

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



**What should we make of
the Bowie adulation coming
from the establishment?**

- Junior doctors strike
- Germany: sex attacks
- South African fires
- Iran's royals

No 1089 Thursday January 14 2016

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

£1/€1.10

EIGHTY YEARS
SINCE
THE ITALIAN
INVASION



**ABYSSINIA AND THE
MYTH OF APPEASEMENT**

LETTERS



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

Taking part?

According to *The Guardian*, the Labour Party has estimated how devastating will be the cut in income if the anti-trade union bill becomes law this summer. Instead of detailing this, I just want to look to the future by examining the recent past and the present, to indicate that a mood for action is not to be expected if the participation rate in two important recent elections are anything to go by: perhaps 1.4% in the Corbyn election, 10.6% in the re-election of Dave Prentis as head of Unison - ie, abstention rates of 98.6% and 89.4%.

In the LP election 422,871 voted, 71,546 being affiliated supporters (the *Weekly Worker* reported this on September 17). These were members of affiliated organisations - mostly trade unions, but also the Cooperative Party (7,936 members - last annual report) and sectional groups. To vote all you had to do was request a ballot, and you could even vote online. So how many were eligible? Only 14 trade unions are affiliated to the LP, but the website doesn't say how many people give money through their union. However, the 2014-15 annual report of the state certification officer says 4,954,606 members contribute to their union's political fund (this as of December 31 2013). So at least 1.44% voted in August-September. Inexplicably - and this is not trivial - of the perhaps 148,162 unionists who bothered to request a ballot less than half, 48.3%, actually voted.

As of December 31 2014, Unison, market-leader in the public sector, was the affiliate paying most to the LP: 1,184,458 payers (17,920 more than the nominally bigger Unite, biggest in the private sector). So each of these unions pays just under a quarter of the LP's affiliation income. Unison's general secretary serves a five-year term, and Prentis's reign covers the elections of 2000, 2005, 2010 and the one last month. The participation rate has trended downwards: 17.6%, 18.7%, 15.7%, 10.6%.

It took a while to get this data because participation rates are never mentioned on the Unison website and hardly ever by the 'far left'. What is also striking is the recent decline in the number of (valid) votes over these 15 years, with the membership only varying a few tens of thousands either side of 1.3 million: 224,390; 244,481; 216,116; 134,014. So, compared with February 2000, almost three years into Blairism, the start of Corbynism has been presented with a 40.3% fall in the number of Unison voters.

Necessity is the mother of invention, they say. Well, sometimes humans are too disorganised, they set wrong goals, develop non-efficacious ideas, strategies and policies, lack adequate means for implementation, and then aren't that skilful in the act. It's much easier to mess up than do a good job. There's no guarantee of success; failure is our sword of Damocles. Satisfying practical imperatives is a contingent matter.

As often happens in history, humans are forced by circumstances not of their choosing to address their situation. The working class in Britain is in a right pickle, the onslaught of more than 35 years continues unabated, but it's when the cash gets tight that even the indolent are stirred into action. The check-off system, having to opt-out - both are procedures loved by rulers of offices; until, that is, superior powers change the rules. That's what now faces both the LP and the unions with political funds. The primary fact is that *bureaucratic*

convenience is always at the expense of argument, of having to make one's case, of having to be political. The consequences when adjusting to new social rules are time-dependent: can these lazy organisations change quickly enough? For the first time since whenever, union members will have to be systematically approached - and convinced.

The Tories may be doing us a favour. Without them what was the incentive to change? Witness the Public and Commercial Services Union. Mark Serwotka has been in post as long as Unison's Prentis. Year after year, supporters of 'far left' groups seemed quite content. And the participation rates? There were no elections for Serwotka's job in 2005 and 2014, even though it pays very nicely: the union's 2014 annual report is too polite to tell the members, who are suffering real wage and pension cuts, but the state has to be told (form AR21) ... £92,198 gross plus £29,573 employers' (ie, the members) pension contribution, a total of more than £2,300 a week. So why no elections? No-one could jump over the branch nominations threshold - something straight out of Erdoğan's playbook. Indeed, after the 2005 experience, in 2014 not even one branch nominated anyone other than Mr Serwotka. For the incumbent, no contest.

There were two candidates in each of the 2000 and 2009 elections - fewer than run for US president. The PCS website report, December 17 2009, doesn't even give the number of votes for the candidates, just their shares of the vote. Neither the number of eligible voters (c 231,323) nor the turnout were disclosed. Although the abstention rate was 78.9%, a vote of 21.1% puts Unison to shame. However, compared with the almost 30% who voted in 2000, it dropped, coincidentally, by almost 30%.

PCS illustrates an unfortunate complacency amongst those who should know better. It also indicates how difficult it must have been when attempts were made to enthuse the membership. But the question remains: to do what? To achieve what? And how? The three cases examined indicate the obduracy of the dominant attitude that participation is to be observed if at all, and certainly not practised: the treatment of democracy, a kind of government, as a spectator sport, as spectacle. Political participation is not a popular organised enthusiasm of the British working class. Fishing is, politics isn't. How can this be changed?

The stakes are high indeed. The other week someone made an interesting point to *The Guardian*'s Michael White. If the Labour Party is not transformed successfully with Corbyn as leader then the next chance Labour has to win a general election is likely to be 2030: fail in 2020, not trusted for 2025, ready to compete in 2030. It has the ring of truth.

Lastly, the Socialist Workers Party had their annual conference last weekend. Where are the *Pre-conference bulletins*? Where are the malcontents? Why has the *Weekly Worker* been boycotted? Will no-one come forward and give a frank conference report? This becomes more disturbing by the day. The class demands to be told.

Jara Handala
email

Fascist Bowie

In 1976, David Bowie, in his late 20s and already a public figure for about a decade, not content with giving a Nazi salute from the back of a Mercedes (Hitler's favourite car) in the middle of Victoria Station, told *Playboy*: "Britain is ready for a fascist leader ... I think Britain would

benefit from a fascist leader. After all fascism is really nationalism ... I believe very strongly in fascism; people have always responded with greater efficiency under a regimental leadership ... Adolf Hitler was one of the first rock stars ... You have got to have an extreme-right front to come up and sweep everything off its feet and tidy everything up."

Apparently that is all OK for most of the so-called left, because Bowie was high on cocaine at the time and later gave 50p to the Anti-Nazi League in the 1990s (or some such nonsense), as they kept repeating *ad nauseam* on Facebook every time I raised the issue of his totally unambiguous praise for Hitler and fascism (which *Guardian* obituaries call "flirting").

Unlike John Lennon or Bob Dylan or Jimi Hendrix (or, some would argue, Tory squire Sir Mick Jagger in his youth), there is absolutely no sign that he ever made even one political statement supporting our side. A lot of his individualistic stuff clearly gives sustenance to the right, which is why David Cameron, Tony Blair and the Archbishop of Canterbury (a former oil trader from Eton) were so keen to mourn him.

Yet most of these very same self-defining Marxists who would not hear a word against a fascist propagandist on Facebook were more or less saying in January 2015 that the martyred leftist atheist cartoonists of *Charlie Hebdo* were blaspheming Islamophobes who deserved what they got. And they would probably agree with the Vatican's condemnation of the first anniversary issue, attacking the survivors for their more generalised onslaught on all monotheistic religion, exemplified by their image of a Judaeo-Christian god.

Maybe those who thought the title track of *Black star* was a hymn of praise to IS were right and maybe these so-called leftists would endorse such sentiments. Words fail me.

Toby Abse
email

Shocking

I think the left needs to have a word with itself regarding art versus politics.

Some artists may be scumbags and politically beyond the pale, but - and you might need to take a deep breath and sit down for this bit - an artist's politics has absolutely no bearing whatsoever on the artistic merit, or indeed lack thereof, of the artist's work.

In other news, internationally famous, incalculably wealthy rock stars may not actually be fully conscious socialists. Wow, imagine that ... Finally, despite all that, their output might still actually have artistic merit.

Shocking, eh?
Harry Paterson
Nottingham

Status update

Mike Macnair's insightful analysis of an ex-SWP comrade's *Selected works* ('The Davidson papers', January 8) looks at the important issues (and their misinterpretation) of 'stages theory' and permanent revolution, 'people's fronts' and united fronts. Well worth discussing for those of us trying to critically approach the thinking adopted by 'the revolutionary left' - not to dismiss everything as 'dogma' but in a spirit of learning.

There is no way I could hope to respond, at the moment, to the many points that comrade Macnair raised, but there are two related things I can comment on.

To the assessment of the aim of publishing the work - that it is to differentiate a 'tradition' - is added an almost throwaway comment: "Hence - from a very different point of view - the argument of Michael Ford, in his critique of Left Unity, that a really

useful regroupment would be one between the *Morning Star*, Communist Party of Britain, Socialist Action and Counterfire. All that would be needed, though Ford doesn't mention this point, would be for Counterfire to give up the Clifflite ties - 'permanent revolution', and so on - which no longer have any operative significance in their politics."

This is something I had myself noticed. The differences between the CPB, Socialist Action and Counterfire are not enough to justify organisational separation, in my opinion. Not that I would call a regroupment of these groups "useful" or positive.

The main obstacles to unity seem to me to be about 'tradition', rather than looking at their converging political trajectory. Then the name of such a united group is an issue - unlike the situation in both 'western' and 'eastern' Europe, the Communist Party is probably reluctant to give up its name, and the others would be unhappy to accept that name: this may seem a trivial point, but it is still an obstacle.

Finally, can you really see people like John Rees and Lindsey German accepting minor league status in such a new united left party?

Alan Theasby
Teesside
email

On the up

Finally some good news comes from across the Atlantic! Recent polling suggests that Bernie Sanders now leads Hillary Clinton in the crucial Iowa and New Hampshire primaries, due to begin voting on February 1 and February 9 respectively. For those of us who believe a marginal shift to the left is hugely preferable to a further slide to the right, the news is encouraging indeed. More to the point, whilst the bookies all still have Clinton as favourite, the momentum is unarguably with the Vermonter socialist. Clinton has exhausted her reserves and now relies on the stamina of her support to carry the day. In Sanders' case, short of a disastrous blunder, the only way is up.

Considering the respective positions of each candidate, we may have just witnessed a pivotal moment in the campaign. While every poll has to be taken with a pinch of salt (here's looking at you, Ed), victory in these first two primaries could be even more decisive now than it has been in the past. Hillary likely *needs* to win both convincingly to prevent supporters crossing over into the 'unelectable' Sanders camp; failure to do so could provoke a catastrophic rout. Last week's

contorted attempt to corral 'feminist' votes - with the over-hyped 'voice of her generation', Lena Dunham, being roped in for cheerleading duties - could come straight from the Yvette Cooper playbook, still reeking of the same panic and desperation.

For Sanders (other than his principled refusal to accept the tainted money of Wall Street), the main obstacle has always been the semi-conspiratorial efforts of the establishment media to keep him out of the spotlight and bury him in obscurity. Winning the first primaries will force them to change tack - in all probability towards high-exposure mudslinging.

Socialists of all stripes should find succour in the fact that - already - the electoral rulebooks appear to have been rewritten. No, Sanders may not be our ideal candidate, but his basic position pushes the American electorate in the right direction. Enough even, for comrades over at *Jacobin* to launch an 'ABCs of socialism' guide to help manage an influx of inquiring political newbies and their swelling readership - developments which they unambiguously credit to the rejuvenating effects of the Sanders campaign.

Which ever way we spin it, this is something to be celebrated.

Tom Munday
@Tommundaycs

Curious

As a leftist, indeed Communist Party, I find it a bit weird that your paper promotes universal military service. Wouldn't that just feed the war machine and militarise society? Isn't communism against such things?

So why the support for such a policy? Your website does say it's for universal military service time and time again and, furthermore, what is a 'people's militia' and how would it not be a 'standing army'? Just curious, as I find these stances confusing for leftists to hold.

Ian Bee
email

In or out

I am active in the Red Party in Norway and a member of the 'No to EU' movement in Norway. What is your position in the coming referendum on the UK's membership in the EU? Will you advise people to vote to stay or to leave the EU?

Could you advise me on articles that you have written concerning this issue recently?

Johan Petter Andresen
email

Fighting fund

Get justice

Readers are inspired - or driven - to donate to our fighting fund for all sorts of reasons, including on occasion something they have read in the *Weekly Worker*.

This week comrade EJ was moved to make a PayPal donation of £20 after reading a contribution to our letters page - that of John Smithee, who wrote about the death of his friend, which made EJ "sad and angry". Comrade Smithee's friend died of an overdose after the mental health day centre he attended became a "resource centre" and he was "left alone without any support". Comrade EJ writes: "Let's get justice for his friend."

For her part, KL does not pick out a particular article or letter, but she writes: "Thanks for a brilliant issue", followed by "Keep up the

good work". And to help us do so she enclosed a cheque for £100!

On top of that, there were seven standing order contributions totalling £150 - thank you, RK, GD, SM, DV, AN, RB and RP - plus another PayPal donation for £10 from JB (he was among 3,472 online readers last week).

All in all, the last seven days saw our January fighting fund increase by exactly £250, taking the running total to £639. But we need to raise the full £1,750 target every month, so we are a little behind where we need to be. Can you help? ●

Robbie Rix

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

OBITUARY

Nijinsky and Woolworths

What should we make of the current adulation from the establishment? Howard Phillips looks at the David Bowie phenomenon

By now you will no doubt have listened to and watched hundreds of tributes to the artist, David Bowie, who died of cancer on January 10 2016, aged 69. Indeed, it is at these moments that one starts to get profoundly suspicious, as you realise that Bowie has attained the status of a 'national treasure'. It may come as a surprise to anyone looking at the media in the last few days, but there have been times over the preceding decades when his media profile had been less than auspicious.

For example, when I was a student back in 1990, Bowie had launched a telephone survey so that his fans could pick songs for his forthcoming tour. The *NME* (back when it was a publication with some limited cultural clout, rather than something that just litters tube trains in London) ran a mocking campaign entitled 'Just Say Gnome' in an attempt to get people to vote for 'The laughing gnome', a profoundly embarrassing piece of psychedelic whimsy that Bowie had recorded in 1967. This, of course, was a payback from the *NME* for some of Bowie's mid-to-late 1980s output that had seen him adopt a slick, commercialised sound and adopt an 'ordinary guy' shtick in direct contrast to earlier avowals of homosexuality.

Other, more controversial, incidents include a supposed (and utterly mythical) fascist salute given by Bowie at Victoria Station in 1976, which was an outgrowth of perceptions that he had allowed to grow up in the mid-1970s. For example, talking about the death of rock and roll in 1975, he was asked about the next step. "Dictatorship. There will be a political figure in the not-too-distant future who'll sweep this part of the world like early rock and roll did." Such statements were reflective of a whole series of rambling delusions about Hitler and Nazism (mixed with liberal dollops of occultism) that, in turn, were a product of cocaine psychosis and Bowie's performance alter-ego of these years: the Thin White Duke, a cold, Aryan and ascetic apparition with which he took the stage. This strange visage proved to be suitably bemusing to the media in the 1970s, as well as, presumably, parts of Bowie's audience.

There are also the issues that partly made him famous - his androgynous looks and his professed and widely publicised bisexuality - which meant that he was very far indeed from being any sort of 'national treasure' in the 1970s. Bowie's route through fame was thus more fractious and confrontational than can be allowed in any of the treacly sentimentality featuring in the media after his death. However, this reaction could have been predicted in the broad public consensus around Bowie before his death as a kind of ubiquitous font of coolness.

However, there is something else in the response to Bowie's death: namely a more naked understanding of commodification. In invented characters such as Ziggy Stardust, Aladdin Sane and the Thin White Duke, he very obviously commodified his whole appearance and persona in the pursuit of selling his music with flamboyant costumes, dyed hair and liberal amounts of make-up (although the Thin White Duke was partly a reaction against such moves). Bowie famously classed Ziggy Stardust as a mixture of Nijinsky (Russian ballet dancer and choreographer)



Brixton shrine

and Woolworths (a dreadful store that sold cheap plastic tat and boiled sweets), and it is this kind of enterprise which is most clearly understood by some of his musical contemporaries, politicians and media celebrities, who know that some kind of stance, or image, is the best means by which to exchange themselves with the social world at large.

This is really what is meant by the acres of media taken up praising Bowie as an artist and innovator. What is most immediately understood is that this artist sold himself and sold well. (This was even the case with other former disgraced 'celebrities', such as Jimmy Savile.) The particular points of his musical *oeuvre* are merely incidental. Even the public at large dimly perceives the commodification at work with an artist such as David Bowie. He may represent a more extreme profile, but most people have to transform at least part of themselves to get any kind of footing in the world and to exchange their personalities for money or other desirable goals.

Bowie's chameleon-like ability to sell one image after another was, of course, underpinned by his musical output (alongside acting and painting), which offered a potential substance underneath his public persona. The flaw with this was that his chosen art form was mainly the pop song, or at most, condensed collections of those pop songs in the form of albums. It is fairly obvious why Bowie needed the pop song as a swift, transient and portable form that could shift him and his various images across boundaries. But underneath this was a much more profound and serious magpie artistic sensibility that drew on heavily aestheticised notions of what a pop star should be.

His first great record, *Hunky dory* (1971), thus threw some notable Nietzschean and occult themes into a haunting, allegorical and often non-linear selection of songs that appeared to pine for the territory of Bob Dylan's output of the mid-1960s. (Indeed, 'Song for Bob Dylan' was a partial lament: 'Tell him we've lost his poems/So they're writing on the walls/Give us back our unity/Give us back our family'). Bowie's abilities as a writer never dimmed through the 1970s, even through the ravages of his cocaine abuse, but this was marred by a consistent need to have to throw his achievement on the shoulders of a more transient pop form, which unpicked it in the cause of exchange.

A partial exception to this trend was the song 'Station to station' on the album of the same name (1976). With a long, loping arrangement, treated effects, concern with the stations of the cross, references to occultist Aleister Crowley and borrowings from German band Kraftwerk, this was not your average mid-1970s album listen. However, these notions of a return to Europe and ideas of avant-gardism

evolved into Bowie's 'Berlin trilogy' (he moved to West Berlin at the end of 1976), which he partly composed with the help of Brian Eno. This consisted of three albums - *Low*, *Heroes* (both 1977) and *Lodger* (1979) - of uneven quality.

The problem with this trilogy, despite the interest of its construction, is that it seems like a bundle of fragments (no bad thing in itself) held together by the idea of imposing Bowie's contemporary autism and recovery from drug abuse onto yet another batch of short pop songs; as an experiment in what could be loaded onto the form in an attempt to break it. In places, this only led Bowie back to (magnificent) pop forms, such as 'Sound and vision' and 'Heroes'. The most interesting parts of *Low* and *Heroes* are the instrumental pieces that seem to defy any pop sensibility. *Lodger* is even more conventional - and forgettable - than its predecessors. The sum total of the Berlin trilogy is a set of works much more interesting in its inspiration and setting than what eventually ended up on vinyl. Now hailed as a daring and innovative experiment in avant-gardism, the 'Berlin trilogy' actually foreshadows some of Bowie's dreadful 1980s output (such as 'Let's dance'), where any pretence of being anything other than a pop star was finally dropped. His latter decades produced little of consequence musically and left next to no mark on popular consciousness, partly because the artist had come to be defined either as 'Ziggy Stardust' or the slick mainstream crooner of the 1980s.

Bowie did have one final card to play with the 'Ashes to ashes' single (1980), which was accompanied by a striking video, in which he wore a Pierrot costume, as well as playing an older character: 'Major Tom', an astronaut who had first appeared in 'Space oddity' (1969). Partly self-referential about past misdemeanours (Major Tom had become a junkie), the end of the video featured Bowie's Pierrot and others marching in front of a huge bulldozer as a kind of premonition of violence. The use of such imagery and effects in the context of this strange and doom-laden song meant that Bowie had actually made a dent in the form of the modern pop song by broadening out its possibilities.

Those possibilities remained unrealised by the MTV generation, which simply meant that by the mid-1980s every pop band, no matter how dreadful and unimportant, had to have a video to accompany their singles. The form was quickly cheapened into little more than a marketing tool and stagnated as an art form. By 1983, Bowie was simulating sex with a Chinese woman in a video to a song called - umm - 'China girl'.

Like so much of David Bowie's career, the promise and possibilities were immense: the fruits markedly less so ●

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

Every Monday we upload a podcast commenting on the current political situation. In addition, the site features voice files of public meetings and other events: <http://cpgb.org.uk/home/podcasts>.

London Communist Forum

Sunday January 17, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Study of Ralph Miliband's *Parliamentary socialism*. This meeting: chapter 1, section 3: 'The challenge of militancy'. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday January 19, 6.45pm: Introduction to social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1. 'Myths of Aboriginal Australia: rainbow snakes and song-lines'. Speaker: Chris Knight. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Russian Revolution 100

Friday January 15, 1pm: Planning meeting: Marking 100 years since the Russian Revolution. Level 3/SU, Institute of Education, University College London, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1.

Teesside People's Assembly

Tuesday January 19, 7.15pm: Action planning meeting. St Mary's Centre, 82-90 Corporation Road, Middlesbrough TS1. Facebook event: www.facebook.com/events/149063485457656.

Resisting police militarisation

Thursday January 21, 6.30pm: Planning meeting. Global Justice Now office, 66 Offley Road, London SW9. Share and learn from stories of police repression. Organised by Campaign Against the Arms Trade: www.caat.org.uk.

An economy to serve people, not profit

Thursday January 21, 10am to 4pm: Conference, Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester M1. Cooperative and labour movement discussion on alternatives to capitalism and austerity. Speakers include John McDonnell MP. £45, including lunch and refreshments. Organised by Cooperatives UK: www.uk.coop.

No to Trident

Thursday January 21, 7pm: Debate, Quaker Meeting House, Friargate, Lower Friargate, York. Organised by York Against the War: www.stopwar.org.uk/index.php/events/local-stop-the-war-events/21-jan-york-public-meeting-trident-debate.

Stop Trident

Thursday January 21, 6.45pm: Meeting, Unity Hall, 277a Upper Street, London N1. Speakers include: Kate Hudson (CND), Asima Shaikh (Islington Labour councillor). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Burning country

Thursday January 21, 7pm: Debate, Five Leaves Bookshop, 14a Long Row, Nottingham NG1. 'Syrians in revolution and war' - talk by Robin Yassin-Kasib on his new book on Syria. £3. Organised by Five Leaves Bookshop; fiveleaves.bookshopevents@gmail.com.

Left Unity Wales

Saturday January 23, 1pm: National meeting, Sport Wales National Centre, Cardiff CF11. Organised by Left Unity: www.facebook.com/LeftUnityWalesChwithUnedigCymru/.

On liberty

Saturday January 23, 2.30pm: Corin Redgrave Memorial Lecture, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Speaker: Shami Chakrabarti. Entrance: £8 (£5 concessions). Organised by Peace and Progress: www.peaceandprogress.org.

Don't renew Trident

Wednesday January 27, 7pm: Discussion, Priory Rooms, Quaker Meeting House, 40 Bull Street, Birmingham B4. Speakers include Lindsey German and a Lebanese socialist. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Corbyn's campaign

Wednesday January 27, 7pm: Book launch, Five Leaves Bookshop, 14a Long Row, Nottingham NG1. With Tom Untrerriner, Tony Simpson and Adele Williams. Organised by Five Leaves Bookshop; fiveleaves.bookshopevents@gmail.com.

Labour Representation Committee

Saturday February 20, 10am to 5pm: Special conference, 'The tasks facing the Labour left and LRC'. Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Organised by Labour Representation Committee: <http://l-r-c.org.uk>.

Revolutionary or dreamer?

Saturday February 27, 2pm: Public meeting, Red Shed, Vicarage Street, Wakefield. The life of William Morris. Organised by Wakefield Socialist History Group: www.theredshed.org.uk/SocialHist.html.

Stop Trident

Saturday February 27, details tbc: National demonstration to protest against Britain's nuclear weapons system. Organised by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: www.cnduk.org.

CPGB wills

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

NHS

Giving lie to Tory claims

Support for the junior doctors remains firm, writes **James Linney**



Jeremy Hunt: wipe the smile off his smug face

On January 12 the first of three planned strikes by junior doctors in England took place - the first time doctors had taken such action since 1975. It meant a withdrawal of all non-emergency care by junior doctors for 24 hours. The second strike is planned for Tuesday January 26, and will once more involve a withdrawal of non-emergency care (this time for 48 hours), but the final planned action, on February 10, would involve, for the first time ever, a full withdrawal of labour between 8am and 5pm.

The British Medical Association balloted its junior doctor members in November over the government's proposed new contract. Negotiations between the BMA, the department of health and national health service employers began back in July 2013, but the BMA withdrew in August 2014, when the government threatened to enforce a contract that the union deemed unsafe for patients and unfair for current and future junior doctors. The strikes, which were supported by an overwhelming 98% of BMA junior doctors in the ballot, were originally planned to start on December 1, but were suspended for a month when at the last minute the government agreed to re-enter negotiations.

Those negotiations have been almost entirely fruitless, thanks to the government's stubborn intransigence. Health secretary Jeremy Hunt, whilst surely initially taken by surprise by the number of doctors prepared to go through with a strike, has since November been reconciled to this and has clearly been given the green light by prime minister David Cameron. Hence the final round of negotiations lasted no more than 60 minutes, leading Mark Porter, the BMA's council chair, to laconically comment that the government is still not taking junior doctors' concerns "seriously."

The main areas of disagreement are over patient safety and pay. The proposed contract would weaken the current (far from perfect) safeguards aimed at preventing junior doctors from being overworked. It would permit employers to impose longer shifts, more night and weekend hours with fewer breaks and rest days. The current system of financial penalties for not adhering to safe working limits

would also be significantly weakened. The inevitable result of this would be hospitals full of more sleepless, stressed and exhausted doctors. Having myself worked as a junior doctor doing seven consecutive 13-hour shifts, I can attest that a direct result of this increased workload would be much greater risk of patient harm. This will be the reality of Jeremy Hunt's 24/7 NHS.

Hunt's proposed contract would also change the way junior doctors are paid by increasing the basic by 11%, whilst at the same time reclassifying Saturday and evenings as part of the normal working day. For many this would lead to an overall income reduction, with some seeing their salaries reduced by 20%-30%. The BMA argue that this would lead to further demoralisation and directly reduce the number of people applying to medical school - that number is already in sharp decline due to the fact that, after their five-year medical degree, newly qualified doctors now face an average of £70,000 debt (outside of London).¹

So on January 4 it was announced that the strikes were on once again. And if you were wondering how Jeremy Hunt and his team had been spending all the time freed up by not taking the negotiation process seriously, it became immediately obvious that they had been working on their media strategy. Hunt's tactics have been twofold: to try and cast the BMA as a militant left wing union which is misleading gullible doctors, whilst at the same time (and somewhat contradictorily) painting the dispute as being simply about pay and reluctance to work weekends. Without actually saying so, Hunt and co are implying that doctors are so greedy and lazy that they are happy to abandon their patients. This a disgraceful slur on a group of workers who are so committed to patient care that they regularly stay at work for up to an hour after their shift ends without pay.

Political shift

Hunt released a statement just after the negotiations once again broke down, commenting that junior doctors are "basically saying, 'We won't be there for you in life-threatening situations' ... some elements of

the BMA are using the strikes as a political opportunity to bash a Tory government that they hate."² Similarly Boris Johnson claimed the BMA had "Corbyn fever" and is "more interested in politics than patients".

Firstly the idea that the BMA has suddenly morphed into a fighting, socialist crack squad has no basis in reality (unfortunately). The BMA leadership is made up of doctors who are elected by their peers: people who on the whole are not known for their revolutionary politics, not least when it comes to specialists and consultants. This is because there is truth in the fact that such doctors get paid well above the average wage and are therefore more privileged members of the middle class. Many still come from well-off, Tory-voting backgrounds.

Of course, social positions can shift and with this comes a shift in political allegiance. During the past few decades we have seen an increasing proletarianisation of the medical profession and this will tend to lead to a move towards the left. Hopefully the experience of the current contract dispute will politicise more doctors and destroy any illusions that the Tory government represents anything other than a cancer on the NHS. So we obviously welcome any kind of "Corbyn fever" as a good start - this is one disease we don't want to cure. So it was hugely encouraging to see both Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell visiting the picket lines and expressing support for the strikes.

Secondly doctors and their BMA representatives have made it very clear, both in media interviews and on social media, that for them the dispute is not mainly about pay, but about patient safety and the future of the NHS. For Jeremy Hunt though, truth and reality are not the foremost considerations - when you have a close relationship with powerful, rightwing media tycoons there is no need to get too caught up with little things like the truth.

It was no surprise that News Corp led the charge to discredit the BMA and the strikers. *The Sun* managed to hit new lows in lazy journalism, even by its own abysmal standards, when it published photographs of junior doctors on holiday taken from

their Facebook accounts under the headline, "Moet medics", followed by captions aimed at highlighting their shockingly lavish behaviour.³ In the pictures doctors were shown having the audacity to sit on beaches, some even drinking alcohol. Readers were informed that one BMA committee member, "Dr Yannis Gourtsoyannis, 32, last year signed a letter supporting Jeremy Corbyn for Labour leader." Outrageous. But this pathetic attempt to discredit the doctors backfired, when it was revealed that some of the 'holiday' photos they had chosen were taken whilst the doctors concerned were working voluntarily in poverty-stricken countries such as Nepal.

While it is easy to laugh off such amateurish and easily exposed smear stories, we must not underestimate the power of the state-media alliance and its ability to dominate and control political dialogue. Thus in the same way that the mainstream media normalises the idea of Corbyn being an 'extremist' for not wanting to bomb Syria or opposing nuclear war, so it - by and large - willingly accepts that Hunt is making a necessary, genuine attempt to improve the NHS. His 24/7 scheme is certainly not seen as part of the attempt to demoralise NHS workers on the Tory-sponsored one-way trip towards full privatisation. So, for example, the media gives little space to ask the obvious: how can an NHS that is massively understaffed, underfunded and generally in permanent crisis suddenly increase its planned care provision by adding two extra days per week for routine treatment?

On the whole the public have seen through the blatant attempts to

misinform and to discredit the junior doctors. In fact a BBC poll held on the eve of the strike found 66% supporting it, with only 16% opposing, the remainder being undecided.⁴ This reflects what I encountered on the picket line: I did not hear a single negative comment from the public, with many people going out of their way to show solidarity by stopping to encourage us, donate food or simply keep their horn in support as they passed. This is in large part due to the fact that workers are well aware that NHS staff do their best, in very difficult circumstances, and that they have patients' best interests at heart.

It is therefore crucial for junior doctors to continue to link their struggle to the defence of the NHS as a whole. If rumours are to be believed, then the BMA and the department of health are close to coming to some kind of agreement, thus ending this round of doctors' industrial action. If the final contract meets our concerns over safety, and does not impose extra hours or reduce anyone's pay, then good.

In the short term the next step for junior doctors, irrespective of a contract agreement, should be to show solidarity with their nursing comrades as they mobilise to save student NHS bursaries ●

Notes

1. www.pulsetoday.co.uk/your-practice/practice-topics/education/medical-students-unlikely-to-repay-student-debts-during-working-life/2009752.fullarticle.
2. www.telegraph.co.uk/news/nhs/12090372/Jeremy-Hunt-warns-junior-doctors-strike-will-harm-patients.html.
3. www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/6850988/Luxury-lifestyles-of-junior-doctor-strike-leaders.html.
4. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-35288042.

Trusting who?



On the picket line

A chilly morning on the picket line outside Croydon University Hospital in South London could not dampen the spirits of junior doctors, not least because they were bolstered by overwhelming public support.

A chorus of car horns from the rush-hour traffic greeted striking medics, as they staged the first of the three planned walkouts in protest at the imposition of new contracts by the department of health. Patients and members of the public stopped to show their support by having a chat, pinning on a badge or even, in one case, buying us a tray of biscuits from the hospital shop.

But the most visible support came from fellow public-sector workers, including teachers who joined the picket, along with Philipa Harvey, president of the National Union of Teachers and a local resident. Passing paramedics flashed their ambulance lights, sounded their sirens and shouted

encouragement. Members of left groups dropped by to show their solidarity and even a police officer did his bit by donating hand-warmers for those holding placards.

Attempts to derail the strike by NHS managers at Sandwell General in the West Midlands, where they declared a 'major incident' - usually reserved for events like a terrorist attack or multi-car pile-up - for the simple fact that the hospital was short of beds, were staunchly and correctly resisted by the British Medical Association, and striking doctors quickly returned to the picket line.

The question remains as to whether the government will see fit to act on the concerns raised by the doctors and their union, but after today one thing was very clear to me - the public trust the real doctors more than the spin doctors ●

Richard Galen

GERMANY

Migrant sex mob hysteria

Instead of fighting for open borders and internationalism, the left in Germany has joined the ruling class in its collective embarrassment, says Tina Becker

Germany is slowly coming out of shock over the events of new year's eve, when male 'sex mobs' attacked and abused women in various cities. Not just any men - migrants, most of them from north Africa and amongst them recent arrivals - ie, refugees from Syria. So far, more than 500 complaints have been filed with the police just in Cologne - most of them for petty theft, but 40% had a "sexual background" - ie, the women were subjected to humiliating sexual touching and abuse. Two rapes are being investigated and there have been a number of arrests.

As could be expected, rightwing organisations like Pegida (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident) have ostentatiously seized on the opportunity, organising demonstrations against "rapefugees" and trashing Turkish restaurants and shops in Leipzig.¹ There have been increasing numbers of 'revenge attacks' on asylum-seekers. German politicians and the media are debating the lessons of the 'failed integration' of millions of migrants. Germany is having a big crisis of conscience. It does not help that the obviously deranged man who attacked a police station in Paris last week was an asylum-seeker living in Germany under "at least seven different names" and with a long criminal record, including assault and sexual violence.²

As *The Independent* gloomily writes, "The Cologne attacks were a disaster for women and migrants". You might want to add to that 'and the German ruling class'. This was not supposed to happen. Far from displaying 'institutional racism', the German bourgeoisie initially tried to ignore or downplay the events. The police, particularly in Cologne, are under immense pressure to explain why they had not taken the initial reports by female victims seriously. Indeed, on the morning of January 1, the police reported that things had been "relaxed" in the city. The state-run German TV channel, ZDF, had to apologise for not reporting the incidents until a few days later. Similarly, in Sweden, the police are conducting an investigation into the apparent cover-up of dozens of cases of sexual abuse committed by groups of young migrant men at a music festival.

Anti-racist ideology

These events really do not sit well with the establishment. Not only because, like in Britain, the ruling class has an official ideology of anti-racism. German capitalism has fully embraced chancellor Angela Merkel's attempt to incorporate one million Syrian refugees. After all, without immigration, capital in Germany, where the birth rate is amongst the lowest in the European Union, would be in trouble. Refugees tend to be young, male and eager to work. Perfect fodder for the always-hungry capitalist machine. Or, in the words of the president of the German Employers Association, the BDA, Germany should welcome refugees, because "in the next 20 years, we will need a lot more workers than this country can produce". In his estimate, there are 500,000 "unfilled positions" - most of them not the kind of jobs that many Germans are too keen on taking.³

Yes, there had been some issues about how the distribution of refugees was put into practice. It does not take a genius to work out that the 100

inhabitants of the village of Sumte, for example, would feel "utterly unprepared" to house 1,000 refugees. Or that it would not go down well if sports lessons up and down the country are cancelled indefinitely, because refugees are now living in school sports halls. And, yes, there have been small demonstrations and attacks on refugee centres and the right wing in Merkel's conservative CDU party has called for a U-turn over the policy.

But Merkel, the mainstream media and the majority of the government (a coalition of the CDU, its Bavarian sister party, CSU, and the social democratic SPD) had stood firm behind the effort to bring in more refugees from Syria. But, now, in an effort to be seen to be doing *something* in the aftermath of the Cologne attacks, the government has started to send asylum-seekers to so-called 'safe countries', while also announcing that it should become possible to faster deport "criminal asylum-seekers". In reality, of course, anybody accused would still have to be found guilty by a German court, but they might lose their right to appeal. It is mainly hot air at the moment and a proper U-turn seems unlikely - German capitalism simply cannot afford it. But Merkel is known for being an exemplary opportunist - if there is too much pressure on her, she might fold, tightening asylum and immigration controls in the process.

All the more important that the left steps up its fight for an end to deportations, for internationalism, open borders and after a short time full social and political citizenship rights for anybody living in a particular country. Unfortunately, as you would expect, this is not the case.

The left

The biggest left party, Die Linke, has come out with some truly worrying positions - no doubt in order to show that it can be 'trusted' to run bourgeois governments even on a national level (it has been participating in regional governments for many years). The only statement on the matter on its website concentrates on attacking the police authorities for not doing their job properly: "Order and the set of values of the *Grundgesetz* [German constitution] now have to be at the top of the agenda for everybody," says the statement, which also calls for swift justice, including the "possible loss of the right of residence" for the perpetrators.⁴

Worse though came from Sahra Wagenknecht, leader of the Die Linke fraction in the national parliament and - as a founder member of the *Kommunistische Plattform* within the party - usually considered to be on the left of the organisation. Demonstrating that she can be much more accurately described as being on the Stalinist wing, she stated during a press conference: "If you abuse the right to be a guest in this country, then you forfeit this right".⁵ Anybody without a German passport, it seems, is merely a guest and it does not take much to get rid of a guest who has been acting out of place. Back in November, comrade Wagenknecht and her husband, Oskar Lafontaine (former German finance minister), presented a position paper in which they demanded that every EU country should be taking "firm contingents" of refugees. "We simply cannot take in a million people every year".⁶ With those positions, she is actually trying to place Die Linke *to the right* of the current ruling coalition - and has allowed the 'moderate'



Pegida bigots

rightwingers in the party to look more like socialist humanitarians than the *Realpolitiker* they really are.

The German sections of both the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party in England and Wales (Sozialistische Alternative - SAV) are trying to put the events firmly in the context of "everyday sexism". Marx21, the German "sister organisation" of the SWP, for example, writes in *Socialist Worker*: "Sexual violence against women in Germany is a large and long-term problem. Women are frequently sexually harassed at large festivals, including the Oktoberfest in Munich and the Carnival in Cologne."⁷

Very true. But not quite the same, is it? The comrades make no effort to explain why these young migrant men got together in large groups and started to pounce on and abuse women. By ignoring this obvious fact, the deeply disappointing left is *in denial* and clearly somewhat embarrassed - a feeling which is shared by many liberal-minded people in Germany, who are now doing a lot of soul-searching. Did we not greet the first of those refugees with open arms? Did we not go to train stations all over the country with our home-baked cookies and leftover toys? Did we not set up volunteer groups in every town and village to provide German lessons and playgroups for the kids? Did we not show exemplary *Willkommenskultur*? And now we are being paid back like this? It simply can't be happening!

But the fact that you are a migrant or refugee does not make you a 'good person'. You can flee war and poverty and still be an idiot, a bigot and even a rapist. And, yes, deeply patriarchal societies treat women with contempt. No doubt, this continues in the minds of many young men - even if they now find themselves living in western Europe. Add to that the fact that on new year's eve many of the men involved got pretty drunk (like most people) and had been moved on by the police from one place to the other - and you have a recipe for trouble. Attacking women is a bit like kicking the dog in this context - an easy way to let off steam.

But migrants and refugees are certainly no 'worse' than their German counterparts. A study in November 2015 found that, "despite the recent influx, migrants and refugees do not commit more crimes than the native population". In fact, the only rise in crime figures came from "attacks on accommodation centres for asylum-seekers".⁸

Statistically, one would actually expect to find the *opposite*: a higher level of criminality amongst refugees

and asylum-seekers. For a start, many come from the social stratum that commits by far the most crimes: young, male ... and traumatised. Plus, a lot of crimes that migrants have been found guilty of simply do not exist for natives: "a third of all violations committed by asylum-seekers" are breaches of the strict asylum regulations, finds the report. And if one considers the deeply alienating conditions that many refugees find themselves in once they have arrived in Germany (or Britain, or the rest of the EU), it is actually quite amazing that these crime figures are not higher.

Asylum-seekers arriving in Germany have always been herded into special centres, mostly far away from town centres. The idea is that most of them will be returned to the last 'safe country' that they passed through, so why make things too comfortable for them? But now refugees are also crammed into sports halls, empty army barracks, huge tents - and even in the old Berlin airport, Tempelhof. Sanitation in most of these locations is almost non-existent, there is no privacy, no access to amenities, shops - or anything to do. They might not starve or freeze to death, but that's about it. They are provided with the bare minimum when it comes to clothes and necessities and have to live on €143 a month - the humiliating official title of the payment being "pocket money".

In the first three months after their application for asylum, refugees in Germany are not allowed to work. After that, they can only take on jobs for which there are no other "equally qualified candidates from the EU". After 15 months, this hurdle falls. But many cannot provide proof of their professional qualifications and, even when they can, they are often not recognised by the state. Most do not speak German and there is no legal obligation for the state to provide language courses, so many end up in the worst paid jobs.

Migrants

But not all of those accused are refugees - or from Syria. While not much is yet known about the background of those arrested in Cologne, the court-appointed defender of two of them describes his clients as "modern nomads. They aren't war refugees, they are big street-children, who move with the stream of refugees through Europe. They have, to put it nastily, hit the jackpot - they are without a voice, without a home, without a future."⁹

I would not be surprised if it turns out that some of those involved in the attacks have been living in Germany

for years or might have even been born there - 9.4% of the population is made up "foreigners". Until 2000, Germany adhered fully to the philosophy of *Recht des Blutes* - you are only German if you can prove that good German blood is flowing through your veins.

Many so-called 'guest workers' who arrived in Germany from the mid-1950s were never granted citizenship - and neither were their German-born children. More than 14 million *Gastarbeiter* came to Germany during the post-World War II boom, many bringing their families (maybe Sahra Wagenknecht wants to start sending those back too if they misbehave?). But no attempt was made to integrate them into society. Quite the opposite. For example, a conscious decision was made *not* to offer them language courses. They were only supposed to be exploited for a few short years and then return to their home country.

This first generation of immigrants in the main spoke no German at all, either at home or at work. Their children were sent to school with only rudimentary knowledge of German. There, they would sit at the back of the class, doing their best to catch up, but most left school without any qualifications: the next generation of cheap labour. Even if their father or mother had qualified to take the extremely difficult naturalisation test, the children would then have to choose at the age of 23 whether they wanted to remain, say, Turkish or become German. Only in the last year has the law been changed, allowing everybody born after 1990 to hold dual nationality.

Despite its image to the contrary, Germany is incredibly bad at integrating non-Germans - a factor which has clearly played a role in alienating a large chunk of its population. Then there is the overwhelming, all-encompassing pro-Israel propaganda of the entire German establishment (stemming, of course, from the 'collective guilt' over the holocaust), which condemns any criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic, alienating and sidelining many young migrants with an Arab or Muslim background even further.

The events in Cologne and elsewhere demonstrate once more that sexual violence has very little to do with sex *per se* and very much more to do with control - or, more precisely, the lack of control. ●

tina.becker@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. For more on this rag-tag outfit and its aims, see 'Nationalism and role of Pegida' *Weekly Worker* January 22 2015.
2. www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/recklinghausen-pariser-attentaeter-wohnte-in-deutscher-asylunterkunft-a-1071287.html.
3. www.sueddeutsche.de/wirtschaft/arbeitsgeberpraesident-kramer-ueber-fluechtlinge-wir-muessen-deutschkurse-vom-ersten-tag-an-anbieten-1.2634072.
4. www.linksfraktion-brandenburg.de/presse/anzeige-pressemittteilung/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[backPid]=269&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=3363&cHash=6a9fda7e9be026c1a561430f8d9809b6.
5. *Wer das Gastrecht missbraucht, hat das Gastrecht verwirkt.*
6. www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/fluechtlinge-linke-vorstand-stellt-sich-gegen-sahra-wagenknecht-und-oskar-lafontaine-a-1067502.html.
7. https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/41957/Sexism+is+not+a+foreign+import%E2%80%94German+socialists+respond+to+Cologne+attacks.
8. www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2015-11/bundskriminalamt-fluechtlinge-deutsche-straftaten-vergleich.
9. www.bild.de/politik/inland/sex-uebergriffe-silvesternacht/ist-die-silvester-schande-die-folge-einer-falschen-politik-44085362.bild.html.

SOUTH AFRICA

Systems and symptoms

While millions live in dire poverty, the SACP wants us to believe that the main problem is still 'racism'. Peter Manson reports

During my visit to Cape Town over Christmas and the new year, I was struck by two news stories in particular. The first related to one of the periodic fires that sweep through the townships, destroying scores of shacks, and the second concerns accusations of racism against various individuals and possible legal moves to ban all expressions of racist language.

Western Province, which includes the city of Cape Town, is the only part of South Africa controlled by the opposition Democratic Alliance. That is because it is the only part where black Africans are not in a majority. So-called 'coloureds' - a label derived from the apartheid era, referring to people of mixed race - account for around 49% of the population, as against 33% for blacks, 17% for whites and 1% for Asians. Under the apartheid regime many coloureds, most of whom speak Afrikaans as their first language, preferred the evil they knew to majority rule, and this accounts for the fact that the DA - originally a whites-only party, although its current leader, Mmusi Maimane, is far from white - rules the roost in the Cape.

Some coloured people live in shacks, but in general such "informal settlements", to use the mainstream jargon, are occupied by blacks. There are well over a million shacks in the country as a whole, housing around five million people - and, of course, since they tend to be tightly packed together, any fire can have devastating results.

In November, between 800 and 1,000 shacks were destroyed in this way in Cape Town's Masiphumelele township and 4,000 people were left homeless. Some rebuilt their shacks on adjacent land, but, during my stay, the DA local authorities sent in the bulldozers. As despairing residents looked on, their homes were destroyed for the second time - this time deliberately. Armed police in riot gear kept them from intervening.

A city official disingenuously claimed: "The attempts to illegally erect structures in Masiphumelele have been made largely by persons ... who were not affected by the fire". Furthermore, the land they occupied is owned by South African National Parks and is a "protected area", which is "not suitable for habitation". Somewhat contradictorily, she added that the "invasions" would have "a negative effect" on the city's "housing development" efforts, "to the detriment of the legitimate beneficiaries".¹

Illegitimate

Apparently men, women and children with nowhere to go must sleep in the open rather than engage in this disgraceful queue-jumping (even if it is on land "not suitable for habitation"). To add to the demonisation of these 'illegitimate' shack-dwellers, an allegation was published claiming that "some fires around Masiphumelele ... were related to residents from the informal settlements trying to clear land so that more shacks could be built".² Either way, it is obvious that people are desperate.

However, the uncertainty and instability produced by this situation is a cause for concern among elements of capital. For example, someone described as a "businessman [who] has set up a number of charities" was given space in the daily *Cape Times* to warn of the danger of mass rioting. The writer, Fred Turok, was also worried by the



Cape Town: fire capital

disruption caused to local businesses when the homes of workers they employ are destroyed: "The recent disaster in Masiphumelele," he wrote, "is a symptom of a much wider problem: how we treat our valuable local workforce who live in townships." Turok points out that the residents are "commonly referred to as 'illegal squatters' by the council and other authorities, even though most of them have been here for many years", where, he says, they have been "working for local businesses and families".

He claims that after the fire the council provided basic materials (eg, wooden poles, corrugated sheets and a door) to build a 5m x 4m shack - but only to those residents who had a "registered number", issued by mysterious "community leaders". However, it seems some people took up "a bigger floor plan area than they were entitled to" and that left those without a registered number "with building materials but no sites to build on". They had "no option other than to build their shacks in other parts of the wetlands".

It was in response to this that the bulldozers were sent into the township, which is known by locals as 'Masi'. When it was pointed out that some people had built "oversized shacks", the council's reaction was to demolish some of those too! Turok states: "The city council, its political and employed officials are playing havoc with people's lives." He gives the following example:

The shack of a 30-year-old father, who is a local gardener ..., was burnt to the ground. He lost all his belongings, including ... his bicycle to get to work with. This was the third time this has happened to him. He is a 'no number' resident or 'illegal squatter', even though he has lived in Masi for 13 years ... The shacks were knocked down ... and this young father's building materials destroyed or stolen while he was at work earning a living.

He declares that these shack-dwellers "provide a really valuable and crucial service for our communities and local businesses", yet we "afford them virtually no rights". Turok warns of the "dire consequences" of allowing this situation to continue, reminding readers of "the recent Masi riots that affected us all".

The following day the same newspaper gave space for a reply to

Priya Reddy, a council spokesperson, who repeated allegations about "attempts to illegally erect structures" by people "not affected by the recent fire". If the "proliferation of this informal settlement" continues, "it will become more dense and therefore more prone to devastating fires".

Reddy did not say what the homeless are expected to do. But, never mind, the council is taking steps to prevent fires through a campaign whereby "structures in informal settlements are being painted with fire-retardant paint". However, "The city simply doesn't have the resources to paint every structure in Cape Town" and hopes that "the private sector and communities themselves will come on board and assist". If Turok, "a businessman", wants to make himself really useful, then, instead of making "sweeping statements", perhaps he might "get involved with our initiative to paint vulnerable structures".

Despite Turok's concern about the local workforce, it is clear that the overwhelming majority of shack-dwellers, including those in Masiphumelele, are unemployed. Statistics just released show that, of South Africa's 36 million people of working age (defined as those between 15 and 64), only 16 million - less than half - are employed. The number of jobless people has more than doubled since the fall of apartheid.⁴

Racism

It is entirely understandable that some Masi residents have accused the white-dominated DA of racism. One "community leader" is quoted as claiming that the city "does not want blacks in the province".⁵

The callousness of the DA council has certainly been on display - although homelessness, 'informal settlements' and shack fires are, as I have stated, hardly a problem of the Cape alone. But the governing African National Congress - and especially its main cheerleader, the South African Communist Party - take every opportunity to level accusations of racism against the opposition party.

In reality the DA is the descendant of the white liberal Progressive Party, which opposed apartheid, and today it makes a show of stamping down on any sign of nostalgia for the previous regime, let alone racism, within its own ranks. For instance, in September 2015 the party expelled one of its MPs, Dianne Kohler Barnard, merely for *sharing* a Facebook posting, which

read: "Please come back, PW Botha. You were far more honest than many of these ANC rogues."

She pleaded guilty to bringing the party into disrepute and breaching its social media policy, but appealed against the decision to expel her and was eventually reinstated in December. This prompted ANC spokesperson Zizi Kodwa to declare: "We always knew the initial decision to sack her was just a bluff to deal with the public outcry. The DA will always remain a racist party at its core ..."

Then there is the case of estate agent Penny Sparrow, who earlier this month condemned allegedly unruly behaviour by blacks enjoying themselves over the new year on South Africa's beaches and openly called them "monkeys" in a Facebook posting. When it turned out she was a DA member, the party promptly issued a condemnatory statement and summarily expelled her. And how about economist Chris Hart, employed by Standard Bank? He wrote on social media: "More than 25 years after apartheid ended, the victims are increasing, along with a sense of entitlement and hatred towards minorities." Standard Bank's response was to suspend Hart and issue a statement which read: "The comments made by him are factually incorrect, make inappropriate assumptions about South Africa and have racist undertones."

But the statements of these two nonentities were seized upon by people like SACP hack S'dumo Dlamini, who is president of the Congress of South African Trade Unions: "Racists like Penny Sparrow and Chris Hart must be arrested and charged," he declared. Referring obliquely to those like the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, which Cosatu has expelled for daring to withdraw support from the ANC and SACP, he added: "The racist attacks we see are a sign that the enemy is gaining confidence in the face of our own divisions. It is time to unite against the common racist enemies!"

Deputy minister of justice John Jeffery said the government will now redraft a bill on hate crimes to include "hate speech and racist behaviour". Although president Jacob Zuma has said that a stronger deterrent would be "peer pressure" and the ostracising of racists by society, Jeffery commented: "The original intention was not to criminalise hate speech, which can already be dealt with as a civil matter

in the equality courts ... but in light of the current developments we felt ... we need to look at that." He added that "various forms of punishments" would be considered, "not excluding jail". While his boss, justice minister Michael Masutha, said that the proposed bill would have to "strike a balance" between discouraging hate speech and allowing for free speech, ANC caucus spokesperson Moloto Mthapo said jailing racists would be an "effective tool".

For his part, Blade Nzimande, general secretary of the SACP and South Africa's minister for higher education, also referred to the latest furore at a meeting to commemorate former SACP leader Joe Slovo. Naming Sparrow, he claimed: "The DA is trying to fool the public again by suspending her. Evidence exists beyond any reasonable doubt that there is home for such racism in the DNA of the DA."

Nzimande went on to declare that not only racism, but any "expression of support for apartheid" must be "criminalised". He added: "There are still many internet-based media comment sections that nevertheless continue to accommodate comments that are racist, sexist, offensive and contain insults and hate speech. We called on and wrote to the South African Human Rights Commission to investigate the problem."

The difficulty for Nzimande is that "The workplace remains a pyramid that is predominantly white ... at the top and black at the bottom. This social engineering is not a product of the acts of nature, but a long process of racist exploitation and privileges. It is this that the DA and its like are defending in opposition to democratic transformation ..."

Yes, the legacy of the particular form of capitalism that was apartheid lives on. It is on display not only in the workplace, but in 'informal settlements' like Masiphumelele. Overwhelmingly those at "the bottom" - in society as a whole, not just "the workplace", are black. But the response of the SACP is not to target the root cause of this oppression and superexploitation - ie, the system of capital itself - but to focus on particular symptoms. It hardly helps when individual blacks are promoted to top positions in the state and in business, nor would it help if more of those at the bottom were white.

The focus on racism serves as a useful diversion for Nzimande and co, which enables them to avoid championing the cause of the working class - black, coloured and white - in the here and now. And in fact the entire establishment - black, coloured and white - is formally committed to the eradication of racism. In response to the two trivial social-media postings I have quoted one of the country's top newspaper publishers, Independent Media, is to launch a new campaign entitled 'Racism Stops with Me'. But it is to do so in partnership with another organisation - the 'communist'-led Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers Union! ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. *Cape Times* December 23 2015.
2. *Weekend Argus* January 2 2016.
3. *Cape Times* December 28 2015.
4. www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0277/P0277September2015.pdf.
5. *Cape Times* December 23.

IRAN

A dynasty of ill-gotten gains

Yassamine Mather looks at the life of Ashraf Pahlavi who died on January 7 aged 96

Ashraf Pahlavi, the twin sister of the ex-shah of Iran, was a deluded, ruthless megalomaniac. Until her last days she believed that the Iranian revolution of 1979 against the rule of her brother was a “plot devised by the secret services in the United States and the United Kingdom”! Contrary to what has been written in the last week - not only by royalist exiles, but even by sections of the liberal opposition, nostalgic for the shah’s era - she was no champion of women’s rights, nor was she a “Lady Macbeth”, as Hamid Dabashi claims in an obituary published on the *Al Jazeera* website!

In 1938, inspired by Kemal Ataturk’s westernisation in Turkey, her father, Reza Shah, decided to unveil women as part of his ‘modernisation’ drive. Ashraf, her sister and their mother were amongst the first Iranian women to appear in public wearing a hat instead of the traditional head covering of Iranian women. Like many other aspects of this ‘modernisation from above’, at the end of the day only a minority of urban women - mainly amongst the aristocracy and the middle classes - adopted the new dress code. Attempts to impose unveiling, including the use of police to remove women’s head covering by brute force, only added to the resentment against Reza Shah’s policies. Ashraf Pahlavi, like many in the shah’s court, never understood this - her comments decades later, describing her horror at seeing a demonstration of black-veiled women in Tehran in 1978, is proof of this.

In the few days since her death, the royalist exiles have made exaggerated comments about her work as a champion of women’s rights. Not quite true. The women’s organisation she set up had a marginal impact on the lives of middle class and upper class women, but it did nothing to alleviate the plight of the overwhelming majority of Iranian women - except as the objects of charitable activities. Far from being a champion of women’s rights, she always talked of her own masculine qualities. Far from being a champion of women’s rights she always talked of her own masculine qualities. She was proud of being the only child of Reza Shah to be slapped by him, always boasting that she had more guts than her brothers and aspired to become a power in her own right. In her autobiography she wrote: “I confess that, even though since childhood I had paid a price for being a woman, in terms of education and personal freedom, I had not given much thought to specific ways in which women in general were more oppressed than men.”²

In 1941, the United Kingdom and Russia invaded and occupied Iran in response to Reza Shah’s declaration of neutrality in World War II. Accused of harbouring pro-Nazi sentiments, he was forced to abdicate in favour of his son, Mohammad Reza Shah. The Allies sent him and the rest of the family to exile in South Africa, but Ashraf soon returned to Tehran, setting up her own royal headquarters - mainly to support her brother, who at the time was viewed as weak and indecisive. It is believed that it was she who appointed several of his prime ministers.³

In 1946 she visited the Soviet Union to discuss withdrawal of Soviet troops from northern Iran. A meeting with Stalin, which was supposed to last 15 minutes, ended three hours later and as a parting gesture Stalin gave Ashraf a fur coat as a gift.

According to historians, in the early 1950s Ashraf met Mohammad Mossadegh, Iran’s nationalist prime minister, on at least two occasions.



As commissioned from Andy Warhol

She tried to convince Mossadegh to take a more conciliatory approach to her brother and, having failed, became one of his major opponents. She was heavily involved in the preparations for the 1953 coup.

Coup

In the preceding months Ashraf played a crucial role in Operation Ajax, the CIA-organised military and propaganda campaign to overthrow Mossadegh. Historians have credited her with convincing her brother, Mohammad Reza Shah, to give the go-ahead. According to Stephen Kinzer, author of the book *All the shah’s men*, Ashraf met CIA agents in Spring 1953. They asked her to use her influence to convince her brother to agree to the proposed coup:

Ashraf was enjoying life in French casinos and nightclubs when one of Roosevelt’s Iranian agents, Assadollah Rashidian, went to visit her ... The next day a delegation of American and British agents came to pose the invitation in stronger terms. The leader of the delegation, a senior British operative named Norman Darbyshire, had the foresight to bring a mink coat and a packet of cash. When Ashraf saw these emoluments, Darbyshire later recalled, “her eyes lit up and her resistance crumbled”.⁴

Ashraf’s own account contradicts this. She claims she was offered a blank cheque if she agreed to return to Iran from her French exile, but refused the money and returned of her own accord.

CIA documents declassified in 2000 and published by the *New York Times* show the agency’s assessment of the shah at that time as “a man of indecision”. These documents support the suggestion that to ensure progress in the coup plans, those involved relied on “the shah’s dynamic and forceful twin sister” and that she had already been in touch with US and British agents.

Ashraf was a renowned gambler, at times spending long hours in poker games with close friends - some from Iran’s aristocracy. Later she became famous for gambling in the French Riviera, the French press dubbing her *La Panthère Noire* (Black Panther) after she survived what appeared to be an assassination attempt in 1976. Fourteen shots were fired at her Rolls Royce - a friend was killed and the chauffeur was wounded.⁵

Throughout the 1960s and 70s there were allegations about Ashraf Pahlavi’s “financial misconduct”. By her own account, she faced hardship in 1953, when Mossadegh’s nationalist government sent her into exile. However, once Pahlavi rule was re-established, she amassed considerable wealth. Nikki Keddie claims:

... part of the story behind the build-up of her fortune may have been that during the Iranian industrial boom, which was driven by a surge in oil prices, Pahlavi and her son, Shahram, took 10% or more of a new company’s stock gratis, in return for ensuring the delivery of a licence to operate, to import, to export or to deal with the government. Government licences were said to be given only to a few well-connected companies in each field. As a result, the need to get and keep a licence became a cost that had to be met.⁶

There were also widespread allegations about her role in drug-trafficking in Iran - some of the shah’s ministers repeated these claims at the time and later in their memoirs.

In 1980, Ashraf published an article in the *New York Times*, followed by two books in English: *Faces in a mirror: memoirs from exile* (1980) and *Time for truth* (1995), together with a similar autobiographical book in French, *Jamais résignée* (1981). Here she respond to rumours about her wealth, arguing it came about not through “ill-gotten gains”. She was particularly keen to rebut the stories that she had profited from drug-trafficking, attributing her fortune to inherited land, which “drastically increased in value with the development of Iran and the new

prosperity that was there for all”. She notes that many other Iranians profited from the sale of real estate, but were not accused of financial misconduct because of close ties to the clergy and ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.⁷

However, before coming to power in 1925, Reza Khan was an officer of the Iranian army, with very little income or land. It is inconceivable that the fortunes accumulated by the Pahlavis and their entourage - fortunes smuggled out of the country around the time of the 1979 revolution, allowing them a life of luxury for the last three and a half decades - derived just from the sale of land. By emphasising this as the main explanation of the family’s wealth, Ashraf Pahlavi gives further credibility to accusations that have survived well beyond the short-lived rule of the Pahlavi dynasty ●

yassamine.mather@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/01/lady-macbeth-princess-ashraf-pahlavi-160108130337420.html.
2. A Pahlavi *Faces in a mirror: memoirs from exile* New Jersey 1980.
3. www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2016/01/160108_behnoud_ashraf_pahlavi_died.
4. S Kinzer *All the shah’s men: an American coup and the roots of Middle East terror* London 2003.
5. A Pahlavi *op cit*.
6. N Keddie *Roots of revolution: an interpretive history* New Haven 1981, p172.
7. A Pahlavi *op cit*.

REVIEW

Mavericks and conspiracies

Alan Friedman *My way: Berlusconi in his own words* Biteback Publishing, 2015, pp300, £20

Alan Friedman's *My way* is a far more interesting and, in some respects, a better book than I imagined it would be. The advance publicity indicating it was an authorised biography written with the subject's cooperation and the short and rather negative review it received in *The Economist*,¹ created expectations of a tedious hagiography, an extended version of Berlusconi's 2001 *Una storia Italiana*, the illustrated pamphlet about his life story sent to every Italian household during that year's general election campaign.

One of the major sources for the book was a long series of videotaped interviews with Berlusconi, which were also designed to be the basis of a television series modelled on the Frost-Nixon interviews of 1977. I am not clear when, or if, these programmes have been shown and they may well have seemed to the television mogul to be the perfect vehicle to present his own version of his life story to a mass audience, larger than the potential readership of the book, without any challenge from his critics. Whether, removed from the broader context of the book, the interviews would have this effect is difficult to judge, since some of Berlusconi's responses to Friedman, when quoted on the printed page come across as evasive or absurd. It seems slightly surprising that this model aroused no doubts in Berlusconi's own mind.

One presumes that Friedman sees himself as a latter-day David Frost, but what is much more interesting is the implicit parallel between Silvio Berlusconi and Richard Nixon, given that it is all too obvious from Friedman's reminiscences in the 'author's note' about following Watergate and Nixon's impeachment hearings with avid interest as a teenager that he does not see Nixon as any kind of hero (pix).

To some extent Friedman fell under Berlusconi's spell, as "he told the story of his life, in his own words, in 37 days and in well over 100 hours of meetings, videotaped interviews and conversations" (p284), but it is obvious to any attentive reader that the experienced journalist does not swallow the whole story of a massive conspiracy by leftwing magistrates over decades against a completely innocent man, even if he is inclined to find the timing of some of their initiatives or their willingness to leak information as indications of a certain amount of animus on the part of some of them. Moreover, Friedman is very aware of Berlusconi's considerable talents as an actor and a showman, and does not always take what he describes as Berlusconi's "Hollywood smile" as a true indication of his subject's feelings.

Friedman as an American financial journalist has no particular sympathy for the Italian left or for the public sector, so the viewpoint adopted in the book is obviously not intrinsically hostile to Berlusconi's transformation of Italian television or even his proclaimed goal of a Thatcher-style "liberal revolution" in Italy - although Friedman, like many commentators of a similar 'pro-business' persuasion, is aware that Berlusconi failed to achieve the latter.

However, the one really noticeable instance of pro-Berlusconi partisanship on Friedman's part emerges in chapter 8, 'Women!' (pp153-72), through his extremely hostile treatment of Berlusconi's second wife, Veronica Lario, and her role in the events that led to their divorce. Moreover, there is absolutely no mention in Friedman's book of the massive scandal unleashed by his night with the prostitute, Patrizia



Happy days: Gaddafi and Berlusconi

D'Addario (whose audio recordings made her world-famous), which would have undermined the American's dismissive reference towards the end of the book to "the sensationalism and demonology surrounding his relation with women" (p283).

International role

Some of the most interesting sections of the book are those dealing with Berlusconi's foreign policy and relations with foreign premiers and presidents - matters that have generally been sidelined in previous biographies of Berlusconi.

Since Friedman secured an interview with Vladimir Putin, it is clear that most of the material supplied by Berlusconi and his close aides, such as Russian-speaking Valentino Valentini, about his relations with the Russian leader contained in chapter 7, 'A friend in the Kremlin' (pp133-52), have been confirmed by the man in the Kremlin (the venue for Friedman's interview with Putin). Whilst there has been some reference elsewhere to greatly increased trade between Italy and Russia during the Berlusconi era (including unsubstantiated allegations in leaked American diplomatic documents that Berlusconi might have personally benefited from it), much less has been written about Berlusconi's role as an intermediary between Russia and Nato - a role which reached its zenith in the Russia-Nato summit at the Pratica di Mare Italian air force base near Rome in 2002. Friedman says: "Former US diplomats say that Berlusconi actually played a useful role as a backchannel for Bush and Putin, especially in the period after 9/11 and in 2002 and 2003" (p136).

Unlike George Bush, who clearly lost any interest in Berlusconi after the end of his presidential term, Putin continues to show some, apparently genuine, affection for the Italian in his political decline - "like the time in October 2014 when he stopped by Berlusconi's Milanese mansion for a plate of pasta and a chat at two in the morning" (p149).

Berlusconi tried to dissuade Bush from his war against Saddam. He told Friedman:

I was worried and I wanted to see if I could change Bush's mind. I was looking for an alternative to the invasion of Iraq. I was thinking about how to find an exile for Saddam, a way out that would avoid war. So I began contacting Gaddafi and we began discussing the idea of his hosting Saddam in exile in Libya ... I was getting him to a point where he was almost willing to accept Saddam (p126).

Berlusconi went to see Bush on January 30 2003 in the Oval office after an abortive attempt to engage with a distracted Tony Blair in London on January 29: Blair, who later that day uttered one of his many lies to parliament - "We know of links between al Qa'eda and Iraq" - was clearly totally set on war. Mel Sembler, a former US ambassador to Rome, was present at the Bush-Berlusconi meeting and confirmed Berlusconi's account to Friedman, saying: "He was being a good ally. He was looking for an alternative to war" (p128). Berlusconi attempted to get Bush's attention with a long, allegorical anecdote about jungle animals, to no avail. "'Yeah!' said the president of the United States of America to Silvio Berlusconi: 'I am gonna kick his ass!'" (p130).

Friedman devotes a whole section - chapter 10: 'Eat, drink and kill: the Libyan affair' (pp191-209) - to the relationship of Berlusconi with Gaddafi. In this instance it is impossible to confirm the accuracy of all of Berlusconi's stories about Gaddafi, since the Italian was in the end, however reluctantly, complicit in the events leading up to the killing of his former friend, and the only other witnesses cited by Friedman are Italians close to Berlusconi, who would be inclined to back him up. However, the account has some plausibility. Muammar Gaddafi, at a meeting in the Libyan desert on February 10 2004, allegedly explained his capitulation to western demands that he renounce terrorism and give up any attempt to obtain nuclear weapons by saying: "I didn't want to end up like Saddam Hussein. When I saw Saddam climbing out of the spider hole, I decided I was not going to be next" (p191). Berlusconi told Friedman:

The key to getting Gaddafi to be more rational was to become his friend. Whenever I went to visit him in Libya he always embarrassed me with his largesse, with his presents ... so over the years I was able to establish a really close rapport with Gaddafi and I managed to change some of his attitudes. Not all of them, because he was an unpredictable fellow. But I think we had managed to get him on our side over the years (p195).

Berlusconi did manage to achieve a reconciliation between Libya and Italy, whose relations had been poor for many years because of appalling Italian atrocities during the colonial period (1911-42). "Gaddafi's greatest moment of self-esteem was yet to come, however, and it would be a moment on Italian soil, only a few

weeks after the Rome visit" (p196). This was the moment when Berlusconi took advantage of his official role as host to get Gaddafi to turn up as an invited guest at the L'Acquila dinner at the G8 summit. Whilst American officials managed to veto Berlusconi's provocative placement of Obama on his right and Gaddafi on his left, after the dinner was over "Berlusconi jumped up and physically grabbed the hands of each man, literally dragging them together and forcing them to shake hands and have a conversation" (p197) - much to Obama's embarrassment.

Although the French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, was as keen as Berlusconi in attempting to buy oil from, and sell arms to, Gaddafi, it was Sarkozy who in March 2011, after the start of the Arab spring, was the first to call for Gaddafi's overthrow, recognising the rebel leaders as the 'legitimate government' of Libya on March 10. The key moment where the western leaders made the decision to mount a military attack on Gaddafi's regime was an international summit in Paris on March 19. Berlusconi "had a closer knowledge of Libya than Sarkozy and he was convinced it was pure folly to go to war there" (p203).

Berlusconi told Friedman:

I had become a friend of Gaddafi, and I had enjoyed very close relations with Gaddafi. We had done a lot of things together; we had achieved a lot ... I felt bound by my friendship with Gaddafi. After all, I had managed to turn him from enemy to friend. So I was absolutely opposed to this attack. I ended up having to go to Paris with my hands tied because of the president of the republic, Giorgio Napolitano ... I went to Paris, therefore, determined to at least minimise our participation and to offer only the use of our bases, but no armed intervention, no bombing by Italy (pp203-04).

When Berlusconi got to Paris, he realised that Sarkozy had already met Hillary Clinton and David Cameron and briefed other more bellicose leaders, excluding Italy from the decision-making. Berlusconi tried addressing Angela Merkel: "Angela, what is going on here? ... This is a farce. We are all called here to Paris, but everything has already been decided" (p205). Merkel shrugged and gave him no support. Berlusconi then discovered that Sarkozy had already told Cameron and Clinton that French war planes had just taken off.

There was a vehement clash at the meeting between Berlusconi and Sarkozy, but the former found himself completely isolated. In retrospect Berlusconi, understandably, feels vindicated by the course of events in Libya. However, Friedman stresses:

Berlusconi is not at all keen to discuss what is perhaps the most controversial allegation ever made about Sarkozy's twisted relationship with Muammar Gaddafi, the claim that when it came time for the Libyan dictator to die it would be at the hands of a French secret agent with a licence to kill - the rumour promulgated by the French press that Gaddafi's death was somehow engineered by the French equivalent of the CIA, whose ultimate commander was the French president (p207).

Friedman points out that "Sarkozy was jubilant on the day Gaddafi died" and Hillary Clinton's reaction on seeing the news on a journalist's Blackberry was

perhaps even more bloodthirsty: "'We came, we saw, he died,' she joked to the startled TV reporter after reading the news flash, throwing her head back in a raucous outburst of laughter" (p208).

Conspiracy

The most thoroughly researched chapter in the entire book is chapter 11: 'International intrigue' (pp211-51). Although it is clear that many of Friedman's sources were not willing to be named, it is quite obvious from what Friedman has compiled that Berlusconi's repeated contention that there was a conspiracy to bring him down - involving Nicolas Sarkozy, Christine Lagarde, Angela Merkel and Wolfgang Schäuble abroad and Giorgio Napolitano at home - is borne out by a wealth of first-hand evidence from non-Italian sources, including José Manuel Barroso, the former president of the European Commission, as well as Zapatero and American officials (such as Timothy Geithner, the US treasury secretary at this time) present at the G20 in Cannes in early November 2011.

There seems no doubt that Lagarde - far from acting as the independent head of an international institution, the International Monetary Fund - was during those few days "behaving like a ventriloquist's dummy and Sarkozy was pulling the strings. She was speaking like a trained parrot" (p246) - in the words of an anonymous "former top aide to Berlusconi" present at the meeting. Barroso, with surprising frankness, recalled: "For me it was clear that Sarkozy wanted blood. He wanted the scalp of Italy" (p235).

However, Sarkozy could not have behaved in such an aggressive manner without German backing. Berlusconi says: "I think all my troubles with Merkel began with the publication of that supposed quotation of mine, the one where I was accused of calling her an unfuckable lardass" (p229). However, given the way the Greek prime minister, George Papandreou, and finance minister, Evangelos Venizelos - who never resorted to personalised sexual insults against Merkel - were treated by Sarkozy and Merkel on November 2 2011, this seems an over-simplification: Merkel and Schäuble were in large part motivated by their fanatical adherence to an extreme version of neoliberal austerity.

Berlusconi appears to have been subjected to the same kind of waterboarding on November 3 as the two Greeks were the previous day and the subsequent Greek prime minister, Alexis Tsipras, was in July 2015. Berlusconi's stubborn refusal to accept an IMF loan (that would have destroyed not just his own political credibility, but that of his country's economy²) might seem to suggest that the old rogue had more courage than the young Syriza leader was to display in 2015.

Anybody interested in the real dynamics of the 2011 euro zone crisis, and the way technocratic governments were imposed on both Greece and Italy that November, should read Friedman's book, or at least chapter 11, which contains far more damning detail than I can quote or summarise here ●

Toby Abse

Notes

1. www.economist.com/news/books-and-arts/21677606-former-prime-minister-tries-explain-away-history-hes-back.
2. However bad the relationship between Berlusconi and his finance minister, Giulio Tremonti, had become by November 2011, they were at one on this issue. Friedman quotes Zapatero, who said: "I remember Tremonti saying, 'I know better ways to commit suicide than asking the IMF for help.' He must have repeated the phrase 20 times on that day, with Italian humour" (p243).

HISTORY



Battle of Adwa: through African eyes

Abyssinia and the myth of appeasement

Eighty years ago, fascist Italy invaded Abyssinia. Mike Belbin argues that this event is the key to understanding the international politics of the 1930s and after

“Let us fight against not only Italian imperialism, but the other robbers and oppressors: French and British imperialism” - CLR James
“As a private citizen, I think all this striving after greatness and domination is idiotic; and I would like my country not to take part in it. As a historian, I recognise powers will be powers” - AJP Taylor

In October 1935, the Italian troops of Benito Mussolini’s fascist government crossed the border into Ethiopia - then known as Abyssinia, the last but one independent country in the African continent. The invasion was the first instance of ‘fascist aggression’ from a European country, though not, of course, the first European incursion into Africa.

In the chronicle of the 1930s, the case of Abyssinia does not have the prominence of the Spanish Civil War or the Munich agreement. Compared to the bombing of Guernica or the determination and cunning of Adolf Hitler, Mussolini seems rather a

clown, though his African war was no joke. It is my contention that Ethiopia, aka Abyssinia, is a good place to start to discuss what lesson we can learn from the 1930s.

Is it the familiar one referred to as ‘appeasement’ - the one that so overshadows foreign policy decisions in the west today, the one alluded to only recently by prime minister David Cameron and Labour MP Hilary Benn in the debate on whether to extend the air war into Syria, the lesson about ‘standing up’ to fascism? Or is it time to say that this tale of the 30s is a myth, false in detail, which may indeed be concealing other lessons?

In terms of international politics, the 1930s are known for two things - the first being the great depression that swept through the world like a dust storm, taking livelihoods and lives. Voters were thrown into the arms of those ‘saviours’, whether Roosevelt or Hitler, who promised that the state could alleviate what private capital had wrecked. The other legend of the 30s is, of course, the one about appeasement. This being the story of how the bourgeois democratic

nations - principally Britain and France - refused to risk another world war and conceded to the demands of the dictators. These foolish pursuers of a dishonourable peace were British politicians, like PM Neville Chamberlain, who invented a new policy out of their weakness by trying to settle with the bullies, famously in Chamberlain’s declaration of “peace for [not *in*] our time”, while the warnings of those like Winston Churchill, “in the wilderness”, were ignored.

Luckily, as the story relates, the arrival of World War II found the British recovered from their weakness of spirit. Then, under the leadership of Churchill and with the help of the Allied nations, they went on to defeat the fascist enemy. Ever since this infamous period, ‘appeasement’ has become a cautionary tale for government about the preparedness to fight and having a large enough supply of arms to counter any foe. So it was before the Syria debate. Cameron challenged MPs with the choice: Chamberlain or Churchill; the shame of giving in or the pride of ‘doing

something’ - that is, going to war.

In recent decades this logic of ‘no appeasement’, the justification for the use of military might, has itself been widely challenged, as in the protest at the debacles of the US war in Vietnam and the Bush-Blair invasion of Iraq. However, the lesson of ‘appeasement’ continues to be proclaimed in order to justify western interventions, always against threats said to amount to some form of fascism. A re-examination then is long overdue of the 1930s story, to determine what did happen and why, and whether this narrative that so many take for granted might, on the contrary, be concealing something else we need to know.

League of Nations

It seems that when Mussolini - the inventor, strictly speaking, of fascism and ruler of Italy since 1922 - decided to invade Ethiopia, his motive was to look impressive, to signal that he was now playing in the big league of imperial powers. In doing this he knew that he was more than likely to be condemned by a new organisation in the world, the League of Nations.

Following World War I, the European League of Nations was set up in 1920 to prevent such a conflict ever happening again. A result of the Paris peace conference and the armistice signed at the Palace of Versailles, the League’s primary goal, as stated in its covenant, was to maintain world peace by preventing war between its members. To achieve this, 58 countries had signed up, including Britain and France, to provide “collective security”: that is, to act as a group against any one nation pursuing aggression. In its HQ located in Geneva, the League, while of course lacking its own army, had to rely on member-states, especially the big powers, to guarantee its prohibitive resolutions and economic sanctions.

Long before anyone put on a fascist black shirt, Italy’s rulers had their eyes on Ethiopia. During the reign of Menelik II (1890-1913), Italy had concluded a treaty with Ethiopia, whereby, in return for western armaments and recognition of the emperor, Italy was granted control of the north, a part of Eritrea, half of which was already an Italian colony.

HISTORY

In 1896 conflict erupted between Ethiopia and Italy. In March, after a short war, the Italians lost when defeated at the Battle of Adwa.

In 1922 Mussolini was brought to power by Italy's state, including King Emmanuel III, due to the ruling class's fear of post-war revolution. Mussolini's declared aims were to 'unite' capital and labour under the command of a directive fascist state and to return Italy to something like its glorious Roman past. To achieve this he needed to secure a larger empire: the occupation of Ethiopia would therefore show Britain and France that Italy was a rejuvenated military force.

From December 1934, Italian troops started to harass the Ethiopians on the border from a fort at the Welwel oasis. In 1935, after a further border incident, Italian forces began to assemble for a projected invasion. The League of Nations could not ignore this repeated aggression, seeing as Ethiopia itself had been a member of the League since 1923. However, instead of taking any action against Italy directly, the League set up a committee on September 4 to simply report on the threat of war. This committee delivered on September 18 a proposal to both avoid war and to sustain it, as argued, something of Ethiopia's "independence". The League would make the country "an economic protectorate" of all the European powers, with Italy also participating. "Specialists and advisors" would be responsible for "policing areas in which Europeans reside; disarming the local population, collecting taxes and setting up courts" involving administration by a "principal advisor" who would have "the necessary support of the Ethiopian government".

At the time the Afro-Caribbean Marxist, CLR James, commented that in fact "each of the four sections [of administration] will have at its head a 'principal advisor' sent by the League." (October 4 1935). Control by Ethiopians would in fact be minimal. James called for sanctions against Italy, but ones organised by the workers of the world, advising them to take their own independent action and "keep far from the imperialists, and their Leagues and covenants and sanctions".

Second Italo-Ethiopian war

Mussolini, however, ignored the League's proposal and sent his army across the border from Eritrea on October 3. It was a three-pronged attack, involving land troops, 5,099 tanks and the Italian Royal Air Force. The Italian forces consisted of 685,000 new troops which had joined the nearly 690,000 soldiers already in Eritrea and Italy's other colony in Somaliland. Added to these would be irregular Somali and Arab recruits. In response, the Ethiopians numbered around 700,000 fighters, but had no tanks and only three outmoded biplanes. The Ethiopians were indeed ready to resist, but were no longer even feudal warriors - they were mainly farmers, civilian administrators and small business people. The Italians, on the other hand, had learnt from the previous war of 1896 to go in with overwhelming force. The air offensive alone claimed thousands of Ethiopian lives - the use of an advantage which would be duplicated when German bombers assisted Franco during the Spanish Civil War.

On November 8 the Italians took the town of Mekele in the north. Mussolini, however, considered the army's progress too slow and replaced the general in charge. In the meantime Ethiopia's then emperor, Haile Selassie, had already prepared a counterattack, called the 'Christmas Offensive', intended to encircle and

split the Italian forces. The action took place at Amba Aradam mountain on the way to the capital, Addis Ababa, where the Ethiopians were led by the Prince Regent Imru Selassie. The Italians found themselves encircled and tried to break out, whereupon the Ethiopians managed to immobilise their tanks. Eventually half the Italians did escape.

It was then that the League of Nations finally condemned Italy's aggression and imposed sanctions. Italy then resorted to the use of chemical weapons. Its air force dropped gas canisters, described as the "terrible rain that burned and killed". All in all, 100,000 Ethiopians were left dead by gas poisoning alone. Italy also brought in more troops, as well as heavy artillery. In early 1936 Italian forces began a new offensive, but the consequent battle of Tembien ended in no definite win for either side. Nevertheless, the Italians suffered 10 casualties, the Ethiopians 8,000.

In early March 1936, Ras (Prince) Imru engaged battle again, but the Italian air force bombed his troops into defeat. At the battle of Maychew on March 31 the emperor himself made a last effort with non-stop attacks on Italian lines, but the Ethiopians finally had to withdraw exhausted. The air force finished off the routed army with mustard gas. Haile Selassie is said to have looked with despair on the corpses of his army, strewn around the poisoned lake of Ashenge.

In May 1936 Italian troops marched on Addis Ababa and the war officially ended, though Ras Imru only surrendered in December at Gojeb River. In Rome Mussolini stood on a balcony and declared that "peace has been restored".

With the setting up of an Italian administration in Addis Ababa, the struggle in the country - renamed Italian East Africa (*Africa Orientale Italiana*) - passed into a second phase: guerrilla warfare. On February 19 1937, the Italian viceroy, marshal Rodolfo Graziani, was assassinated by two young Ethiopians, Abaha Deboch and Moges Asgedom. In reprisal, over the following weeks, the Italian authorities executed 30,000 people. However, the men and women of the resistance were not discouraged. Italian convoys were ambushed and in the capital railway workers provided the leadership against the occupation. Children acted as scouts to tell fighters about the approach of enemy troops and an underground network forged papers and identity cards to enable safe passage. Unfortunately there was little coordination overall, as the guerrilla forces were split between monarchists and republicans. The Italians responded heavily with chemical warfare again, as well as summary execution of prisoners. Between 1936 and 1941 the Ethiopians killed by Italian forces, including the paramilitary Blackshirts, numbered in the hundreds of thousands, amounting to 7% of the total population - casualties of occupation, as well as the war.

On the other hand, the damage to Mussolini proved to be the cost of the war. The original estimate had been set at 4-6 billion lira. The bill ended up at 33.5 billion. Furthermore, the cost of the occupation between 1936 and 1940 came to 21 billion lira. This seriously impeded the continued modernisation of the Italian military. So much so that during World War II, Mussolini had to rely on his Axis partner, Hitler, to do most of the fighting, even on the Italian mainland. This may have contributed to that lack of morale among Italian troops which so benefited the Allies.

At the time of the invasion, the League of Nations had moved to enact sanctions against Italy. These would last until July 1936. But they did not include prohibitions on the sale of oil or the use of the Suez

Canal to transport it. The sanctions were supported in Britain, as was the League, by a 'National' government of mainly Tories and Liberals, which had been in power since 1931. Another general election occurred in October 1935 and PM Stanley Baldwin found it useful to pursue re-election against Labour with the slogan, "All sanctions short of war". Baldwin presented the government position as supporting the League against aggression such as Italy's, but without risking war.

In fact this was good old British hypocrisy at work. Only a month after the election British and French diplomats had come up with their own solution to the 'Abyssinia' problem. This Hoare-Laval Pact proposed that old standby: partition. Mussolini was in fact open to such a suggestion: as detailed above, the Ethiopians were proving a greater obstacle than he had expected. However, news of this "compromise" of Ethiopia's sovereignty was leaked to the press and there was public outrage. Bishops, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, and both Labour and Tory politicians, condemned it. For once, political lip service had failed and the plan was abandoned. One of its sponsors, foreign secretary Samuel Hoare, had to resign.

By March 1936 a *Times* editorial was declaring: "Whenever the League fails to check one dictator in his disregard of treaty obligations, there is - and always has been - a direct encouragement to others to follow his example." Some people had been onto the fight against fascism a little earlier. As early as June 1935, African-American boxer Joe Louis had knocked out Italy's heavyweight, Primo Carnera, in New York and crowds ran through Harlem shouting, "Let's get Mussolini next!"

On June 30 1936 Emperor Haile Selassie was allowed to escape. He promptly diverted to Geneva and addressed the League of Nations, denouncing Italy for the invasion and criticising the world community for effectively just standing by. He warned the national delegates: "It is us today. It will be you tomorrow." Eventually it was World War II that brought an end to Mussolini's rule in Ethiopia.

So far this account suits the general idea of the appeasement legend. Here is the received image of an aggressive fascism rolling over the democracies, with appeasers like the League of Nations failing to resist. This can be read either as a reluctance to bring on a greater war or perhaps a treacherous sympathy for fascism. Such a policy of concession, the moral of the story goes, must never be allowed to happen again, whether in the face of Stalinism after 1945 or during the US crusade for 'freedom' in the Muslim world, against movements like the Taliban or individual dictators like Saddam Hussein.

But was the League simply ineffectual through fear or treachery? Were they pro-fascist? Why did Britain fail to stand up to a fascist power invading Ethiopia?

Britain and fascist Italy

Throughout the 19th century, Britain had promoted the policy of free trade that had swept the world and gained the UK half a globe in colonies. But it also made other nations able to profit, from agriculture or industry, and become possible military rivals. The concept of avoiding such rivalry, either by negotiation (as with the USA) or confrontation (Russia, Germany) had been a policy aim since the mid-19th century. Thus the British empire saw off many challenges before 1918, but after World War I its economic and military burdens - and the need to have a popularly approved military - required avoiding another European

war. As a foreign office memo of 1926 put it,

We have got all that we want - perhaps more. Our sole object is to keep what we want and live in peace ... The fact is that war and rumours of war, quarrels and friction, in any corner of the world spell loss and harm to British commercial and financial interests ... so manifold and ubiquitous are British trade and British finance, that, whatever else may be the outcome of a disturbance of the peace, we shall be the losers.

World War I, with its collision of empires, had proved just how disruptive an alliance of continental powers could be.

Therefore the policy of the British government towards Mussolini's Italy had always been non-antagonistic. As early as 1925 the British government agreed a treaty with the Italian state to recognise Ethiopia as an exclusive zone of Italian influence. In return Mussolini pledged support for the British effort to secure a concession to build a dam at Tana, the largest lake in Ethiopia. Then with the coming to power of the Nazi Party in advanced industrial Germany, there was a greater imperative to prevent any alliance of rising powers. At this time Japan's militarist state was also viewed as a possible member of such an alliance and would mean the empire fighting on two fronts, in Europe and the Far East.

After he succeeded Baldwin to become PM in 1937, the foreign policy of Neville Chamberlain, supposed epitome of appeasement, simply continued the strategy of avoiding disturbance to British power. His one innovation was to try and delay the war he could see coming through direct public negotiation with Hitler. Chamberlain had the foresight to predict that if war came it would most probably result in dominance by one of Britain's rivals: namely, the USA. "Heaven knows," he told his sister, "I don't want the Americans to fight for us - we should have to pay too dearly for that if they had a right to be in on the peace process."

But what of Winston S Churchill, that fabled opponent of making peace with fascists? He too was on the lookout for rivals to empire power. Only, like many others in the early 20th century, he judged Germany to be the premier threat, even if the Germans were 'latecomers' as an industrial power and had hardly participated at all in the colonial 'scramble for Africa' from 1881. Nevertheless, Churchill agreed with those who saw any hint of German expansionism as signifying the main enemy to the 'balance of power' in Europe. What scared the imaginations of many English of the period was that the Germans had been organised enough to have 'caught up' in technology.

By the early 1930s, however, Churchill's main concern was not Germany, Nazi or otherwise, but the British possession of colonial India. Parliament had been considering some measure of home rule (local government) for the Raj, the sort already granted to the white Commonwealth of Australia and Canada. Churchill declared "India must be governed on old principles" and labelled his opponent, Gandhi, a "malevolent fanatic". In the face of a challenging world, Churchill was a member of the same consensus that the empire needed allies in Europe and he too considered fascist Italy a good candidate, saluting it as "a powerful and friendly factor in Europe". He had always admired Mussolini for the dictator's anti-communism and grip on Italian society. In 1927 during an Italian visit, Churchill wrote: "The country gives the impression of

discipline, order, goodwill, smiling faces. A happy, strict school ..." In 1935, three months before the invasion of Ethiopia, he wrote in the *Sunday Chronicle*, that Mussolini was "a really great man", and three weeks after the invasion he told the House of Commons that "no-one can keep up the pretence that Abyssinia is a fit, worthy and equal member of a league of civilised nations" (October 24 1935). Churchill endorsed "collective security" all right, as an alliance to contain the eternal expansionism of Germany, with British closeness to Italy as a counterweight. In 1937, Churchill wrote in the *News of the World*: "It would be dangerous folly for the British people to underrate the enduring position in world history which Mussolini will hold, for the amazing qualities of courage, comprehension, self-control and perseverance which he exemplifies."

As for the Nazis, Churchill did praise Hitler for his domestic policy, resurrecting Germany from under the depression and the reparations imposed by the victorious French. However, Churchill remained wary of what he saw as just another expansionist German who was challenging the empire by dominating Europe. Nevertheless he *did not* oppose Chamberlain's strategy of negotiations with Hitler *until* the *Führer* had made a move on Austria in the *Anschluss*, or annexation: that is, till February 1938. He even wished the prime minister "god speed" when on September 28 1938 Chamberlain announced a last conference with Hitler at Munich. Churchill's differences with the government were over armaments and then only on details: what kind of weaponry and whether they should be defensive or offensive. His own careerism, however, led him to make the most of his demands in parliament for greater rearmament.

In November 1938 Chamberlain's cabinet had approved the air ministry's proposals for fighter aircraft. These were less expensive than bombers - the cost of a bomber being equal to four fighters. Chamberlain was convinced this would make an effective use of Britain's overstretched and depression-hit resources. Chamberlain's emphasis was on defence, while the bellicose Churchill's was on attack. At this time Churchill was not even impressed with the Spitfire fighter or, for that matter, radar - a localised warning system, after all.

Behind the invasion of Ethiopia

In April 1935, before the war in Ethiopia, and seeking allies, the British had signed a new agreement with Italy and France in the town of Stresa on the banks of Lake Maggiore. The aim of this was to affirm an earlier peace treaty (the Locarno of 1925) and prevent any attempt by the Germans to alter the Treaty of Versailles by rearming.

However the 'Stresa front' began to break down when in June Britain agreed another treaty, this time with the 'threat', Germany. The Anglo-German Naval Agreement gave Hitler permission to actually increase the size of the German navy, though only to a certain degree. Germany could build a tonnage of ships in a ratio of 35:100 with regards to the shipping of the Royal Navy. At the time this proposal was expected to produce a "balanced fleet" on Germany's part, which the Royal Navy could handle. However, it broke with the conditions of Versailles. Hitler himself regarded the agreement as marking the beginning of an Anglo-German closeness, which would allow him a free hand in central and eastern Europe. The British diplomat,

What we fight for

Robert Craigie, even informed his German opposite number that the agreement "was designed to facilitate further agreements within a wider framework".

The actual British attitude to German ambitions was revealed some years later in a joint admiralty-foreign office letter to the British ambassador in Berlin. It said that Hitler "overlooked, as all German politicians have overlooked for many years, that this country is bound to react, not only against danger from any purely naval rival, but also against dominance of Europe by any aggressive military power, particularly if in a position to threaten the Low Countries and the Channel ports."

In 1935 the effect of the naval agreement on the other partners in the Stresa front was immediate. France accused Britain of 'treachery' by absolving Germany from the Versailles treaty and without telling Paris. It riled Mussolini too. It was precisely because Mussolini had regarded Britain as his new ally in the Stresa front that he had held back on any more incursions into Ethiopia. He did not want to annoy his new allies, because Ethiopia bordered British Somaliland too. But he regarded the naval agreement as marking the end of the alliance and so went ahead with the invasion. The British made no objection - this was a piece of Africa where they had no interests (except the Tana dam, of course). Subsequently, there was only one other superpower that Italy could ally with. On January 6 1936 Mussolini told the German ambassador that he would not object to Germany absorbing Austria as a satellite state: the *Anschluss*.

Whether the British move to the naval treaty with Germany was due to arrogance or desperation, it was no 'appeasement'. The point, as with Italy, was to make allies where possible and prevent a combination of newly ambitious powers. In the end the treaty proved a miscalculation. These moves to secure separate arrangements with Italy and Germany led in time to the formation of the alliance they were supposed to prevent.

Lessons of independence

As for the Labour Party, it did not so much promote the pursuit of an imperialist 'peace', which meant war for Ethiopia, as fail to oppose it vigorously and independently.

In 1934 the Labour Party executive had declared itself committed to "all-round disarmament" as well as resistance to aggression through the League of Nations. Labour members were suspicious of rearmament, especially by the 'National' government. A 'ballot' for peace was also conducted in June 1935, which showed overwhelming support for taking economic and non-military measures against an aggressor. Furthermore, in September 1935, the TUC published a resolution pledging "firm support of any action consistent with the principle and statutes of the League to restrain the Italian government and to uphold the authority of the League in enforcing peace." That same month the foreign secretary, Samuel Hoare, assured everyone in a speech to the League that his government intended "steady and collective resistance to all acts of unprovoked aggression".

So it was that the government and Labour opposition were agreed - resistance, yes, but by the League. Resistance of a sort was also on the minds of the Labour left. Sir Stafford Cripps of the *Socialist League* explained, however, that seeing as there was no socialist

government yet in Britain, it was "unfortunate, tragic, but inescapably true, that the British workers cannot at this moment be effective in the international political field." If, however, the labour movement felt "a desperate urge to do something at all costs in the present situation", it must fall back "on the attempt to use working class sanctions". Neither the Labour executive nor Labour left saw any urgency in doing more than oppose rearmament and echo the government's support for the League. So it was that up to the outbreak of the war in 1939, party members would continue to write indignant articles and hold meetings while rejecting any alliance with the extra-parliamentary and anti-fascist Popular Front.

In the event it was CLR James who proposed an independent movement to counter all big-power imperatives, whether at Geneva or Rome, in order to defend the peoples from imperial domination and fascist invasion.

As the 30s passed and Chamberlain finally declared war on Germany for invading Poland, the will to get behind the national effort and Churchill as leader, meant the actual strategy of the outgoing period was forgotten. It was time for scapegoats. A few 'guilty men' had done something unthinkable and given into Britain's enemies for the sake of a foolish peace. To promote this line, the actual traditional diplomatic strategy - that is, allying with a regime that then becomes an enemy and vice versa - had to be painted as a cowardly aberration (and maybe a personal fault of Chamberlain's). If there was anything to be said for a tactic of making peace with rising new powers, the public were not to be reminded of it. So it was that the word 'appeasement' entered the post-war period as a sin to be condemned and a simple nostrum proclaimed: evil must be met with might.

An examination of the motives and context surrounding the 1935-36 occupation of Ethiopia shows that British rulers were not interested in peace in Europe because of an antipathy to war as such. After all, they did not object to a war in Ethiopia. Later in the 30s it would be Czechoslovakia which had no strategic interest for Britain and would be taken by Hitler. But Abyssinia was the first to suffer takeover. Protest was muted, sanctions ineffectual and whether the latest colonisers were fascist was immaterial. Lip service might be paid to condemning aggression, but diplomacy was the decider, the avoidance of war with countries that need not be enemies. These were not concessions to bullies, but negotiations with fellow powers, involving acquiescence in arrangements to which the British state had no objection. Chamberlain and Churchill did not disagree on the aim, but on the tactics, with the League of Nations therefore providing an idealistic 'front' to impress those seeking something beyond the usual diplomacy of power politics.

Ever since, an allusion to 'appeasement' has been used to promote the notion that the diplomacy of the 30s was something unique and shameful rather than part of a policy of the usual divide and rule. The new sorts of leader, especially Hitler, may not have been fully comprehended, and in these circumstances the application of the policy led to mistakes, which in the end only encouraged war. But this does not make it the shameful innovation of a few statesmen rather than the conventional hypocrisy of power-politics diplomacy.

Today the lesson of greater military force as a deterrent is largely irrelevant, when armed conflict has ceased to exist between states, and become a struggle both internal to

countries and transnational. The wars in the Middle East, for example, are civil wars of various kinds, including the Saudi bid for Sunni leadership, with outside support for combatants on all sides. The heady days of war as fighting and bombing till you occupy a nation's capital city, as with Hitler's Berlin, are gone.

Since at least Vietnam, war is fought with ideas, propaganda and the wavering support of populations, local and international. Islamic State is not just a 'homeland' territory to be 'degraded', but an idea - the idea that Muslims (sectarian Sunni) would be better off in a caliphate; an idea that cannot be bombed out of existence, but must be proved wrong.

Lately, appeasement has even reappeared - 'rebooted' under a different name: the 'peace process', as in South Africa and Northern Ireland; that is, coming to an accommodation with those aspiring to government. If you can't beat them, join them to you. Of course, the lesson of the Vietnam war is that it may take some time, money and blood to reach such a peace. War has not yet been abolished. Even a believer in the historical decline of violence like Ian Morris perceives that there remain sources of explosion. He observes that the gap between the west and the rest "may cause more, not less, conflict, as it dislocates economies and adds to the sense of injustice that already inspires Islamist violence. More terrorism, Boer Wars and state failures may be looming."

In 1938, if perhaps 'collective security' had been a reality, maybe the final precipice would have been avoided. Perhaps in some transcendence of suspicion, some broad anti-fascism, might have led to a firm alliance of the UK, France and the Soviet Union, which would have called Hitler's bluff. There is evidence that in the face of such a commitment the German military might have deposed Hitler. But the British government was suspicious of Russia not only for ideological reasons, but because Stalin had purged his own military top brass in 1937 and such a leader was seen as unreliable. The

British state did indeed 'compromise' with fascism, but this was not a sheepish surrender. Chamberlain, for example, was trying to delay Hitler's inevitable imperial advance, while Britain rearmed. Some propose that, when the war did come, Churchill's 'going too early' was what produced the retreat that ended in Dunkirk.

In the 30s, if Labour had joined with the Popular Front and others in a serious independent anti-fascism, this might have been the best possible lever to exert some pressure. In our own times, there have indeed been independent protest movements, such as over Vietnam and Iraq, which have refused collusion with power politics. In the 1930s it was the lack of an effective and independent opposition that failed to resist the international onslaught of European fascism, which began in 1935-36 with an invasion of Africa ●

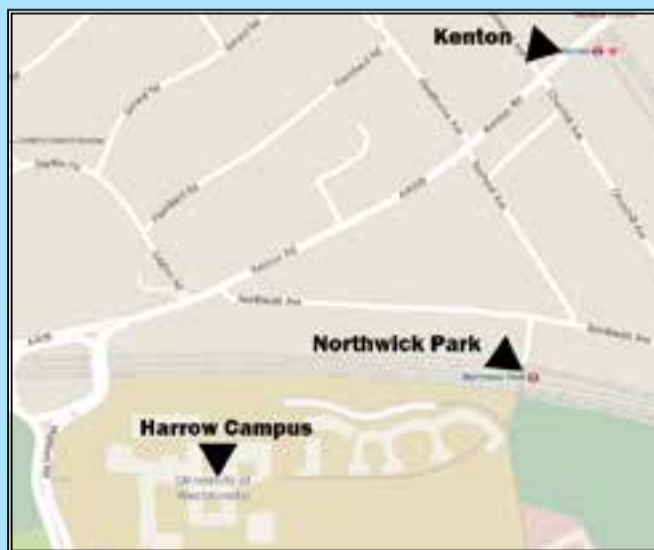
Thanks to Paul Flowers and Dawna King for discussion and comments.

Bibliography

- T Ali, introduction to R Miliband *Class war conservatism and other essays* London 2015, pp. xii-xv.
- 'Cato' *Guilty men* London 1940.
- W Churchill *The gathering storm* London 1948.
- D Dutton *Neville Chamberlain* London 2001.
- D Gilmour *The pursuit of Italy: a history of a land, its regions and their peoples* London 2011.
- E Haraszi *Treaty breakers or 'Realpolitiker'?* *The Anglo-German naval treaty of June 1935* Budapest 1974.
- CLR James, 'Intervening in Abyssinia' *New Interventions* Vol 11, No 4, autumn 2004.
- J Lukacs *June 1941: Hitler and Stalin* London 2006.
- JF Kennedy *Why England slept 1940*: www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKPP-026-004.aspx.
- E Mandel *The meaning of the Second World War* London 1986.
- R Miliband *Parliamentary socialism: a study in the politics of Labour* London 1972, chapter 8: 'The challenge of appeasement', pp. 231-71.
- I Morris *War: what is it for? The role of conflict in civilisation, from primates to robots* London 2013.
- C Ponting *Churchill* London 1994.
- G Rifkind, 'We need to defeat Islamic State - but how?': <http://oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk>.
- AJP Taylor *The origins of the Second World War* London 1961.
- Wikipedia pages: 'Second Italo-Ethiopian war'; 'Stresa front'; 'Anglo-German naval agreement'.

Communist University 2016

Saturday August 6 - Saturday August 13 (inclusive)



Westminster University, Harrow House, Watford Road, Northwick Park, Middlesex HA1 3TP

A week of provocative and stimulating debate

The venue is two minutes walk from Northwick Park tube station on the Metropolitan line, and a few minutes walk from Kenton on the Bakerloo line and overground from Euston.

Full week, including accommodation - £250 (£150 unwaged).

Solidarity price - £300

First/final weekend, including one night's accommodation - £60 (£30)

Full week, no accommodation - £60 (£30)

Day - £10 (£5) Single session - £5 (£3)

Accommodation limited - book now to avoid disappointment

Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk

■ Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

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

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

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

The *Weekly Worker* is licensed by November Publications under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Licence: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode>. ISSN 1351-0150.

weekly WORKER

The global economy is in a fragile state

And the band played on

As Chinese woes once again spread throughout the world economy, Paul Demarty wonders what could shake the complacency of the bourgeoisie

Michael Roberts, the Marxist economist and occasional contributor to this paper, has frequently predicted that the next major slump will begin in 2017. I am reluctant to start affixing dates to such things - it is very often the ruin of millenarian religious sects and Marxist economists alike, the latter of whom are popularly said to have predicted 10 out of the last five crises.

At this point, however, I am reluctant to bet against him. The last couple of weeks have not painted a picture of a global economy bouncing back happily into health, after the shocks of 2008 and ensuing slump. Quite the opposite: more bad news from China, combined with the continuing freefall of basic commodity prices (especially oil), suggest there are rocky times ahead.

The proximate cause of recent wobbles is news from China, where the key stock exchanges have been subject to dramatic falls in value, following similar events in the middle of last year. A wave of panic selling in Shanghai knocked another 5% off the value of the CSI 300 index, which tracks major Chinese firms. As of the morning of January 12, the Shanghai composite index had dropped around 20% in the last month.

The Chinese stock indices are not terribly significant on their own, of course. Foreign companies investing in production (Apple, say) are tracked elsewhere. The equities traded in Shanghai are dwarfed by those being shuffled around the City and Wall Street. The effects are rippling outwards, however. Most immediately, the Chinese government is taking increasingly drastic steps to stabilise the yuan, with its central bank attempting to drain liquidity from global forex markets to stabilise the price. There were some indications that the yuan was being deliberately devalued to boost a flagging export market, but after more market turbulence the Chinese abruptly switched strategy, leading to the present game of cat and mouse with speculators.

Those flagging exports point, in turn, to globally deficient demand. China has had great success by basically reconfiguring itself as a huge pool of cheap, well-controlled labour. The vast masses in the countryside are lured to the cities, superexploited and packed off home. These great temporary migrations are slowing down, whether because the peasants are more sober about what exactly they are buying into, or simply because the economy itself is slowing down. Growth is expected to fall, according to official figures, to 7% - whether one trusts the official figures is another matter. Analysts looking at proxies like electricity usage think the real number is much lower already.

Lower exports also mean lower imports of capital goods and raw materials. This is a matter of extreme concern to several countries, such as Australia, for whom China accounts for nearly a third of total exports (mostly basic commodities like iron ore). The pollyannas who do Australian budget forecasts had previously based their projections for the years to 2020 on



Down, down, down

assumptions that amounted to China building, from scratch, more homes than would house all the Chinese (of whom, famously, there are a great many).

A more dramatic case than Australian iron is oil. Governments are already imploding over the precipitate decline in oil prices (an important background element, for example, in the retreat of the 'Bolivarian revolution' in Venezuela). Oil-producing countries were not necessarily as blindly bullish as the Australians over their prospects - Iran, for example, planned on a worst-case price of \$50 for a barrel of Brent crude a couple of years ago, which would have looked wildly gloomy at the time.

Now, however, things are getting uncomfortably close to \$30. Morgan Stanley analysts expect the slide to continue towards \$20. The market is flooded with black gold. For a picture of how bad things have gotten, we look not at Venezuela, but the epicentre of oil production in the contemporary epoch - Saudi Arabia.

The house of Saud took control of the Arabian-American Oil Company (Aramco) over a seven-year period from the Yom Kippur war to 1980, supposedly as a protest against US support for Israel in that conflict. Whatever the level of commitment actually offered by this despicable gang of mediaevalist tyrants to the Palestinian cause, the outcome is

plain - Aramco was a licence for them to print money, and remained so for upwards of 30 years.

Now they want to privatise it. Its flotation will make it the largest company on earth, by market capitalisation, to go public, dwarfing the petty likes of Apple. Yet with crude at \$30, we have already arrived at the point where, at least in marginal operations like Canadian sand, US shale and the Russian Arctic, it costs more to get the stuff out of the ground than can be made by selling it. But even though Saudi Arabia has the world's lowest production costs at \$3 a barrel, it is suffering, albeit from a loss of income. And if that situation continues, and it looks like it will, then how will the murderous crew continue to bribe their population into quiescence at home, and fund murderous Wahabi 'pet projects' abroad? If the Saudis are worried enough to sell off their golden goose, then who remains who really believes in the prospect of limitless development in the east and the global south?

Global

The problems are hardly, at this point, confined to such regions. We note, with some interest, that our own George Osborne - the Great Helmsman of the modern Tory Party - has claimed a great deal of credit for getting Britain back

to economic health, essentially by creating a huge asset price bubble; and also that the money used to fund recent carbuncular additions to the London skyline has something of a petrochemical smell to it. Gulf monarchs and Russian oligarchs are the sort of people who are going to be squeezed, should demand from industrial producers slump for a prolonged period. So where does that leave George?

The story is, in the end, one of a global economy that has not bounced back from the 2008 crash and subsequent depression with any great vigour. At best, the core capitalist countries have had growth that looks like a rounding error. Significant economies in Europe have suffered much worse fates, leading to a very bumpy ride for the euro zone as a whole. There are moments in Hegel where it seems that the subject of universal history is the Prussian state of his day; at the moment, it looks rather more like Japan, leading the world into a period of apparently unending stagnation.

In such a situation, there is a great twitchiness. The present malaise originated in China, but it might have originated in India; previous difficulties have stemmed from political crises at the periphery of the euro zone. It appears that we lurch

from cautious optimism to Defcon 1 every other Monday morning.

Why is the problem so intractable? We may look at the last economic crisis of the scale we saw beginning in 2008: the great depression of the 1930s. It is often taught, to school pupils who may not know any better, that the depression (in America, at least) was ended by a switch from *laissez faire* economics to aggressive government investment in infrastructure.

In reality, the events of that era are indissociable from World War II. The ruinous material devastation of Europe, coupled with a better-entrenched Soviet threat in the east, that created enough chaos for the rebuilding effort to provide sufficient stimulus, and made that rebuilding effort necessary, respectively. In any society, politics and economics are indissoluble; in capitalism, however, both escape the conscious control of all social actors, and dance together towards terrible chaos.

We are not immediately on the verge of a great-power war at the present, although the widespread ascendancy of revanchist nationalism - from Shinzō Abe to Donald Trump, indeed to Xi Jinping - does not augur well on that score.

Suppose, in any case, that capitalism was, somehow, able to right itself, and return to growth. We know what that growth actually means; barely a month after our glorious leaders met in Paris to agree that climate change was a Very Bad Thing, all have returned to anxiously urging the price of oil upwards, since that would mean that more of it was being burned, so as to manufacture more armaments, selfie sticks, etc, and keep London property prices on their skyward course. All for the best, in the best of all possible worlds!

The *status quo ante* was apocalyptic enough already. Whatever way things go, it is difficult to see what could break the complacency of the capitalist class - except (dare to dream) a resurgent working class movement, in a mood to shake off the parasitism of its exploiters, and organise production according to a radically different set of priorities ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

Subscribe

	6m	1yr	Inst.
UK	£30/€35	£60/€70	£200/€220
Europe	£43/€50	£86/€100	£240/€264
Rest of world	£65/€75	£130/€150	£480/€528

New UK subscribers offer: 3 months for £10

UK subscribers: Pay by standing order and save £12 a year. Minimum £12 every 3 months... but please pay more if you can.

Send a cheque or postal order payable to 'Weekly Worker' at:
Weekly Worker, BCM Box 928,
London WC1N 3XX

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel: _____

Email: _____

Sub: £/€ _____

Donation: £/€ _____

Standing order

To _____ Bank plc _____

Branch address _____

Post code _____ Account name _____

Sort code _____ Account No _____

Please pay to Weekly Worker, Lloyds A/C No 00744310 sort code 30-99-64, the sum of _____ every month*/3 months* until further notice, commencing on _____ This replaces any previous order from this account. (*delete)

Date _____

Signed _____ Name (PRINT) _____

Address _____