20,000 or more internet readers every week. But nowadays we are down in the teens - in fact last week we fell below 12,000 (11,982, to be exact). Nevertheless, it has to be said we now have a firmer hard core of supporters who are prepared to put their hands in their pockets and back us financially.

That was admirably illustrated by the success of our standing orders appeal, which ended in August with pledges for an extra £313 a month. The last few of those are still being realised - in this week's post there was a completed form from comrade CF, who doubled his quarterly payment from £10 to £20 (that translates into an extra £3 a month).

Largely because of this new regular income, our fighting fund is looking better than ever. For example the last two days of September brought in an additional £25, taking our final total to £1,326 - in other words, we exceeded our £1,250 target by £101.

I am hopeful of doing even better in October if the evidence of the first few days are anything to go by. Standing orders landing in the *Weekly Worker* account at the beginning of the month amounted to £250 - thanks to all 15 comrades, whose contributions included four of £30 and one each of £25 and £20. I also received three cheques in the post - thanks to comrade RI, who added a magnificent £50 to his subscription, and FJ, who doubled his six-month sub by adding £25. Then there was another £25 from RG, who was too modest even to send us a covering note.

Thank you all! After just five days our October fund stands at exactly £350. The question that intrigues me is, by how much will we exceed our target this month? That's almost as intriguing as "When will the website be relaunched?" ●

Robbie Rix

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

What we fight for

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

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

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

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations 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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Refounding Labour to win ... what?

Suffocating lack of democracy

Delegate **Jim Moody** gives his impressions of the Liverpool Labour Party conference

New Labour is dead: long live the refounded Labour Party! Well, that's not quite what happened in Liverpool last week. In fact, the Blairite legacy is alive and well and functions to destroy real debate within the party, especially at what should be its ultimate decision-making body, annual conference.

The other side of this coin was illustrated on the Mersey too: that the unions are decisive and if their bureaucracies wanted they could change the present state of affairs, for the betterment of party democracy. In actual fact, conference functions largely as a PR presentation for the media, with stage-managed speeches absent of contention with respect to any proposal on the table, since almost everything has been decided beforehand, beyond the conference hall.

Attending conference as a delegate for the first time was an almost joyless experience for me. Unsurprisingly and perhaps even unremarkably, the attenuated (ie, denial of) democracy beloved of New Labour persists. Those of us active in the party know how democratically eviscerated it has become since the time of Blair's takeover in the mid-1990s. When it comes to what would be usual for conferences of trade unions and all kinds of democratic organisations, Labour now does things differently. We have arrived at a situation where, instead of a conference at which affiliates' and constituencies' delegates debate motions and amendments to motions, there are the deliberately impenetrable and abstruse policy forums and subsequent empty rhetoric and pointless conference speeches. Once the national policy forum's (NPF) report is accepted by the national executive committee, that is that: the report, section by section, can only be accepted or rejected by conference; no amendments are allowed. As expected, it was passed as the leadership intended following conference 'debate'. In conference itself, there were only flashes of real discussion, mainly centring on attempts to reference-back the morning's conference arrangements committee (CAC) reports on a couple of occasions.

Constituency Labour Parties and affiliates such as trade unions are allowed to submit one so-called contemporary motion (and CLPs can only do that if they have not submitted a rule change proposal). However, if a contemporary motion is to stand a chance of appearing on the conference order paper at all, its subject matter must not already have been discussed by the NPF or its commissions before the cut-off date (the NPF's last meeting in late July). Obviously, this considerably constrains what CLPs and affiliated organisations can put forward. At conference itself this thin slice of permitted motions is squeezed into a few composites, only eight of which can be moved. On the first day two groups - CLPs and affiliates (overwhelmingly the unions) - each choose four composites.

But this year, through overlapping choices and the restricted interpretation

of the CAC, only five composites actually made it onto the agenda. The unions chose 'Jobs, growth, employment rights'; 'Health and social care'; 'Phone hacking'; and 'Public services'. CLPs in the main disregarded advice given in the first bulletin put out by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, so their votes were largely wasted when they were cast for three dead certs (ie, three of the union-backed composites), plus a composite on 'Housing'. This meant, for example, that the 'August riots' did not get taken: a glaring omission. Although there were challenges to the CAC's morning reports on its recommendations, none was successful and chairs of sessions refused calls for card votes.

What constitutes an emergency motion to conference was even more tightly defined: so much so that none of those submitted this year cleared the hurdles placed in their way. All the proposed rule changes that were accepted onto the agenda, none of which was earth-shattering, fell on card votes after CAC recommendations against their acceptance.

Of course, arguably the most important item at conference has been the culmination of discussions on the *Refounding Labour* document first proposed by Peter Hain in March on the instigation of Ed Miliband. Branches and CLPs spent considerable time and effort on this project, submitting thousands of responses. But these appear hardly to have been given more than a nod in the end: we are still waiting to see if the responses will be published in full; the only feedback so far, apart from standard bland letters of acknowledgment from Hain, has been bare statistics on the number of responses that were made.

The NEC finalised a reformulated version days before conference after secret recommendations were made by its organisation committee in the light of trade union objections. Then last-minute negotiations between party and union officials on the day before conference started ensured that

the leadership's key proposals were retained in *Refounding Labour*.

Accordingly, from now on non-members can become registered supporters of the Labour Party, able to vote in the leadership election and otherwise participate within the party alongside individual members; levy-paying trade union members will have to register to have these rights. The unions pushed through a concession, whereby this is not achieved solely at the expense of their representation, as was originally proposed. The last-ditch deal allows registered supporters, once their numbers reach 50,000, to gain 3% of electoral college votes, with 1% taken from each of the three former electoral college components: individual members within Constituency Labour Parties; those paying the political levy in the trade unions; and MPs. If registered supporter numbers increase beyond the minimum 50,000, the proportion of electoral college votes they control will rise progressively up to a maximum of 10%, to be allocated on the same basis: ie, a 30:30:30:10 split.

In addition to the dilution of membership rights, both individual and trade union, another step away from democracy was contained in the document. The longstanding right of Labour MPs to elect members of the shadow cabinet is now abolished. Instead, the Labour leader while in opposition now has the right to select whomsoever he wishes independently of any Labour body, just as a Labour prime minister already does. This further adds to the dictatorial powers of the leader, who, instead of acting like an elected monarch, should be accountable to and recallable by the NEC. And no-one should be fooled by all those full seats during such set-piece, key PR moments as the leader's speech: officials will put anyone and her brother in empty ones to ensure the hall looks full. There were more media and PR people attending conference than delegates, which is nothing out of the ordinary these days.

Of course, given the way things are carved up in the Labour Party, neither CLPs nor affiliates were able to intervene openly to change *Refounding Labour* at conference; once again, no amendments were allowed. It was again 'take it or leave it' time. A minority of delegates followed the logic of opposition to these objectionable proposals, as well as to the undemocratic process as a whole, and voted against the entire document when it came to a card vote on the first day of conference.

The bitter pill had been sweetened for conference delegates by offering incentives. Constituencies will no longer have to pay a fee for the first delegates they send. In addition, local councillors and Young Labour will in future have representation at annual conference and distinct rights in leadership elections. But why should councillors - or MPs, for that matter - be granted special powers and rights? This is another example of the tail wagging the dog, since they allegedly represent us.

However, there may be some unintended positive consequences for party democracy. It all depends upon how members press the point. For it now may be possible, as a consequence of the rule changes brought in by *Refounding Labour to win* (its new name), for branches and constituencies to allow affiliate (eg, trade union levy-paying) members, as well as the new registered supporters, to attend their meetings.

Unable to amend it, on the usual 'take it or leave it' basis CLPs overwhelmingly supported the final NEC-approved version of *Refounding Labour to win*: voting was 112,286 in favour, with 14,842 against. Affiliates, which numerically are mainly the trade unions, voted 2,459,269 for and only 11,822 against.

The high point for real debate at conference has to be its fringe meetings, where all sorts of groups - within and without the Labour Party - vied for delegates' attention at lunch breaks

and at the end of each day. Single-issue campaigns provided plenty of scope to discuss questions where debate was squashed out of the agenda in the conference hall itself.

The best fringe meeting that I attended was organised by the Labour Representation Committee in a nearby hotel. Over 200 comrades crammed into a sweltering room to hear platform speakers John McDonnell, Tony Benn, PCS's Mark Serwotka and Unite's Len McCluskey lambast politicians of all stripes, including Labour ones. The speakers' main focus was on the forthcoming strike on November 30, but they and contributors from the floor called for the resistance to the cuts to be built beyond one-day events and to include civil disobedience.

Comrade McDonnell stated that class struggle is "at its bitterest for generations", while Len McCluskey wanted the widest "coalition of resistance". Mark Serwotka was very clear: "We should say there should be no public spending cuts ... We should say we're not having austerity." Were the mood and tenor of the LRC meeting to have been that of even a large minority at the conference itself, there could have been a direct challenge to the pro-capitalist cliques that currently vie at the top of the party to control it.

As well as those organised by unions and other groups from the working class movement, there were fringes put on not just by charities, but by overtly pro-capitalist bodies. The very well-funded Blairite Progress group held several, in conjunction with 'partners' such as the Chemical Industries Association; Progress had a platform speaker at one fringe meeting from Nato's London Information Network on Conflicts and State-building. One of the Fabian Society fringes was supported by EEF, "the manufacturers' organisation". Businesses and commercial organisations holding fringe meetings included Aviva, the Nuclear Industry Association, Reuters, *The Times* and *The Observer* ●

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