



# weekly worker



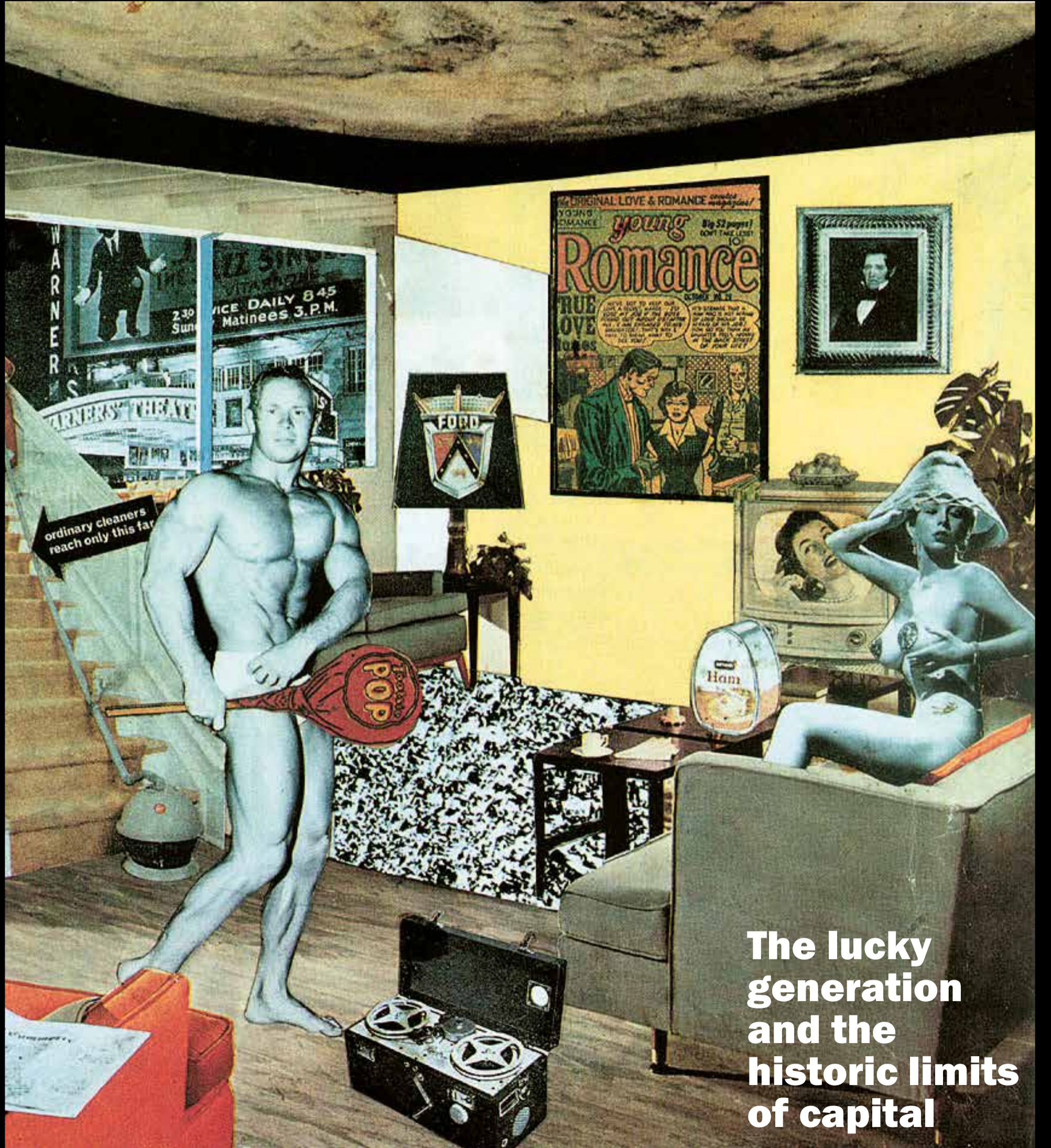
**Elections: candidates give their answers to Communist Platform's seven questions**

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# LETTERS



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

## Hang your head

There is something profoundly dishonest about Jack Conrad's article in last week's *Weekly Worker* ('Aims, deals and recommendations', March 5). The seven questions which conclude the article purport to be an attempt to identify individuals among the candidates of the Independent Socialist Network which the CPGB can support in Left Unity's internal elections. Yet the questions are transparently aimed at justifying a blatantly sectarian refusal to engage with any kind of dialogue with the ISN.

Jack Conrad obviously finds himself in a difficult position. The ISN is standing a number of candidates in the internal elections on a principled platform: for a mass united socialist party committed to the overthrow of capitalism and based on the working class; against the anti-austerity coalition dreamed up by Left Unity's leadership that would involve backing non-working class parties; and for a serious orientation to recruitment and campaigning.

The ISN does not think it can achieve this goal by itself, so - in the short period between the elections being announced and nominations closing - we approached a number of organisations and individuals who we felt shared our broad vision. We informed them what we were doing and suggested that we try to avoid clashes and maybe embark on a process of discussion in the coming months.

When Nick Wrack phoned the national organiser of the CPGB on February 24, far from "clos[ing] the matter", as Jack Conrad reports, Mark Fischer welcomed the approach. A couple of days later Mark reported that at the Communist Platform's steering committee there had been a positive reaction and "people were interested in collaboration". It was agreed to talk again once nominations were in. However, after the Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB met on March 1, lines of communication went dead. Jack Conrad's article is the PCC's reply.

The article is Jack Conrad's attempt to avoid the messy business of actually picking up the phone and speaking to people. In it he characterises the ISN as "based on the politics of fudge" and "unanchored programmatically". If that means that the ISN is open to all independent socialists and does not demand that its members act as automatons, that is correct. It is entirely wrong to suggest that the ISN is not committed as an organisation to clear goals. In fact the ISN has adopted the statement of aims and principles of the Socialist Platform that just about every member of the CPGB signed up to in 2013.

It is true that this statement is nothing like as long or comprehensive as the CPGB's own *Draft programme*. However, note the adjective 'draft'. The CPGB programme is not supposed to be the finished product, but a contribution to a future process, whereby the left comes together to form a Marxist party (the CPGB is itself supposed to be 'provisional'). That process will involve many traditions and strands of the left throwing a wide range of ideas into the pot. The party that emerges will continue to debate, discuss and retain the capacity to change its mind.

Too often the CPGB's 'draft' programme serves as a weapon in the hands of the CPGB's leadership to repel others on the left by insisting on prior agreement with whatever the CPGB asserts is important - priorities selected usually on a fairly random basis. That is the behaviour of a sect bent on maintaining internal cohesion above the broader interests of the working class.

As for Jack Conrad's argument that the ISN is more committed to the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition than Left Unity, well, we do think it is important that the forces represented by Tusc (an increasing number of defectors from the Labour Party, as well as the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party) are part of the process of creating a united mass socialist party. ISN members are the principal standard-bearers within Tusc of the demand that democratic structures are set up. Over a hundred general election candidates in May should mean over a hundred branches in June.

Left Unity also potentially has an important role to play. But the last thing that we need is yet another organisation claiming to be the only true socialist party in competition with all the others. The ISN prioritises neither Tusc nor Left Unity, but overcoming the crippling division of the socialist left.

So our reply to Jack Conrad's seven questions is this. We do not accept the CPGB's arrogant assumption that it can conduct a one-way exchange with other organisations on an agenda it alone determines. Nor will we disavow our members on the CPGB's say so. Laurie McCauley's exclusion from his branch should be resolved and his right to report in the *Weekly Worker* preserved. That is going to require dialogue, comrades, including with Chris Strafford.

Then - pulling another rabbit from his hat - Jack Conrad raises an eight-year-old case against John Pearson. I was organiser for the Campaign for a Marxist Party at the time, so I know exactly what this is about. John Pearson should have apologised for threatening during an interval in a CMP aggregate to "lamp" another comrade (a former friend who he felt had disparaged him in a speech). However, John was hardly going to apologise at the behest of the organisation that had expelled him for the way he voted at a Socialist Alliance meeting. He was duly suspended from the CMP shortly before the CMP suspended itself.

Now, John Pearson may be stubborn, but he has not used physical violence or threatened it on any other occasion. Indeed, the CPGB has raised no objection to John's prominent role on Left Unity's conference arrangements committee. They have challenged John's rulings with no apparent fear for their physical safety. Yet suddenly, when the ISN is in Jack Conrad's sights, no statute of limitations applies on past misdemeanours.

This is a cynical and thoroughly nasty case of character assassination in the service of sectarianism, with John Pearson just so much collateral damage. Jack Conrad should hang his head in shame.

**Nick Rogers**  
Independent Socialist Network

## Wrong tone

I find the tone of Jack Conrad's article too antagonistic towards the ISN, and the personal remarks against some of their members quite unnecessary. This in the context of the ISN's approach to the Communist Platform for an accord, whereby the ISN and ComPlat would support some of each other's candidates in the forthcoming internal elections of Left Unity.

As an independent member of ComPlat's steering committee, I hasten to add that nothing in comrade Conrad's article explicitly contradicts resolutions adopted by our committee. So in this sense I must take partial responsibility for that article. However, in my opinion the negative remarks made by Jack are unfortunate, and I regret not trying to forestall them. I think it was an oversight not to agree beforehand on the tone and tenor of our response to the ISN.

**Moshé Machover**  
email

## Pro-Zionist

Jack Conrad justifies his engineering my departure from the CPGB's Communist Platform last year because of my "retrogressive" attitude to Jews. But he produces no evidence of antipathy towards Jews. Most of my political mentors are of Jewish origin. I circulated a reading list on the Jewish question shortly before Conrad's purge, citing five authors - Marxist and non-Marxist - of material relevant to formulating a Marxist analysis of the Jewish question today.

These authors were: Karl Marx, Abram Leon, Israel Shahak, Shlomo Sand and Gilad Atzmon. All of Jewish origin. It does appear that, from his own semi-Zionist perspective, Conrad considers that all these writers are racist against their own ethno-religious group. Certainly all of them have been accused of anti-Semitism at various times, mainly by people who can easily be shown to be pathological liars. The principle of Occam's Razor suggests, to anyone with any knowledge of Jewish history, that Jack Conrad has capitulated to the reactionary social pressure of today, where all three major political parties are dominated by 'Friends of Israel' factions who aim to suppress criticism of Israel's crimes, and has joined the witch-hunters.

The analysis I developed on the Jewish question, derived from study of the sources above and others, together with independent analysis of my own, is that the 'people-class' that constituted the Jewish people in medieval times, analysed by Abram Leon, dissolved with the advent of capitalism. But it also left behind a survival product that has now acquired considerable social/political power: a Jewish-Zionist caste within the bourgeoisie of several advanced capitalist countries, centrally the United States, whose ruling classes therefore overlap with that of Israel. This consolidated itself in tandem with the Israeli state as an imperialist power in the Middle East, and is now a very powerful force in western politics.

Conrad implies that this materialist analysis is in some way racialised. But the idea is absurd. It does not apply to all Jews, but only to the Jewish-Zionist sections of the bourgeoisie. It does not even extend to all bourgeois who are of Jewish origin, of which there are considerable number to whom this matters little, but only to a self-selected group that are politically Zionist, and consider themselves representatives of a Jewish nation. I argue that this 'nation' does not objectively exist, but this consciousness is itself a material force, and gives this organised bourgeois current a coherence that I call semi-national (for want of a better term).

These kinds of propositions on the national question would be completely innocuous among Marxists were they to be applied to any other people. The fact that such is forbidden in the CPGB is not due to there being anything reactionary about this being analysed by Marxists, but because of the CPGB's own capitulation to Jewish anti-Arab chauvinism, which is longstanding.

The 'canary in the coal mine' indicating this capitulation to Jewish chauvinism is the figure of George Galloway, who is unusual on the old Labour left because - unlike the previous generation, such as Benn and Heffer - he had never been pro-Zionist, but rather a forthright supporter of the Palestinians since before he was an MP. His championing of Arab causes has made him the subject of hatred from Jewish and Israeli chauvinists. This includes Jewish chauvinists on the left.

The CPGB has had a hostility to Galloway, unlike any other on the left, for a very long time. Mike Macnair himself admitted in 2004 that the *Weekly Worker* "came close to joining in" the witch-hunt against George Galloway over *The Daily Telegraph's* 'Saddam's gold' smear, which cost the Tory paper £150,000 in damages. That is, they "came close" to crossing the class line. The anti-

Arab chauvinism in the organisation and demonisation of those sympathetic to Galloway's forthright anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism led to my leaving the CPGB in this period.

History repeated itself when, after a wobble to the left in late 2013 when they dared bloc with me to concretely oppose the Zionists of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty within Left Unity, the CPGB reverted to type as AWL-lite. In the context of fear-mongering about 'anti-Semitism' being generated by Israel's massacre of Gaza Palestinians in Protective Edge, they decided my militant defence of the Palestinians against Israel and its bourgeois supporters in the UK and US, and formulation of this in Marxist terms, was to be proscribed. But Conrad has never managed to explain how my analysis is in any way racialised. It is a cowardly lie, manufactured to appease 'left' Jewish chauvinist sentiment.

Yet again, the litmus is George Galloway. Conrad makes an issue of an alleged incident where John Pearson threatened to "lamp" someone in a political context years earlier. If he did this, and failed to repudiate it, that is stupid and discredits him. But, given that Conrad demands that candidates for the Left Unity leadership condemn such violence, why did the CPGB refuse to condemn the violent racist/politically-motivated, violent attack on George Galloway, by a Jewish-Zionist thug, on August 29, because of his views on Gaza?

I repeatedly urged the CPGB to condemn this attack at the time, when I was being witch-hunted by Conrad. It is a matter of record that they have never printed one word about it. Whatever John Pearson may have done is hardly significant compared to this attack on Galloway accompanied by 'Arab-lover' type insinuations, which mark this as a racist attack.

That they have never condemned this, despite being challenged to do so within their own periphery, fits well their rightwing, pro-Zionist motion at the last LU conference denouncing the demand for Palestinian liberation "from the river to the sea". On this they are opposing the leadership of LU from the right. Thus the Communist Platform does not deserve leftwing votes.

**Ian Donovan**  
Communist Explorations

## Homophobic?

The Workers Power branch of Leeds Left Unity has banned the sale of the *Economic and Philosophic Science Review* from its public meetings, stating alleged "offence" at an article written a year earlier, on March 5 2014.

Given that the article is supposed to have been so "offensive" that it justifies outright censorship, it seems bizarre that it has taken them over a year to raise any objections to the article, despite having numerous opportunities to do so at Left Unity and other public meetings where the paper has been openly on sale.

The timing only makes sense in the context of Syriza's total capitulation to European Union imperialism and its betrayal of the Greek working class, and the exposure this gives to Workers Power's rank opportunism in their long-term support for Syriza, and their (and much of the 'left's' - including, and especially, Left Unity itself) fraudulent claims that a vote for Syriza, backed up by supposed 'left pressure', could somehow 'stop austerity'.

This is the same old petty bourgeois, reformist posturing, dressed up in r-r-revolutionary phraseology and squadist youth activism, that Workers Power has always used in its attempts to drag the working class back to Labourism and parliament as the place to go to change anything. Far better would have been to use this as an opportunity to expose the reformist illusions so-called Left Unity is continuing to foster in the anti-communist Attlee government as the best that the working class can achieve, by pointing to its brutal and bloody suppression of the

KKE during the Greek civil war as an example of the sorts of fascist measures the Labour Party has always been prepared to use in its service to imperialism, and as a warning to the Greek working class today.

There is no 'stopping austerity'. Capitalism's crisis continues to be an unravelling catastrophe, and its ultimate slide to world war is unstoppable without a revolutionary struggle to establish and defend working class rule. To reach the understanding that this is necessary, the working class needs to be drawn into the biggest mass debate possible around the all the issues that divide them, no matter how contentious, and especially over the triumphant and unsurpassed strides the Soviet Union made in human development and the mistakes it committed along the way; and the modern historical experience of Greece is a good starting point. Conclusions need to be drawn from this debate that reflect objective truth as closely as possible, so that they inform the working class in its struggle to overthrow capitalism and build socialism.

Workers Power is for the censorship of such a debate in fear that continued polemical argument in public meetings and in writing further exposes its opportunism and anti-communism. If it really wanted to advance human understanding, it would take up and challenge the arguments raised in the March 2014 issue, rather than use Left Unity's alleged 'safe space' policy as a shield to hide behind and as a weapon with which to whip up a witch-hunting atmosphere designed to intimidate anyone attempting to raise arguments for a Marxist understanding of world developments.

As the *EPSR's* past experience in the Socialist Labour Party demonstrates, self-righteous and baseless howls of 'homophobia' against its exposure of the reactionary, reformist nature of single-issue PCism are a last-gasp attempt to shut down debate and divert attention away from their squirming attempts to avoid exposure over Syriza, and a good sign that they are losing the argument.

Proscriptions against scientific inquiry into the nature of human sexuality and child development appear to have more in common with fascist book-burning than Marxism. Workers Power stand alongside Cameron and Obama in their sudden embrace of gay marriage, for electoral advantage purposes only, as a 'positive sign' that capitalist society is becoming more progressive - just as they stand alongside them in the 'war on terror' by their condemnation of the confused, contradictory and at times self-defeating third world struggles against imperialism.

The only way to develop tolerant and compassionate attitudes towards homosexuality is to openly investigate the nature of human sexuality in all its forms and the possible impact capitalism may have on sexual development. These are open questions that have yet to be answered by science and so are up for discussion. Proscriptions and bans are more likely to drive away politicised members of the working class who are looking for answers and not convinced by the arguments of the gay lobby, and into the hands of the likes of the British National Party and UK Independence Party, where backward, reactionary attitudes are fostered and actively encouraged.

**Phil Waincliffe**  
Leeds

## Economic

Phil Sharpe in his very long letter (February 26) seems to be arguing the following propositions:

We should prefer the socialist revolution to be peaceable. We know the bourgeoisie is armed through its possession of the state apparatus and will use any and all means, including violence, to defeat the revolution. The development of working class organisation, consciousness and of armed formations is necessary in order to deter the bourgeoisie and to effect the disarmament of the bourgeoisie. The more the working class prepares and develops its organisation, consciousness



**SNP**

# Nationalist shock waves

Poll predictions of a Labour wipeout show that the national question has not gone away, argues **Eddie Ford**



**Voting SNP: logical for anyone wanting separation**

Sending shock waves through the political establishment, a recent survey by the Conservative peer and polling guru, Lord Ashcroft, predicts a Scottish National Party general election landslide - the SNP is projected to win 56 of the 59 seats north of the border, leaving Labour and the Tories on a dead heat on 272 UK seats (with 326 theoretically needed to get a majority in the House of Commons).<sup>1</sup>

Not only that: the SNP is only a whisker away from taking the seat of Jim Murphy, Scottish Labour's new leader, and is on course to oust the former Liberal Democrat leader, Charles Kennedy. The nats are even six points ahead in the Labour bastion of Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath, currently occupied by Gordon 'silent no more' Brown - the man who in the eyes of many saved the union and is stepping down before May 7. As for the Tories, the poll found that they were neck to neck with the SNP in their only Scottish seat of Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale.

Obviously, Ashcroft's figures must be treated with caution, as they are extrapolated from only eight Scottish seats. For example, the latest poll projection from *The Guardian*, which takes into account all published constituency-level polls, produces a slightly lower figure for the SNP, giving it 52 seats.<sup>2</sup> Even so, it is still no less dramatic - showing that a genuinely historic event could be about to happen, with Labour more or less wiped out in its former heartland of Scotland. Yet in 2010 the SNP returned a mere six MPs, and in its 80-year history the previous best result was 11 seats in the 1974 autumn election - considered then a near revolution.

## Kingmaker

Alex Salmond may have said that the question of independence had been settled for a generation, but he knew that Scottish nationalism had made a huge leap forward with 45% of the vote gained by the 'yes' campaign in the September 18 2014 referendum. As indicated above, support for the SNP is now rampant - even in the areas that firmly voted 'no'. The momentum generated by the 'yes' campaign was

never going to disappear, representing as it did some sort of alternative vision of the future, however illusory - in marked contrast to the relentless negativity of the Better Together camp. The 1,617,989 million who voted 'yes' on that day were not just voting for the SNP's programme of independence, but against the dreary Labour/Tory/Lib Dem consensus on austerity. No more politics as usual, please.

If anything, the national tensions and contradictions have been exacerbated. All the old certainties are vanishing. Murphy keeps repeating Labour's central (only?) message, that a vote for the SNP will help the Tories remain in power - back to that negativity thing again. Cameron must now be "rubbing his hands with glee", Murphy warned, because every seat the SNP takes from Scottish Labour makes it "more likely" the Tories will be the largest party across the UK.

In turn, the Tories are saying that a vote for Labour is a vote for the break-up of Britain, since the SNP might take part in a Westminster coalition under Ed Miliband. With Labour reduced to a rump in Scotland, the SNP will, barring a miracle, hold the balance of power in Westminster. A formal coalition seems unlikely, but you cannot entirely rule it out. Caroline Flint, the shadow energy secretary, told the *Andrew Marr show* that "we do not want, we do not need and we do not plan to have any coalition with the SNP" - which does not, obviously, rule one out.<sup>3</sup>

In fact some sort of post-election Labour-SNP deal is more than possible. Nicola Sturgeon has openly stated that her SNP MPs could work with Labour on an "issue-by-issue basis". In other words, she would agree to support Miliband in Westminster on votes of confidence and the budget ('confidence and supply') if she had received assurances on her "red line" issues - more powers for the Scottish parliament, rowing back on austerity, and a decision not to renew the UK's Trident nuclear weapons system based in the Clyde. When pressed on the latter issue for a filmed series of leader interviews with *The Guardian*, Sturgeon said the SNP could back Labour *without* a promise by Miliband

to scrap Trident: "But we would not in any vote support the renewal of Trident and I can't make that any clearer than I have already made it" (March 6). She went on to say that if the SNP entered into a deal with Labour, the party would help create a "more effective government and a government that actually delivers some of the policies Labour supporters are probably crying out to hear a Labour leader argue for" - ie, the SNP would act as the social conscience of the Labour Party. Salmond himself declared vaguely that SNP support for any future Labour administration would come with the "condition of progress for Scotland".

Unsurprisingly, the establishment is beginning to feel nervous again - just like it did last year when on September 6 a YouGov poll showed the 'yes' campaign ahead by 51% to 49%, creating full-scale panic.<sup>4</sup> For a dreadful moment, the unthinkable became thinkable. In a move reminiscent of war times or a national emergency, prime minister's question time was cancelled and all the front line politicians charged up to Scotland, desperately promising "faster, safer, better change". Even the queen got the jitters, advising the Scots to "think carefully" before they vote.<sup>5</sup>

Cameron has challenged Miliband to rule out a deal with the SNP "if he cares about this country". Going even further, Lord Baker, the former Tory chairman, has mooted the idea of a "grand coalition" between the Conservatives and Labour in order to avoid the SNP holding the balance of power and possibly plunging the country into a constitutional crisis. This sentiment was endorsed by the "independently-minded" (as the rightwing press like to put it) Gisela Stuart, Labour MP for the marginal Birmingham Edgbaston seat. If on May 8, she conjectured, Labour had more seats than the Tories (but not enough to form a government), yet the Tories had more votes than Labour - then "you should not dismiss the possibility" of a grand coalition to prevent constitutional meltdown.

Really showing the anxiety gripping sections of the establishment, the *Financial Times* is now demanding that Miliband spurns any advances

from the SNP - committed as it is not only to independence, but "big spending increases" and "scrapping" the nuclear deterrent (March 6). Whilst it is "understandable" that Miliband "wants to keep his options open", we read, he "does not have that luxury" - he needs to stop the "haemorrhaging" of support from traditional Scottish Labour voters to the SNP, which is partly happening because many Scots think a vote for the nationalists is a "cost-free exercise" because they could well be Labour's coalition partners anyway. By ruling out a post-election deal, advises the *FT*, Miliband may make voters worry that a vote for the SNP would actually deliver instability - or, even worse, the return of David Cameron to Number 10.

After all, the SNP will "have no realistic choice other than to give informal support" to a Labour prime minister on key Commons votes - the only other alternative would be to bring down that "left of centre" government and risk the return of the Tories: try explaining that to the SNP's Scottish base. So call the SNP's bluff, says the *FT*. If the SNP did have a rush of blood and trigger a snap general election, it would endanger the seats it had only just won. No, the *FT* sternly concludes, no "responsible" unionist party can be seen to be "dancing" to the tune of the SNP - a "separatist movement" committed to "breaking up" the UK. Do the decent thing, Ed.

## Delusion

Prior to the referendum, we were told by some on the left, including a minority within the CPGB, that a clear 'no' would be a vote to preserve the unity of the British working class movement and stop nationalism in its tracks.

This was always a delusion, no matter how worthy - as we now see. Yes, of course, the class struggle is still happening in Scotland, but it is taking place in a *deflected* form - certainly not on the basis, as some doubtlessly imagined, of a 1970s-style wave of militant strikes, working class demonstrations, etc. In any case, such an approach was thoroughly economic, as it downplayed the fight for democracy and high politics: ie,

we must vote 'no' in order to get the national question out of the way and then return to 'normal' working class actions like fighting the cuts, and so on. But a 'no' vote was never going to magically deliver working class unity, especially if the vote was relatively close. What these economic arguments fail to understand is that we first need the *conditions* for working class unity, which were obviously lacking, otherwise there would not have been a referendum in the first place.

We were also told that the CPGB's agitation for a boycott of the referendum was "irrelevant" and that our call for a federal republic was "totally abstract" without any real purchase. Get real, *Weekly Worker*. But our critics have been proved wrong by life itself. Far from slipping into the background, the national question has grown bigger and more dangerous - we are now in a situation where former staunch Labour supporters are now voting for the SNP, a totally *bourgeois* party, as opposed to a bourgeois workers' party: in that sense, things have moved to the right (dream away, those who think the SNP is 'anti-austerity').

We in the CPGB always said, contrary to the philistine arguments of many on the left - whether supporting a supposedly socialist 'yes' or 'no' - that the September referendum was never the simple or straightforward question it *appeared* to be on the ballot paper: a totally naive, almost childish, idea. Rather, 'yes' or 'no' to *what* exactly? Presumably, most of those who voted 'no' did so to back the constitutional status quo - yet that is almost the very last thing they will get, despite winning the vote.

The politics behind the September 18 referendum are complex, which for communists is the central reason why referenda and plebiscites are so problematic - as is the notion of so-called 'direct democracy' in general. By dealing with this or that issue out of its wider context, people tend to get atomised and in that way fundamental lines of class and democratic demarcation become obscured - the very opposite of what Marxists want. Referenda tend to foster the sometimes dangerous illusion that people are actually exercising a form of political power - which is actually about corralling them. Near ideal conditions, needless to say, for all kinds of reactionary ideas to flourish - Scottish nationalism being the perfect example. As internationalists and extreme democrats, the CPGB was right to call for a boycott of the referendum and a pox on both houses - down with Scottish nationalism and British unionism.

The left needs an answer on the constitutional question. To all intents and purposes, we now have a federal *monarchy* - with more powers being steadily devolved to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. But what we need is a federal *republic*. Not along the lines of the United States or France, but a *social* republic: the form, as Engels argued, that the rule of the working class will take here in Britain ●

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## Notes

1. <http://lordashcrofthpolls.com/2015/03/campaign-state-play-plus-latest-marginals>.
2. [www.theguardian.com/politics/ng-interactive/2015/feb/27/guardian-poll-projection](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/ng-interactive/2015/feb/27/guardian-poll-projection).
3. *The Guardian* March 8.
4. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-29096458](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-29096458).
5. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-29200359](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-29200359).

# GREENS



Green Party conference

## Natalie Bennett's motley crew

While the Green Party as a whole is not supportable, argues Robert Eagleton, a small number of its candidates may be

Over the weekend of March 6-9, Green Party members gathered in Liverpool's Area and Convention Centre for their spring conference (a suitable location, given that the Greens have recently become the largest opposition party on Liverpool city council).

There can be little doubt that the Green Party of England and Wales is currently on the up. Despite its out-of-her-depth leader's horrendous media performances, 2014-15 saw the Greens gain one MEP and 18 councillors, whilst also managing to quadruple its membership, which now stands at over 55,000<sup>1</sup> and consequently makes the Greens the third largest party in England and Wales. Kermit the Frog once sang, "It's not easy being green"<sup>2</sup> and, while this may have been true a few years ago, it is most certainly no longer the case: a recent opinion poll shows that the Greens' sole MP, Caroline Lucas, has a 10-point lead over her Labour rival, for example.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately the party's good fortunes have seen a number of comrades within Left Unity begin to promote illusions in the Greens - some have even left to join Natalie Bennett's motley crew. This serves as a stark reminder to the rest of us of just how confused sections of the left are. Indeed, just as comrades north of the border jumped on the Scottish Nationalist Party-led independence bandwagon in the run-up to the September 18 referendum, many down south are collapsing into the politics of Green-style fluffy capitalism.

The Greens have never been against capitalism and their spring conference reminded us of this. Bennett declared that the Green Party aims to create "a society working for *all* of us" (my emphasis). The Greens want a society where workers, employers and investment bankers are all better off, whereas Marxists know that inherent class antagonisms cannot be reconciled - what a pity that not all on the left recognise that simple truth.

At the conference I attended the panel discussion on 'Building a green economy'. Rupert Read, the Green general election candidate for

Cambridge, argued that the alternative to the current economic model must be based on zero economic growth and "sharing better" - "we already have enough stuff", after all. According to Read, we need to eradicate our "obsession" with "growthism", which serves as "an excuse for not redistributing" wealth, because it is generally contended that economic growth will lead to everyone getting better off. This fails to recognise that it is capitalism itself which intrinsically drives towards self-expansion and leads to the increased consumption of finite resources.

The other panel speaker from the party was finance spokesperson Molly Scott Cato MEP. She argued that in a "green economy" rich people might not object too much to the redistribution of their wealth. Once they realise that the satisfaction resulting from an additional million pounds is less than the happiness gained through human relationships, they will be susceptible to the whole idea. I for one won't hold my breath.

The conference dispelled the common misconception that the Greens are in some way Keynesian. Reinforcing Read's argument, Cato called for minute economic growth in a subsequent panel discussion on 'What Syriza's election victory means for the left in the UK'. Cato also told the audience that, whilst she was pleased to see a fellow anti-austerity party gain power in Europe, she had "some concerns" with the political platform of Syriza.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately for those socialists who peddle illusions in the Greens, these concerns did not include Syriza's decision to abandon their policy of separating the church and state, nor did they include the coalition deal with the rightwing Anel. Rather, Cato was much more worried about "their commitment to environmental politics".<sup>5</sup> Apparently "it is very tempting, when you have a debt, to try and get out of that debt by growing rapidly and generating income to pay your debtors; but suggestions that the Syriza government might cut fuel duty, or might make cheaper fossil fuel an answer to the economic problems,

must be resisted".<sup>6</sup>

Another aspect of the Greens which will not sit comfortably with their cheerleaders on the left is their record in local government. In 2011 the party formed a minority administration over Brighton and Hove city council. Every year since then the overwhelming majority of Green councillors have voted through cuts budgets. Any party genuinely orientated towards the interests of the working class would have refused to take office, knowing full well that it would have no alternative to implementing cuts in public services. But the Greens are far more concerned with appearing a respectable party which can be trusted to govern in times of economic difficulty (read: be relied upon to carry out attacks on the working class). The £70 million cuts administered by Brighton since 2011 have been met with resistance from the local GMB union and activist groups.

At the Brighton Green Party's general meeting in January 2015, a resolution was passed calling for Green councillors to stop voting for budgets that include cuts.<sup>7</sup> But, when it came round to setting the budget, a clear majority of Green councillors ignored the party's instructions and on March 3 only six of the 20 councillors voted against the budget proposed by Labour, which resulted in an additional £25 million worth of cuts on top of what had already come before.<sup>8</sup> On the same day the budget was set, ex-Liberal Democrat and Brighton Green group leader Jason Kitcat received an award from the Local Government Information Unit think tank for his "contribution to local government",<sup>9</sup> thanks to his "strong leadership throughout local government in cutting-edge areas".<sup>10</sup> I think LGIU is trying to say, albeit in a roundabout way, "Congratulations on ensuring that a supposedly anti-austerity party has voted for £95 million worth of cuts".

Jack Conrad summed up the Green Party very well when he wrote in a recent article: "While the Greens' critique of the environmental crisis, social inequality and zero-hours exploitation has some value, the

same cannot be said of their plans for the future."<sup>11</sup>

### Class-conscious

The diverse nature of the Greens means that the answer to the question, 'Should socialists ever consider voting for the Greens?', is not a simple one. The Greens are not a homogenous grouping and it is my opinion that certain Greens are supportable. Within the Green Party there is a leftist faction, called the Green Left, which has been at the forefront of denouncing the implementation of austerity in local government. Now, I fully accept that upholding the principle of anti-austerity is not a litmus test to discern whether a person, or an organisation for that matter, is working class (Anel and the BNP are against austerity), but there are nonetheless class-conscious Green Party members whom we should seek to support and win over. One such member is the RMT's president, Peter Pinkney who is standing for the Greens in the constituency of Redcar, and has said he wants to abolish "capitalism and replace it with a socialist system".<sup>12</sup>

Peter Manson rightly states: "We need a Communist Party - one that brings together *all the best elements* from the *existing divided left* ... on the basis of Marxism".<sup>13</sup> I would argue that the fight to win over the "best elements" needs to be extended to the Greens. If we are prepared to engage with Left Unity, to win them over to explicitly Marxist politics, and if we are prepared to work with Labour Party Marxists to try and win over the 200 members, out of the Party's 200,000-strong membership, who attended the recent Labour Left Platform roundtable discussion,<sup>14</sup> then why can't we try to engage with those Green members who are susceptible to the ideas of Marxism? A part of the "existing divided left" is currently fighting within the Green Party to try to prevent it carrying out attacks on the working class.

I am not saying that socialists should join the Green Party, which is fundamentally petty bourgeois: that

would be fruitless. Nor am I saying that we should call for a Green vote purely on the basis that the Greens are to the left of Labour. What I am saying is that we stick to the Communist Platform's motion currently being proposed in Left Unity to "support all working class *candidates* who agree to oppose cuts to services".<sup>15</sup>

This means that we should call for a vote for Green candidates like Peter Pinkney because he is an ally of the working class and there is no other working class candidate standing against him. If a Green candidate is not committed to working class politics then they should not be supported. Similarly if there is a candidate standing against the Greens, from an organisation putting forward working class politics - as the Socialist Party of Great Britain will do when it stands in Brighton Pavilion - then they should be supported over the Greens.

Ultimately those who promote illusions in the Green Party are damaging the advancement of principled socialist politics. While certain candidates may be supportable, the party as a whole is not, and to those Left Unity members who have jumped ship to the Greens I say: Comrades, beware. The grass isn't always greener on the other side! ●

### Notes

1. [www.channel4.com/news/green-party-membership-growth-ukip-natalie-bennett](http://www.channel4.com/news/green-party-membership-growth-ukip-natalie-bennett).
2. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=CSS9PnU6T8s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CSS9PnU6T8s).
3. <http://lordashcroftpolls.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Brighton-Pavilion-Data-tables-Dec-14.pdf>.
4. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wMioYheMCA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wMioYheMCA).
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. <http://greenleftblog.blogspot.co.uk/2015/01/brighton-green-party-passes-motion.html>.
8. <http://greenleftblog.blogspot.co.uk/2015/03/brighton-hove-councillors-ignored-pleas.html>.
9. [www.localgov.co.uk/Tudor-Evans-scoops-council-leader-of-the-year-award/38229](http://www.localgov.co.uk/Tudor-Evans-scoops-council-leader-of-the-year-award/38229).
10. [www.jasonkitcat.com/about](http://www.jasonkitcat.com/about).
11. 'A misjudged Bonapartist initiative' *Weekly Worker* February 19 2015.
12. *Morning Star* June 24 2014.
13. 'Arguments about Greens' *Weekly Worker* February 26 2015 (emphasis added).
14. 'Wishful thinking rather than hard truth' *Weekly Worker* February 12 2015.
15. <http://communistplatform.org.uk/protest-against-the-rightwing-coup-in-left-unity/#more-527> (emphasis added).

**LEFT UNITY****These are the questions posed by the Communist Platform to those standing for the leadership**

**1.** Do you publicly criticise all calls, manifestos and organisations calling for a British withdrawal from the European Union? Will you publicly advocate the programme of establishing working class power throughout Europe?

**2.** Do you oppose the idea of forming some kind of bloc within

Left Unity that includes the social-imperialist Alliance for Workers' Liberty? Should those who support the pro-Nato government of Petro Poroshenko, who refuse to condemn the 2003 invasion of Iraq or the possibility of an Israeli nuclear strike against Iran, be considered legitimate bloc partners?

**3.** Do you give priority to Left Unity or the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition? Do you agree that Tusc is a diversionary Labour Party mark II project?

**4.** Do you support openness and accountability? Do you consider reporting and commenting on Left Unity officers, branches, regions, national

council, conferences, etc, perfectly normal and acceptable? Will you publicly condemn the suspension of Laurie McCauley? Do you demand his immediate reinstatement?

**5.** Do you disassociate yourself from those who resort to violence or threats of violence within the left? Will you insist that anyone found guilty

of making such threats issue a public apology, no matter how belatedly?

**6.** Do you think Left Unity should draw a clear red line between the socialist politics of the working class and the petty bourgeois politics of the Green Party?

**7.** Do you support the call for a Left Unity constitutional conference in 2015?

**Candidates give their answers****Pete Green (principal speaker)**

I am reluctant to respond to these questions from the *Weekly Worker*, given your despicable attack on Salman Shaheen last year, when you used the adjective "cowardly" to describe his public rejection of a call to arm the workers, when what was at issue was simply a political difference.

The bombastic language deployed by Jack Conrad in his contextualisation of the questions ("Bonapartist", etc), a language which in the hands of Marx was both fresh and comprehensible, in the *Weekly Worker*, as elsewhere on the supposedly revolutionary left, has become cliché-ridden and unreadable. These fossilised thought processes will eventually consign the CPGB to the dustbin of history in what I hope is a not too distant future (although I exempt the work of Moshé Machover from this indictment).

My strategic perspective for Left Unity is to break out of the ghetto of the far left, as Syriza and Podemos in their different ways have succeeded in doing. The politics of the CPGB would keep us there indefinitely, fantasising about the day when the masses break in, sign up to the maximum programme and rescue us from oblivion.

That said, I agreed to respond,

lest you embarrass me, as you have the estimable Dave Landau (who wrote our excellent brochure on migration), by including me on your list of recommendations. So in order as presented:

1. I have opposed calls to leave the EU, but voted not to support Britain joining the euro, and for a socialist Europe, not a neoliberal one (and am supporting the Left Platform within Syriza on the question of Greece being prepared if necessary to leave the euro zone). In Britain, however, the critical issue in a referendum would be no alignment with the UK Independence Party and the nationalist right.

2. I am adamantly opposed to any bloc with the AWL, primarily because they defend the Zionist project in Israel. (Is this a reference to a joint candidacy of a Workers Power member and an AWL member for the trade union officer post? I am shocked by that).

3. My priority is Left Unity, of course. I do not, however, deploy the *Life of Brian* language of the second sentence in this question and have supported standing joint Left Unity-Tusc candidates in the forthcoming national election.

4. I certainly support openness and accountability. On the issue of McCauley's suspension, I neither condemn it nor support it, as this is the responsibility of the disputes committee - national officers quite correctly have no role in this. I do, however, condemn any failure to respect elementary standards of confidentiality in reporting on the personal circumstances of individuals within Left Unity.

5. Yes to both questions.

6. I do not accept the terms in which this question is posed, but the answer is no. In what sense are the Greens' politics more petty bourgeois (and what does that mean?) than Labour's? I am in favour of differentiating between Greens such as Caroline Lucas (one of the most consistently leftwing MPs in parliament) and those who support cuts in services or tougher immigration controls. In Hackney North I will vote for

Dianne Abbott, but elsewhere I could vote Green.

7. Yes, in principle, but only if a delegate conference. I agree the constitution is dysfunctional in many respects. But I would not scrap guaranteed quotas for women, as the CPGB would, and I would want to exclude from standing in internal elections CPGB, or any other, members who have failed to pay subs for months and then pay a minimum 50p at the last minute.

**Edmund Potts (principal speaker)**

In general I welcome opportunities for dialogue and discussion, where all involved have the opportunity to ask questions and debate points. In terms of these elections, I am standing on the basis of my publicly available statement, and, of course, my various other contributions (practical and political) to Left Unity. I think these are sufficient for members of LU to decide whether or not to vote for me.

**Phil Pope (treasurer)**

I quite agree with you that the national council or executive committee should elect national officers rather than they being directly elected by



the membership.

If elected as treasurer I will try to focus on improving the administration of LU, making our finances fully transparent to the membership, and supporting the EC in its work. I am not interested in using the treasurer role to push a particular political view within the EC, as I think the direction of the organisation should come from the proportionally elected members of the NC. The most important thing we can do at the moment is increase the size of LU and encourage a higher level of political debate between members.

1. I think that Britain should remain within the EU. However, I think there are other areas of policy that we should prioritise campaigning on, such as housing, public services, living wage, etc.

2. I'm glad that some members of the AWL are participating in LU, but I disagree with them on many political issues.

3. I am active in building LU, but welcome cooperation with Tusc where possible. I don't think either LU or Tusc are yet the new mass party that we want, and to write off either organisation at this stage would be counterproductive.

4. I am absolutely in favour of openness and accountability, and suggested a number of improvements to the disputes process to conference. We should have freedom of speech and conduct political debates in public forums, either on the

internet or in a paper or newsletter. I don't know the full details of Laurie McCauley's suspension, but from what I gather it seems disproportionate at least. I hope he can be reinstated soon.

5. Violence is clearly unacceptable.

6. Whilst I think we need to keep our own distinctive politics, there are many in the Green Party who can be won to a socialist position. Whilst there seems little point in attempting any national agreement with the GP, there may be areas of the country where LU can work alongside Greens and pull them

leftward. 7. Many members (including myself) submitted constitutional amendments to the last conference, but, although conference clearly voted that these should be taken, the conference arrangements committee closed the conference without them being taken. Our current organisation is top-heavy and most members have no way of knowing what is happening at a national level.

**Nick Wrack (national secretary)**

My policies are clearly expressed in my two election statements and in the many articles that I have written on the issue of building a mass socialist party (carried in the

Weekly Worker and elsewhere).

**Matthew Caygill (national council)**



The CPGB list of questions gives us a good opportunity to examine the pathology of this small revolutionary group. To start with the good things: they are clearly in favour of general human liberation, rooted in a tradition drawn from the contribution of the Marxist movement.

However, there is a downside, exemplified by the rather peculiar second question. Is the AWL even in Left Unity? Not where I am. Who is proposing a 'bloc' with them? Is this an attack on Workers Power or Socialist Resistance? Who knows, who cares - except those that think the main purpose of Left Unity is a place for small revolutionary groups to fight out their political differences. And that seems to be the CPGB vision.

For the majority of us Left Unity is an attempt to build something that is neither of the discredited, bankrupt, vanguardist left or of a social democracy that has given up in favour of variants of neoliberalism. We want a broad party that is environmentalist, socialist and feminist. We don't want to provide a site for 'revolutionaries' to show off in front of each other, fight it out, maybe pick up a few more members.

And that is precisely what the CPGB want. They are on record as criticising 'halfway houses' and calling for the unity of Marxists into one party. If they had the courage of their convictions they would be in Tusc fighting for their beliefs there. The consequence of this is that where they have any strength of numbers life for others in Left Unity is miserable. They drive people away, and they don't care. Look at Sheffield for confirmation of this. They aren't in the business of building Left Unity. They wouldn't particularly care if Left Unity failed - they would relish it as evidence that only their nostrums work.

1. I've long been against British withdrawal from the European Union and for working with other lefts towards the transformation of the EU. Syriza's experiences in the austerity machine of the euro zone is a challenge to this, so I would call for more debate on the question - not the assertion of dogmas or irrelevant abstractions.

3. Of course, I give priority to Left Unity, but we have to work with Tusc - in ways that will strengthen Left Unity.

4. I do support openness and accountability. However, this has to be balanced with confidentiality. I haven't heard the details of the McCauley case and would only say that our processes have to be timely. However, the Weekly Worker's reporting

is frequently imbalanced and unobjective, teetering into being dishonest and hypocritical, and revealing the CPGB's bad faith. It's been a good way to destroy any relationships of trust.

5. I do disassociate from violence and threats, and think establishing some sort of code of conduct is important. Bullying also needs to be considered. The Weekly Worker is an instrument for the bully.

6. I don't think I've got enough words to answer this. The question reveals a very wooden and dogmatic understanding of Marxism. Lenin would have laughed at you. The short answer is: 'No, the question is stupid.' Dialectics, not crude binary oppositions, please.

7. I agree that the constitution doesn't work well - it is designed for a much larger party and has failed to provide a framework for effective leadership. I would keep the gender balance component. So I am not opposed to a constitutional conference, perhaps on the basis of branch delegations. But we need to ensure that branches work fairly.

**Will McMahon (principal speaker)**



Thank you for your letter. I have described my political position most fully in my LU election statement and the link to articles at the end. That is more than enough in my view.

**Pete McLaren (media officer)**



I do not think this is the best way to encourage dialogue between the various parts of the left. That is far better done in an open forum without somewhat subjective questions. You are fully aware of my political record and my political activities, in recent years as an officer of Tusc and a national council/executive member of Left Unity.

In these internal elections for LU, I am standing on the statements

that have been published officially, and I see no reason to add to those at this point in time.

**Tom Walker (media officer)**



1. Hello, is it me you're looking for?
2. Do you believe in life after love?
3. Is there life on Mars?
4. Do you really want to hurt me?
5. How soon is now?
6. What's love got to do with it?
7. Why does it always rain on me?

**Terry Conway (nominating officer)**



No, I won't be answering the Communist Platforms questions. I also think it's a little strange to suggest that answers to any seven questions would be the sum of anyone's political positions!

**Luke Cooper (NC, London)**



1. I'm against the withdrawal of Britain from the European Union. We need to build a pan-European movement of European left parties pushing for a democratic, ecological and socialist Europe. There would be huge and wholly negative implications for EU

migrants living here were Britain to leave; not to mention the millions more who would be denied the right to live and work in this country. In the current political context in Britain a 'progressive' campaign for an EU exit is a logical and political impossibility. This debate should not be conflated with a Greek exit from the euro zone, but unfortunately it frequently is by left supporters of a British exit from the European Union.

2. I'm against forming a bloc with the AWL in Left Unity. But this is an odd question to ask, given that, as far as I am aware, no one has suggested doing this. I've been told that the AWL are calling for a blanket vote for Labour in the general election. They are neither active in Left Unity nor supportive of an alternative to Labour. It's a non-problem.

3. We need a democratic, grassroots political party of the left - not a lash-up of old sectarian groups without any internal democracy for members and supporters. The Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party have an appalling record on rape and sexual violence and are an obstacle to the building of a radical left party. I voted against seeking unity with Tusc on the local as well as the national level at the November conference.

4. The Weekly Worker is an unserious gossip rag; the CPGB is a rotten Leninist sect. Like the vast majority of Left Unity members I value openness and accountability at every level of the party.

5. No idea what this is referring to.

6. I support the call to back anti-austerity candidates in the election. The Greens are a progressive, anti-austerity party and their policies are much more closely aligned to working class interests than the neoliberal Labour Party. In lieu of a Left Unity candidate, I will be voting for the Greens in Islington South and Finsbury this May. We can combine criticism of the Greens - for example their role on Brighton council - with backing them when they support anti-austerity, working class campaigns.

7. I haven't heard or read of a specific call for a Left Unity constitutional conference. Amendments are certainly needed to the constitution - for example, to simplify the disputes and appeals procedure and establish a code of conduct for party members - but I assume this can be done at annual conference.

**John Tummon (NC, North-West)**



1 The EU is a capitalist club that insists that only up to 40% of GDP can be spent on the public sector, but leaving it is the rightwing

argument for opposing the EU directive on working hours and various other slightly progressive rulings the right does not like. The SP's reason for being behind No2EU has now been ditched by its alliance with the SWP in Tusc, so the 'British jobs for British workers' rhetoric of Gordon Brown is no longer in play. But we could still work towards international solidarity even outside the EU, so I don't really care much about the 'Should we stay or should we go?' argument between capitalists dependent on the EU for imports and exports and rightwing anti-worker and anti-immigrant sentiment.

2. Not for me, but if they want a tendency, let's see who supports it.

3. Tusc is a retread of everything that has failed before.

4. The LU leadership must be accountable. I have worked on the appeals committee and found that two comrades should have their suspensions lifted - both contested by the leadership. I will only comment on individual cases I have investigated.

5. No - some behaviour is so bad that it provokes violence either of the word or deed and everything must be assessed by its context. I am not for absolute rules and detest the concept of zero tolerance.

6. No - the Greens have very similar policies to LU; both are broad parties, but LU is far smaller. The Greens are progressive.

7. Depends what is behind the call.

**John Penney (NC)**

1. Yes.

2. This is simply a slanderous misrepresentation of another revolutionary socialist organisation which is also a supporting component part of our Left Unity coalition. How does this sort of sectarian tosh help build a broad, radical, socialist party?

3. Yes, Tusc is a diversionary project - a front for the SPEW and SWP. But some Tusc supporters do appear to be putting in some good work for Left Unity nevertheless. Is the 'entrism' aspect of Tusc supporter participation in our Left Unity project any more dodgy than the ultra-leftist entrism motivation of, for instance, the CPGB and Workers Power comrades?

4. Yes to the first part, and 'Don't know enough about this branch dispute' to the second.

5. Yes, of course - but the particular interpersonal dispute behind this question is an old, petty storm in a teacup that serious socialists need to be mature enough to 'get over'. Bearing petty grudges forever is a sad feature of far-left sects.

6. Yes.

7. No - our constitution may well be unwieldy and flawed, but we really have to just live with it for a while yet, and concentrate on doing real political activity. Endless conferences are the delight only of inveterate far leftie sects.

What about another key question then? Ie,

8. Are you a member of Left Unity for the long term to seriously build a radical left, broadly based mass party, or are you just on a short-term 'political raid' to strut your rigid ultra-left political positions for your tiny, 'revolutionary', left sect, cause as much disruption as possible within Left Unity, and hope to leave the organisation, or be chucked out, having gained nothing but a handful of extra members from the wreckage? Just asking ●

## LEFT UNITY

# Meaningless noise

Workers Power has made a strange new ally. Daniel Harvey reports

**W**hen it comes to exposing racism, we can be confident that there is no group more dedicated to doing so than our favourite Trotskyist organisation, Workers Power.

In fact, you could say that WP - like many on the left, to be fair - tends to see racism when in reality what is on display is British nationalism or anti-migrant chauvinism. For example, the *Weekly Worker* was criticised by WP leader Richard Brenner for its report of a recent conference of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.<sup>1</sup> In it, Peter Manson raised doubts about the inaccurate way that the Socialist Party in England and Wales and the Socialist Workers Party both used the term 'racism'. He questioned whether it is accurate to label the UK Independence Party racist (as opposed to a rightwing, nationalist party with some racist members). Comrade Brenner thundered on Facebook:

Look at this crappy report from the *WW*, which makes it clear they don't think racism is central to bourgeois ideology, they don't think Ukip are racist, and they think the straightforward anti-racist views expressed by some delegates at the Tusc conference are to be mocked.<sup>2</sup>

Comrade Manson's article pointed to the difference between racism and "national sectionalism", but, instead of engaging with the argument, comrade Brenner took offence at such a challenge to standard left dogma. That is to say, political difference was reduced to a question of moralism. Similarly, when the 2007 rant against Islam from the Alliance for Workers' Liberty's founder, Sean Matgamna, was republished in 2013, the *Weekly Worker* was attacked by comrade Brenner for not using the word 'racist' in relation to it.

In fact, we agreed that Matgamna's article was a disgrace. Take this notorious passage:

Like desert tribes of primitive Muslim simplicity and purity enviously eyeing a rich and decadent walled city and sharpening their knives, or country folk in former Yugoslavia eyeing a city like Dubrovnik, so, now, much of the Islamic world looks with envy, covetousness, religious self-righteousness and active hostility on the rich, decadent, infidel-ridden, sexually sinful advanced capitalist societies.<sup>3</sup>

That was by no means the only inflammatory part of the article, which went on to describe how "the Islam which failed outside the walls of Vienna over 300 years ago is now a force in the great cities of Europe".<sup>4</sup> The article was taken up and copied on numerous rightwing and xenophobic blogs, who were surprised to see language more associated with commentators like Melanie Phillips and Daniel Pipes employed by a left group.

The Workers Power response was exactly what you would expect:

The whole labour movement should condemn this. Student unions and trade unions have black and minority ethnic groups, equalities and safe space policies: AWL members should be brought to task and asked where they stand on this racism.

AWL members who want



Ruth Cashman: an ally of Workers Power

to continue to play a role in representing workers and students should dissociate themselves from this statement and demand that the AWL do the same.

If they will not, the AWL must understand that they will be branded across the movement as a group prepared to spread racist fear and hatred of Muslims.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, because many Muslims have dark skins, the kind of Islamophobia expressed by Matgamna can easily be conflated with racism. But the point is, WP was clearly stating that the AWL, and those AWL members who did not renounce the article, could not have any legitimate "role in representing workers and students".

Speed forward to 2015 and the internal elections in Left Unity. Which candidates is WP supporting? Well, there is Dave Stockton, who is standing for the national council, and another WP comrade, Rebecca Anderson, who is up for trade union secretary. But comrade Anderson is standing for a job share alongside the AWL's Ruth Cashman on what amounts to a joint ticket for the post. It seems clear that WP must have actively sought out such an arrangement with this fairly long-standing member of the AWL - an arrangement that obviously implies mutual endorsement.

How do we explain this? Has Ruth Cashman now disassociated herself from Matgamna's article? We approached her for a comment, and she was categorical: "I do not distance myself from Sean Matgamna, the article or the AWL's position on the rise of reactionary, politicised religion and the growing role of religion in world politics."<sup>6</sup> She refused to comment on whether WP had challenged her views on the question or said anything to her at all about it.

## Rank and file

According to Richard Brenner, this alliance is based on the fact that "the one question [the AWL] are very good on is the need to form an anti-bureaucratic rank-and-file movement in the trade unions."<sup>7</sup> Here we have WP's economism at its starkest: rank-and-file organisation is seen as entirely separable from the political perspectives being fought for in the working class. WP prioritises trade union-type struggles, as can be seen in its creation and promotion of the Class

Struggle Platform in Left Unity.

In this two-dimensional view, political questions, including allegations of racism, can be downplayed in favour of the all-important dichotomy: on the one hand, the "rank and file" approach, represented by the joint ticket, and, on the other, that of the "bureaucrat" - in this case in the form of the rival candidate, Oliver New. Comrade Brenner confirms this himself when he says:

I think the AWL's most rotten positions will be outvoted on the NC, but that on one of the key questions - the trade union bureaucracy - we need to shift the balance away from people who either (a) want no criticism of union leaders whatsoever because it's 'not our role' or (b) want to tie us to a policy of simply electing left trade union leaders. Given the balance of forces, and the fact that her organisation's rotten positions on Palestine and Ireland will not be shared by others on the leadership, it's a good compromise to make.<sup>8</sup>

Not all readers will be familiar with the finer points of the AWL's approach in the unions, but it has certainly been very political. The AWL is a far more consistent in this sense than WP, with its social-imperialist outlook that it actively tries to normalise in every project in which it operates.

So much so that in 2012 AWL executive committee member Mark Osborn was willing to testify against the University and College Union in a court case that cost half a million pounds, in order to argue that the UCU should not promote any boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign against Israel, on the basis that BDS is inherently "anti-Semitic". Osborn argued that "almost all Jews are Zionists and almost all Zionists are Jews."<sup>9</sup> Within the AWL he defended the action when challenged by other members: "Yes, an AWL member is giving evidence. Why? Because we oppose the demonisation of Israel and Zionism in the British unions."<sup>10</sup>

The case was thrown out by the judge on the basis that it was "an impermissible attempt to achieve a political end by litigious means", which showed "a worrying disregard for pluralism, tolerance and freedom of expression."<sup>11</sup>

When it comes to "rank-and-file" work in other parts of the world, the AWL's position relies on implicit support

for imperialism in the form of the United States, with its 'stabilising' influence, which allegedly creates an environment more amenable to working class organisation. This was no more obvious than in the AWL's point-blank refusal to call for troops out after the invasion of Iraq. Clive Bradley laid this out in an AWL motion in 2004:

The 'resistance' to US/UK occupation [of Iraq] is reactionary. As things stand, the occupation cannot accurately be called 'colonial'. The conflict is more one between the globocop of the empire of capital and local mafias and gangs.<sup>12</sup>

Sacha Ismail spelled out the implications for organising in 2006:

Of course, the occupation does not exist to protect the labour movement in any sense. But it is nonetheless true that, as against the 'resistance' and the gangsters, its rule and that of its sponsored government provide some very limited space for the labour movement to exist.<sup>13</sup>

When Ruth Cashman herself went to Iraq to report on a conference of trade unions in 2009, she only made a single criticism of the occupation, and that was that the pre-existing Saddam-era trade union laws had been retained. Nothing on the chaos and destruction wrought by the occupation and its effect on the way of life, let alone employment and trade union possibilities, for Iraqi workers. In fact the implication was that the occupation was on balance progressive:

The fall of Saddam Hussein enabled a tiny space for the labour movement to develop. While class organisation was illegal in that period, that did not mean that it entirely disappeared.

The remnants of political organisations retained memories of class struggle and this history gave inspiration and strength to a re-emerging Iraqi labour movement. At the conference, heroes of the strikes crushed at the beginning of the Ba'athist regime received standing ovations and brought tears to the eyes of some workers.<sup>14</sup>

But we can safely disregard all that. What matters is Cashman's record on behalf of the "rank and file".

## United front

Another magic phrase which WP finds just as useful in its economism as "racism" and "rank and file" is "united front". It is a wonderfully adaptable concept, which - instead of being applied concretely to temporary alliances within the working class to gain the ear of workers under reformist leadership, as was originally intended - is applied anywhere and everywhere. In Ukraine it means in practice uncritical support for Russian nationalists, for example. But comrade Brenner employs it here to defend this shabby arrangement with the AWL:

Forming a united front on a specific question is legitimate; revolutionaries can always be accused of 'ignoring other questions' when they do it. If it is legitimate to form a united front with counterrevolutionary Labourites, then I'm sure we can withstand a specific agreement with the AWL.<sup>15</sup>

Leaving aside the peculiar use of "united front", it is correct to say that it is perfectly principled to form temporary alliances over specific questions with people we disagree with. This is a tactical question.

But here we are talking about a joint electoral contest. While comrades Anderson and Cashman have put forward separate election statements, you cannot vote for one without supporting the other too. What overriding advantage is to be gained from this alliance with a social-imperialist? Oh, I forgot - Cashman is for "an anti-bureaucratic rank-and-file movement in the trade unions". In other words, it is an alliance based on a distorted sense of priorities.

In reality it will be WP that loses out. It is bestowing militant "anti-racist" credibility upon the AWL, which will use it as just another springboard in its attempt to normalise social-imperialism within our movement. This is shambolic even for Workers Power. And, when it comes to "racism", it seems it is all just meaningless noise from this outfit ●

## Notes

1. 'Dishonesty and opportunism', January 21.
2. [www.facebook.com/richard.brenner.1917?fref=ts](https://www.facebook.com/richard.brenner.1917?fref=ts).
3. [www.workersliberty.org/story/2007/07/19/marxism-and-religion](http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2007/07/19/marxism-and-religion).
4. *Ibid.*
5. [www.workerspower.co.uk/2013/10/denounce-the-awls-racist-article](http://www.workerspower.co.uk/2013/10/denounce-the-awls-racist-article).
6. Email. The full comment read: "I do not distance myself from Sean Matgamna, the article or the AWL's position on the rise of reactionary politicised religion and the growing role of religion in world politics. The CPGB's obsession with Sean, to the extent that their primary focus in broader formations often seems to be demanding the expulsion of Workers' Liberty supporters, is bizarre. It suggests both a lack of confidence in your own ideas and significant hang-ups, in terms of both politics and method, from your Stalinist past."
7. [www.facebook.com/groups/619711848162928/623423294458450/?ref=notif&notif\\_t=group\\_activity](https://www.facebook.com/groups/619711848162928/623423294458450/?ref=notif&notif_t=group_activity).
8. [www.facebook.com/groups/619711848162928/619715241495922/?notif\\_t=group\\_comment\\_reply](https://www.facebook.com/groups/619711848162928/619715241495922/?notif_t=group_comment_reply).
9. [www.scribd.com/doc/235400428/Mark-Osborn-Cross-Examination](http://www.scribd.com/doc/235400428/Mark-Osborn-Cross-Examination).
10. [www.scribd.com/doc/235400464/AWL-C-Emails-2012](http://www.scribd.com/doc/235400464/AWL-C-Emails-2012).
11. [www.judiciary.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/JCO/Documents/Judgments/employment-trib-fraser-v-uni-college-union-judgment.pdf](http://www.judiciary.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/JCO/Documents/Judgments/employment-trib-fraser-v-uni-college-union-judgment.pdf).
12. See 'Those who side with imperialism' *Weekly Worker* October 23 2014.
13. [www.workersliberty.org/node/7400](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/7400).
14. [www.workersliberty.org/story/2009/03/25/iraqi-unions-alive-and-fighting](http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2009/03/25/iraqi-unions-alive-and-fighting).
15. [www.facebook.com/groups/619711848162928/619715241495922/?notif\\_t=group\\_comment\\_reply](https://www.facebook.com/groups/619711848162928/619715241495922/?notif_t=group_comment_reply).



ECONOMY

# The lucky generation and the historic limits of capital

Optimism amongst mainstream economists is clearly misplaced, argues Michael Roberts

Once again at the beginning of the year, forecasts for growth of output and incomes for the world economy and for the top 20 of nations (G20) are optimistic. For the sixth year in a row since the end of the great recession in mid-2009, forecasts by the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the World Bank and EU Commission are for an acceleration in growth and a 'return to normal'. But each year since then, that has proved to be wrong. Real GDP growth, and particularly real GDP per head of population, has failed to return to the trend growth achieved before the great recession. In that sense, the world economy remains locked in a long depression similar to that of the 1930s and of the mid-1880s.

In a new paper, David Papell and Ruxandra Prodan, at the University of Houston, find that deep recessions after a financial crash can take up to nine years before growth returns to trend. But this time it is different - it is even worse.<sup>1</sup> Output has been lost forever (Fig 1).

According to the latest projections of the US Congressional Budget Office (CBO), US real GDP will never return to its pre-great recession growth path: "The projected decrease in potential GDP is unprecedented, as almost all post-war US recessions, post-war European recessions, slumps associated with European financial crises, and even the great depression of the 1930s were characterised by an eventual return to potential GDP." US real GDP will permanently be 7.2% below the pre-great recession growth path because trend real GDP continued to rise during the recession. The CBO calls this a "purely permanent recession". It reckons that the US trend growth rate will slow to just 1.7% and will never be above 2% a year for the foreseeable future!

In another paper just out, three economists find that long-run US real GDP growth has been declining for some time and the main reason is a slowdown in the growth of the productivity of labour<sup>2</sup> (Fig 2). And two more economists show that worker productivity in the major economies has been persistently weak since the onset of the global crisis: "We find that persistently weak productivity is not normally a feature of financial crises in advanced economies - this time has been different."<sup>3</sup>

## Capitalist success

But actually it is not so different. When you look back at the history of modern capitalism, periods when economic growth has been sufficiently strong to raise living standards for the majority and achieve full employment and decent public services, even in the most advanced economies, have been few and far between.

Yes, the capitalist mode of production brought about a huge leap in the productivity of labour. As Andy Haldane, the chief economist at the Bank of England, described it,

For three millennia prior to the industrial revolution, growth per head averaged only 0.01% per year. Global living standards were essentially flat. Since 1750, it has taken around 50 years for living standards to double. Prior



'Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?' (Richard Hamilton, 1956)

to 1750, it would have taken 6,000 years ... Discernible rises in living standards are a very recent phenomenon. If the history of growth were a 24-hour clock, 99% would have come in the last 20 seconds. Economic growth is a recent phenomenon, but rapid growth is even more recent. The sort of growth we experienced over the past half century or so was unusual even by the standards of the last 300 years. In short, we have lived through an extraordinary period within an extraordinary period<sup>4</sup> (Fig 3).

This is undeniably true - as an average. Indeed, the power to accelerate productivity through the capitalist mode of production - a mode of production designed to apply technology and machinery to exploit labour-power to the maximum - was first recognised by Marx and Engels.<sup>5</sup>

But the ugly side of the capitalist mode of production is that it has class-based social relations. The owners of capital stand in conflict with the owners of labour-power and the fruits of labour productivity are controlled and usurped by capital. Capitalism may have developed the productive forces to unprecedented levels, but it did not do so evenly, fairly and without violence. Inequality of wealth and income in the major capitalist economies has never been wider.<sup>6</sup> The vast majority of the world's population remain at or near what everybody regards as poverty levels. War, disease and environmental destruction still stalk the world on a

daily basis. And capitalism has not increased living standards in a straight upward line: the mode of production is inherently subject to crises of production and slumps that destroy the lives and livings of millions in regularly occurring periods.

Back in 1930 at the depth of the great depression, the most famous mainstream economist, John Maynard Keynes, gave a short lecture to students at Cambridge University. Later in 1931, this lecture was revised and published as a short essay, 'Economic possibilities for our grandchildren', in his *Essays in persuasion*.<sup>7</sup>

When formulating the final draft of his essay, Keynes commented: "The fact is - a fact not yet recognised by the great public - that we are now in the depth of very severe international slump, a slump which will take its place in history amongst the most acute ever experienced." But even so JMK wanted to convince his student audience, many of whom were under the influence of Marxist ideas at the time, that they should be optimistic about the future potential of the capitalist mode of production. In his view, as argued in the essay/lecture, capitalism would progress so that by 2030 the standard of living would be dramatically higher; people would be liberated from want and would work no more than 15 hours a week, devoting the rest of their time to leisure and culture.

JMK started his lecture by saying:

We are suffering just now from a bad attack of economic pessimism.

It is common to hear people say that the epoch of enormous economic progress which characterised the 19th century is over; that the rapid improvement in the standard of life is now going to slow down - at any rate in Great Britain; that a decline in prosperity is more likely than an improvement in the decade which lies ahead of us. The prevailing world depression, the enormous anomaly of unemployment in a world full of wants, the disastrous mistakes we have made, blind us to what is going on under the surface, to the true interpretation of the trend of things.

For I predict that both of the two opposed errors of pessimism which now make so much noise in the world will be proved wrong in our own time - the pessimism of the revolutionaries who think that things are so bad that nothing can save us but violent change, and the pessimism of the reactionaries who consider the balance of our economic and social life so precarious that we must risk no experiments. In quite a few years - in our own lifetimes, I mean - we may be able to perform all the operations of agriculture, mining and manufacture with a quarter of the human effort to which we have been accustomed.

Thus Keynes wanted to convince his students that the terrible depression of the 1930s would be rectified and capitalism would prove to be greatest show on earth. Well, as we head towards 2030, was JMK

right? Has capitalism taken human civilisation forward economically since 1930?

JMK reckoned that GDP would quadruple in the lifetime of the Cambridge students he was talking to and would rise eight times by 2030. Well, that prediction may have been close for some advanced capitalist economies. But it was too optimistic for the world economy as a whole.

Anyway, it is not GDP that matters: it is GDP per head. So if we assume that a Cambridge student of 20 years in 1930 lived another 60 years (relatively generous for life expectancy then), did real GDP per head quadruple by 1990? Well, according to the invaluable Angus Maddison studies, in 1930 real GDP per head in JMK's Britain was \$5,441 (PPP basis). It reached \$8,240 in 1960 and then \$16,430 per head in 1990. So there was a tripling of per capita GDP in the UK's real GDP. Not bad - but by no means four times higher. And if we look at the world economy as a whole (something JMK does not explicitly distinguish from the advanced economies), then world per capita GDP rose only about 2.5 times by 1990. JMK was far too optimistic.

Keynes's second prediction was for a rise of real GDP by eight times from 1930 to 2030. "Let us, for the sake of argument, suppose that a hundred years hence we are all of us, on the average, eight times better off in the economic sense than we are today. Assuredly there need be nothing here to surprise us." Again JMK seems to consider that the advanced economies constitute the whole world's population. But was he right anyway? Well, world real GDP rose from \$4.5 trillion in 1940 to about \$50 trillion now. But per capita real GDP was \$1,958 in 1940 and reached \$7,614 in 2008. That is much less than four times. As for the population, there has been an explosion. In 1940, there were 2.2 billion people in the world. It looks as though it will reach 8.4 billion in 2030. Assuming a generous 3% growth in real world GDP from now until 2030 - something that many reckon will not be achieved - world GDP will be about \$97 trillion then. That gives a per capita level of \$11,770, compared to \$1,958 in 1940, or a rise of six times.

You might argue this is quibbling. After all, a sixfold rise in per capita GDP from 1940 to 2030 is still amazing in the history of human social organisation. But capitalism will not meet the targets expected by Keynes. And can we assume that we will not experience major wars or depressions in the next 20 years that could bring the outcome even lower?

Like Marx, Keynes looked to solve the 'economic problem' of scarcity and toil. The difference was that Keynes reckoned it could only be done under the capitalist mode of production:

I draw the conclusion that, assuming no important wars and no important increase in population, the 'economic problem' may be solved, or be at least within sight of solution, within a hundred years. This means that the economic problem is not - if we look into the future - the permanent problem of the human race.

But the capitalist mode of production, like other class societies, cannot avoid

wars and it has not avoided famine and poverty for the majority of the world. Within a decade, Britain was engaged in a world war that killed millions of armed and unarmed people and destroyed the livelihoods of millions of others. And since 1945 there has not been a day where there has not been armed conflict somewhere in the world, even in this period of relative 'world peace' between the major powers, both during and after the so-called cold war.

Moreover, in his address, Keynes

50 hours. It is still above 40 hours (including overtime) now for full-time, permanent employment. Indeed, in 1980, the average hours worked in a year was about 1,800 for the advanced economies. Currently, it is still about 1,800 hours - so again no change there.

### Lucky generation

The point I am making is that there are huge periods of time when capitalism does not deliver even for the majority in the advanced capitalist economies. I am part of the lucky generation.

income going to the bottom 90% rose slightly. Household income growth was also fuelled by the increased participation of women in the workforce. Prime-age (25-54) female labour-force participation escalated from one third in 1948 to one half by 1973. The combination of these three factors increased the average income for the bottom 90% of households by 2.8% a year over this period.

But the golden age was unprecedented and relatively short. It was over by the late 1970s, as capitalism entered a crisis of falling profitability. It was different for what we might call, in the UK, Thatcher's children - those born just before or after the 1980s double-dip recession and becoming working age adults in the late 1990s onwards.

The baby boomers (above 55 years) have increased their wealth dramatically since the 1980s, while Thatcher's children (35-54) have lost out. Indeed, the great recession has created the largest wealth inequality gap between young and old on record. In American households it has quadrupled in the past 25 years. In 1984, households aged 65 and up were 10 times wealthier than their younger counterparts. Now, they are 47 times wealthier.

Disproportionate income gains are also driving the divide. Younger households have seen a 3% increase in income over their counterparts 26 years ago, while older households have had their incomes increase by 25%. Student debt has played a strong role, as more of today's youth attend college than in 1984. Spiralling tuition costs have left today's young adults more burdened by college debt than past generations. As a result, poverty for younger households in the US has reached a record high of 22%, nearly doubling since 1967. Older households have seen poverty rates decline over time, and are now at a record low of 11%.

There is much discussion and propaganda among mainstream economics that the real divide in society now is not between labour and capital, or between rich and poor, but between the young and the old: ie, between my son and me. The old, like me, are sucking away the incomes and future pensions of the young and increasing taxes for our aged care and health. Many of us old (middle class) baby boomers have nice homes without mortgages, while the next generation and the one after that cannot get on the mortgage ladder. A recent study found that in London there were more people forced to rent than there were owning their homes or renting from the state or from social housing.

Recently, the *Financial Times* argued that Britain's young adults, who for much of the 20th century enjoyed living standards well above average, have been displaced by the rise of the comfortably-off pensioner in the most dramatic generational change in decades.<sup>8</sup> Replacing the young in the premier league of living standards have been people in their 60s and 70s. The average 65-70-year-old used to have lower living standards than 75% of UK families. Now people in the same age group can expect to be almost in the top 40% of family incomes.

Ernst & Young Item Club has reported that much of the increase in the UK workforce over the past five years has been due to older people either staying in work or going back to work. Rising participation by older age cohorts, it says, has added even more people to the labour force than immigration. People who 10 years ago might have retired are now staying in work.

The *FT* says this is "gains for the old at the expense of the young", as though there was a pot of unchanging wealth and income that must be

shared. But is that the case? What has really happened is that wages have dropped as a share of GDP, inequality has risen and capitalism has failed to maintain the golden age, as profitability of capital fell (Fig 4).

In response, under the neoliberal period since the late 1970s, cuts in wages, welfare, pensions and public services were made, while job security, conditions and rights were curtailed in order to reverse the fall in profitability. It was the failure of capitalism to deliver, not the greed of old baby boomers like myself.

The reason many older people are staying at work is because their pensions are inadequate (annuity rates are at an all-time low) and they must stay in work now well beyond the expected retirement age. The number of people in defined benefit pension (ie, good final salary schemes) has been falling steadily and will decline sharply from here.

Will there ever be another 'lucky generation' under capitalism or is that the last we shall see? After all, there have been other short periods in the history of capitalism that could be described as a golden age: say the period from the mid-1880s to the 1900s in the UK and Europe, when the labour movement grew stronger, mass socialist parties were formed and there was the beginning of a 'welfare state' in Bismarckian Germany and Liberal England. Maybe, if and when the current long depression comes to an end, capitalism could have a new burst of life, based on a range of new technologies and surplus labour in the emerging economies of Asia. But it gets more difficult each time for capitalism to deliver.

### Past use-by date?

Why? Well, let us consider the basic message of Marx's analysis in *Capital* of the direction of modern

the profit motive.

The current long depression has stimulated even some mainstream economists to raise the question of whether capitalism is past its use-by date in developing human civilisation. Robert J Gordon, a professor at Northwestern University, has argued that the rapid technological progress under the capitalist mode of production in the last 250 years, referred to by Haldane, is now over.<sup>10</sup>

Gordon believes there are six headwinds that will slow future innovation: an ageing population in the mature economies; rising inequality; an increasing lack of competitive advantage for the mature capitalist economies; poorer education because public investment in education is being destroyed; increasing environmental regulations; and excessive debt. He concludes that US real economic growth could fall to just an average 0.2% a year for the foreseeable future, compared to the 2%-3% of the past. Capitalism, at least in the mature economies, has had its day.

In a sequel to his 2012 paper,<sup>11</sup> Gordon responded to mainstream criticism of his thesis:

A controversy about the future of US economic growth was ignited by my paper released in late summer 2012. The debate began with my prediction that over some indefinite period of time into the future, perhaps 25 to 40 years, the growth of real per capita disposable income of the bottom 99% of the US income distribution would average 0.2% per year, compared to 2.0% per year in the century before 2007. This prediction set off a firestorm of controversy with commentary, blogs, and op-eds around the world.

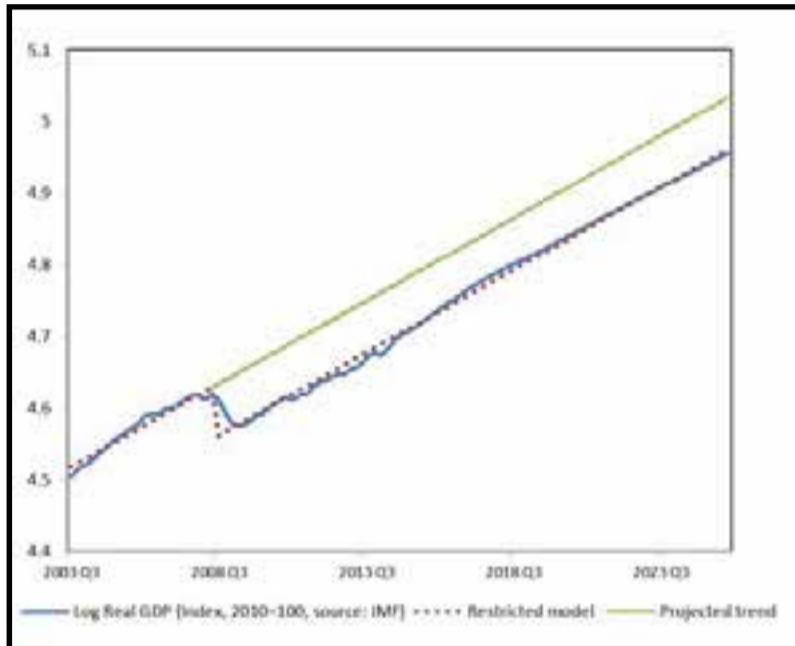


Fig 1

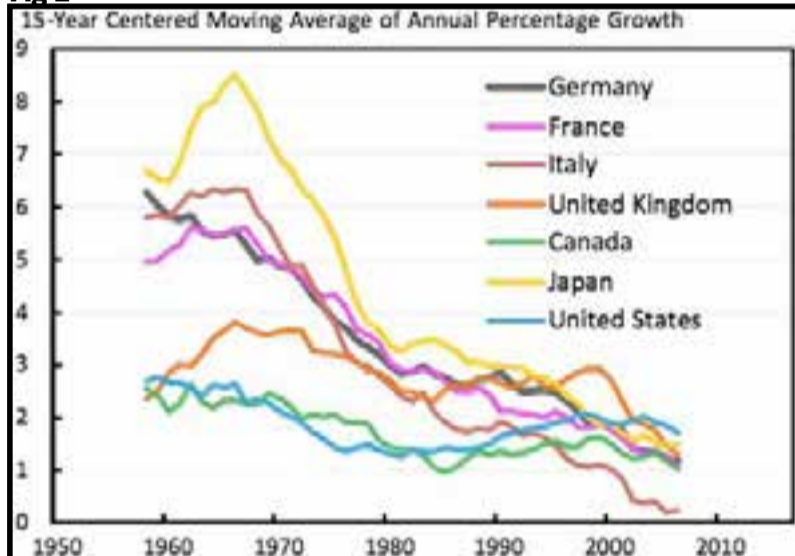


Fig 2

totally ignores inequalities of income and wealth. Per capita income for a country is merely an average. The majority do not reach that average (if it is a mean average). Although average living standards have continued to rise, the living standards at the bottom 20% of the income distribution have stagnated or declined for the last 30 years. Inequality of income and wealth was at a high in 1930 after the 1920s credit and stock market bubbles, back to levels not seen since Victorian times. The post-war recovery and the welfare state with its higher tax rates did reduce inequalities in the major capitalist economies for a while. But the neoliberal period of reaction from the mid-1970s onwards pushed inequalities back to new heights, especially in the US and the UK, right up to the point of the great recession. Now we are in a very similar state economically and socially, in terms of equality, as we were when Keynes made his speech.

Then there is the issue of work and leisure. Keynes argued that "for the first time since his creation man will be faced with his real, his permanent, problem - how to use his freedom from pressing economic cares, how to occupy the leisure which science and compound interest will have won for him, to live wisely and agreeably and well". He predicted superabundance and a three-hour day - the socialist dream, but under capitalism. Well, the average working week in the US in 1930 - if you had a job - was about

I am a member of that cohort of people born between 1946 and 1965 - the baby boomer generation. We are lucky because we came into the world in countries of advanced capitalism at a time when there was unprecedented economic growth, near 'full employment', relative low inequality of wealth and income, and strong labour movements, able to extract concessions from capital on labour rights, a welfare state, universal health and education, public housing.

Capital was able to concede these gains for labour because it was experiencing high rates of profitability after the destruction of capital values during the war. It could draw on a huge reserve army of labour in Europe and Asia, along with new technology, to exploit. And global capitalism had one hegemonic power, the US, that could provide credit and investment in Europe and Asia within Pax Americana. In short, this was a golden age for capitalism. Concessions to labour were possible instead of a desperate class battle. And capital was forced to concede, because labour was organised and relatively strong.

The period 1948-73 was one of relative prosperity that was better shared among the population by a long way than now. That was a product of faster economic growth. The US enjoyed rapid labour productivity growth, averaging 2.8% annually. Income inequality fell, with the share of income going to the top 1% falling by nearly one-third, while the share of

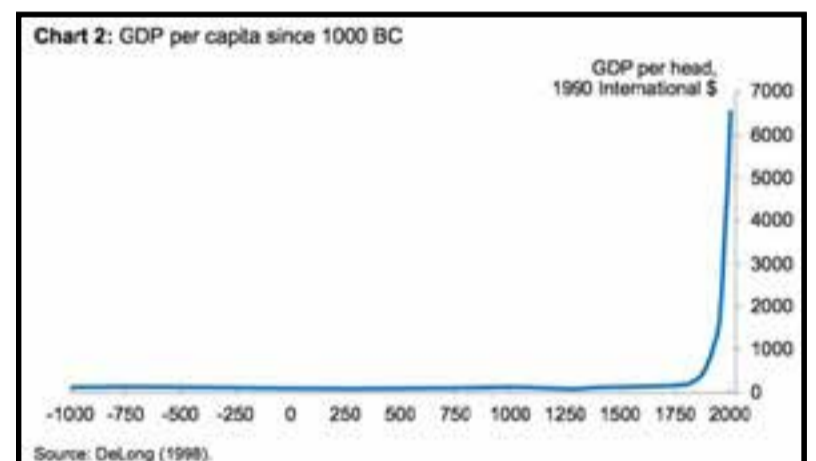


Fig 3



Fig 4

capitalism. Yes, it has taken the level of productive forces to new heights in human history, but within it are the seeds of its own destruction. The graph on p11 (Fig 5, the simple mean average world rate of profit) comes from the work of Esteban Maito.<sup>9</sup> It shows the golden age of the 1950s and 1960s in profit terms. But it also shows the downward direction of the rate of profit globally - signalling the eventual demise of the capitalist mode of production, based as it is on

Gordon admitted that he was talking about the US and no other economies, where the 'headwinds' may be less, and agreed that "there is plenty of room for 'catch-up growth' in the emerging markets of the world". And he was looking at potential growth, not actual GDP.

He was criticised for underestimating the new technologies that will come into play in driving up productivity growth over the next few decades. He retorted:



# weekly worker

**Cameron has everything to lose from a TV debate**

## A tactical embarrassment

Nobody comes out of the leaders' debates farce in good shape, argues Paul Demarty

That Ed Miliband, eh? He's useless! He looks like Wallace out of *Wallace and Gromit*. His teeth are too big. He forgets his lines. But it gets worse: apparently, he is also terrifying, the living principle of mortal fear - half-Jason Vorhees, half-Shoggoth.

How else can we explain the obvious reluctance of the prime minister to sit down in front of a television camera and debate with the Labour leader? Is there some deep-seated trauma in David Cameron's childhood, brought to the surface whenever anyone makes a mess out of a bacon sandwich? I think we should be told.

It all started innocently enough - with a proposed timetable for debates that would see the three main party leaders joined by the UK Independence Party's Nigel Farage; then going it alone; and, finally, a showdown between Cameron and Miliband alone, the two realistic candidates for prime minister, whatever deals would be necessary to get them safely into Number 10.

Cameron, it turned out, was not happy: surely this was unfair to the Greens! (Perhaps he envies Andrew Neil and Nick Ferrari their opportunities for Natalie Bennett bashing.) So they were added, and then the nationalists; there were now to be two seven-way debates, and then a Cameron-Miliband bout. Even this was not good enough - what about the Democratic Unionists? - until we arrived at a situation where Cameron was only happy to do one 90-minute, seven-way debate. That's about 10 minutes speaking time each.

Cameron blames the media for being disorganised, which is plainly risible. The relevant TV stations have been as organised as circumstances allowed: the relevant circumstances, in this case, being sustained recalcitrance on the part of the prime minister. No doubt chagrined by Number 10's spurious blame-shifting, the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Sky have made it clear that the debates will continue with or without Cameron, perhaps even with an empty chair where the prime minister ought to be.

Initially, speculation hinged on the possibility that Cameron was unwilling to face off with Farage; even the seven-way debate wheeze could be read this way. Now it is indisputable: it is Miliband who yellows Cameron's belly.

It is a fact upon which the Labour leader has alighted with unseemly enthusiasm. Cameron "says this election is all about leadership, all about the choice between him and me, and, when it comes to a debate between him and me, he's running scared," he told a conference of the Scottish Labour Party. He has now proposed to enshrine the televised debate in law. All in all, his kitchen cabinet are doing their level best to make sure this one runs and runs.

As entertaining as the thought is, of course, it is not exactly cold-blooded terror that motivates Cameron, but a cynical calculation, which like all such things takes the form of a cost/benefit analysis. The cost is obvious: for a week or so, Cameron has looked like



David Cameron: chicken

a bit of an idiot. The benefit is nothing more than the avoidance of surprises.

In the end, it comes down to the popular media image of Ed Miliband we repeated at the outset of this article: he is gormless, bumbling, bungling, and lacks the proper gravitas to represent Britain on the world stage. It is highly likely that most of this image is false: Miliband is not an idiot, and his front-row seat for the 13-year period of Labour government, as an advisor to Gordon Brown and then an MP and minister, should surely have prepared him well enough for greater things in the corridors of power.

So how can such a manifestly implausible picture of Miliband become common-sensical? In this respect, it is gratifying that the most public functions of media organisations are arrogated to the editorial departments. The Ed Miliband with a bacon sandwich leaking onto his shirt is an *edited* Miliband. Only his lowlights are surfaced. In reality TV, this is known as the 'loser edit': a participant in *X-factor* or whatever is shown in such a light from the beginning of an episode as to foretell his ejection from proceedings.

A 90-minute-plus live broadcast, for obvious reasons, is not amenable to a 'loser edit'. One *can* be achieved if all participants other than the loser - from the other panelists to the producers, to the work-experience

boy - are in on it (the great recent example being Nick Griffin's *Question time* lynching). Even Sky, however, is bound by complex impartiality rules, especially during election season; so that one's out.

The best-case scenario for Cameron is that he ends up where he started - looking marginally more prime ministerial than Miliband. The worst case is that he is caught on the hoof; no, he is not likely to suffer a Natalie Bennett meltdown, but TV debates yield victories on points, not knockouts. Incumbents are at greater risk of being put on the spot, thanks to their over-reliance on cooked books and crooked statistics to prove they are doing a good job. Challengers like Miliband have no record to defend, or at least only a more distant one.

Interestingly enough, both times in living memory when the reverse has occurred - a leader of the opposition refusing a challenge to debate from a sitting prime minister - it was, first of all, Margaret Thatcher turning down Jim Callaghan; and then Tony Blair turning down John Major. Both Thatcher and Blair were cruising to victory, their opponents in disarray. These debates above all favour underdogs, those who are *not* the anointed heroes of the hour: the chance is theirs to overturn hostile public opinion, and theirs to screw up.

For these reasons, we are not enormously confident that Team

Miliband will manage to turn this into a running embarrassment for Cameron. In 1997, John Major's team hired a jobbing actor to follow Blair around, dressed as a chicken, to ram home the point. It does not seem to have done Blair any harm. Indeed, *Times* columnist Daniel Finkelstein - then a Tory apparatchik - recalls:

Unfortunately, the more the actor saw of Mr Blair, the more he liked him. And so the idea took hold that the chicken might, as it were, cross the road. This would have been a PR disaster even greater than having involved ourselves in such a stupid stunt in the first place. So I was given a job. I was to have lunch with the chicken on a regular basis and keep him inside. I proved myself worthy of the trust placed in me (January 14).

Just as well for Major; losing the chicken would have provided one great image of his Quixotic quest to retain power.

Things are different this time in many respects: the election is poised on a knife-edge, with Labour and the Tories sparring for a miserable one-point lead, and a hung parliament now more or less expected (hence the other major story in British politics at the moment: the possibility of a Labour/SNP deal). Should broadcasters press

ahead with putting an empty chair in Cameron's place, a large TV audience will be reminded at least three times of Cameron's reticence.

For this to *really* stick, however, Miliband would need the press inside. The business with the bacon butty, etc, is proof that he has not got it. The capitalist media - and, by extension, the capitalist class - *do not want a Labour government*, or at least not one led by 'Red' Ed. Tory brinkmanship over Europe and the union might have persuaded important voices to come out for a *Blairite*, but not somebody pursuing a core-vote strategy, however weak-tea it may be.

Why, then, does he not tack away from reliance on the press? You do not need an elaborate Marxist theory of the media to understand that he is on a hiding to nothing here. Yet what else is there? Miliband inherited a Labour Party that was already depleted and hollowed out, with the wider labour movement in scarcely better shape. The means by which hearts and minds could be won *without* the filtration of the capitalist media were no longer available.

As a professional bourgeois politician, rebuilding that institutional strength is hardly on his agenda - it would, first of all, remove some control from his central apparatus and, secondly, take longer than a single parliamentary term. With potential wipeout looming in Scotland, Labour is perhaps about to get a lot weaker. All the mainstream parties are, likewise, hollowed out. By contrast, the transmutation of British politics into a media spectacle has gathered pace, culminating in ... televised leaders' debates.

This suits capitalism down to a tee - to a point. Yet it is not clear that the media are an adequate replacement for mass-membership organisations with any life to them. As capitalist enterprises, the press empires are motivated by short-termism: a short-termism which has given us a great scare over Scottish independence, and - should Cameron scrape through - even a referendum on European Union membership. The media's increasingly pre-eminent role as kingmaker between Labour and Tories has produced its opposite - the growth of 'outsider' parties, from the Greens to Ukip, to the Scottish National Party.

The leaders' debates farce, then, makes all participants look brittle and weak ●

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