

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**

David Cameron and Donald Tusk: carefully choreographed

- Momentum NC launch
- Hillel Ticktin on transition
- James Klugmann laid bare
- Michael Roberts on 'Big short'

No 1093 Thursday February 11 2016

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

£1/€1.10

THE **PROBLEM** OF **UNEQUAL ABILITIES**



LETTERS



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

Half a loaf

I am one of those who believe that a Labour government - any Labour government, no matter how impure - is better than any Tory government. Alan Paton, author of *Cry, the beloved country*, told Peter Hain: "I am not an all-or-nothing person ... I am an all-or-something person." In other words, half a loaf is better than none. It is better to be a weak government than a strong opposition. The Blair governments may have been lacklustre socialist governments, but they were better than the 18 years that preceded them and the years that have so far succeeded them.

The CPGB is a case in point. It is impotent. It may expound pure Marxist principles, but the public don't want to buy it and it has *absolutely* no chance of power; sad old revolutionaries dreaming in never-never land. In fact the whole of the British left, fragmented into a plethora of sectarian posturing, is impotent, with no foreseeable hope of gaining political power. The only hope of dealing with the Tories is to get Labour into power. You can then set about trying to get Labour to try to adopt more socialist policies. Half a socialist state is better than none at all.

In 1980, following the 1979 Labour rout that elected Thatcher, Hain wrote the following words: "Of course, all sorts of arguments will be cited in favour of far-left groups, *this time*, in *these* particular historical circumstances, facing *that* specific stage in capitalist development. But then they always are." And later on: "One of the least appealing attributes of the far left is its self-righteousness: its claims to possess a monopoly on socialist wisdom, on morality and honesty, and in the case of the Socialist Workers Party specifically, its irritating tendency to exaggerate its self-importance and the role of its activists. That sort of approach makes left unity difficult to build. It also reflects a fault of the whole of the left, inside and outside the Labour Party: namely, a desire to *posture* rather than grapple with reality."

Later the same year the party elected the hard-left Michael Foot as leader. In 1983 Foot went to the country with a manifesto that later gained the "longest suicide note in history" soubriquet and Labour went down to its most crushing defeat ever, just about managing to avoid third place. Neil Kinnock set about making the party electable and declared: "Remember how you felt on that dreadful morning ... and think to yourselves: June 9 1983 - never, ever again will we experience that." And we haven't - not yet anyway. But if we regard Peter Hain's words as prescient then 2020 beckons. Corbyn is offering "the longest suicide note in history" once again.

The country needs a Labour government that will govern moderately and not ideologically; that puts people before profit, not profit before people; that accepts capital as collateral damage, not people. To get that government you have to deal with Britain the way it is, not the way you want it to be; then maybe you will be able to deal with the world the way you want it to be rather than the way it is.

Michael Ellison
email

Fabian Corbyn

Dave Vincent raises an important issue in his letter on the relationship between unions and the Labour Party, and how it applies to the Corbyn surge (February 4). He writes: "I have received a letter inviting me to donate to the Labour Party in readiness for the May elections. It is all about getting Labour representatives in and the Tories out. Not a word about unions, or about Labour, even under Corbyn pledging to oppose council cuts."

I received a similar letter which does mention the Tories' Trade Union Bill, describing it as "an unashamed attack on

our party, our movement and our values". It does not mention the fact that the last Labour administration was not exactly union-friendly, or that in the not so distant past the Labour leadership was actively distancing itself from the unions.

New Labour omitted to repeal the Tory anti-union legislation of the 1980s, which outlawed much of effective trade unionism, including all 'solidarity' action with other workers and unions. As Dave says, "It is crystal-clear that unions bankroll the Labour Party for no obvious benefit, but are pulled to the right due to Labour's electoral considerations rather than seek to pull Labour left."

The bulk of the present Labour Party is a Blairite/Brownite rump, schooled in the perspectives, compromises and class allegiances of New Labour, swallowing and regurgitating the ruling class narrative on the economy, defence, and foreign and domestic policy, ready to participate in imperialist adventurism and precipitate the nation into far-flung conflicts at the drop of a hat.

Corbyn faces a monumental task to turn the party around, to undo almost two decades of Blair-Brownite New Labourism, and set the party on a new course. He must do all this, with a handful of allies, in the teeth of strident opposition and hostility from the bulk of the party, to say nothing of the class hatred of entrenched Toryism.

Corbyn is a Fabian. As such he subscribes to the concept of a gradualist transformation of bourgeois society to socialism and rejects the achievement of this by revolutionary overthrow. Fabianism extols the virtues of chipping away at the edifice of capitalism in the forlorn hope that the facade will crack and disgorge a veritable cornucopia.

To have even a moderate chance of success in the next general election he needs more than his party behind him. He needs the unions. He must promise to do what Blair and Brown neglected to do: repeal the anti-union legislation imposed by the 1980s Thatcher regime. This also includes whatever anti-union legislation imposed by the present government. He must also promise to reverse the changes pushed through by Brown at the 2007 conference, disenfranchising the unions and local Labour parties.

So far he has said little or nothing on this vital issue. The reality is that the Fabianite Labour Party was always an anvil around the necks of the working class, the greatest obstacle to its self-emancipation. It has always been so, but now more than ever. No matter how able and sincere the MPs and members of the Labour Party may be, they cannot succeed in making the existing social system work in the interest of the great majority of the population: the wage- and salary-earners.

Just supposing Labour under Corbyn acquires a majority in the 2020 election, the question remains, will he go to Buckingham Palace to kneel before her maj, kiss her hand and ask permission to form her loyal government? Refusing to do so would probably trigger a constitutional crisis, which would be interesting, but I cannot believe the outcome of such would be favourable to the working class.

David Callaghan
email

Paradox

In his article, 'Things don't look good' (January 21), Peter Manson reported on the London Left Unity members aggregate. He says: "Steve Freeman preferred to talk about matters other than the question of Labour. He thought it was more important that our policies on democracy, Scotland and Wales, and the European Union were correct."

Some clarification is needed here. I was discussing how to fight Labour, not the incessant chatter of comrades fawning over or liquidating into the Labour Party. Peter is right that I didn't mention 'Labour this', 'Labour that' and

'the next thing for Labour'. I leave all that to the CPGB and all those desperate to join the Labour Party.

I spoke about the political issues and policies the working class needed to build a militant party ready and able to fight the *Tories* (remember them?) and *Labour* on democracy, Scotland and Wales, and the European Union. On these issues, so important for the ruling class, both parties line up on the same page.

My point was about getting LU policies correct. This is the litmus test. Has LU got anything useful, important and distinct to say against the Tory-Labour consensus? Too many LU members have spent too much time 'talking' about how best to ingratiate ourselves with the Labour Party, before throwing themselves under the Corbyn bandwagon. The *Weekly Worker* has done much to encourage this mood of liquidationism.

Take, for example, the popular front extending from Cameron, via the Liberal Democrats, Corbyn, Labour, TUC, the Green Party to Left Unity to vote 'Remain' in the EU referendum. How can Left Unity back Cameron's negotiated pro-City and anti-worker deal? We need a special meeting to review the policy as soon as Cameron's negotiations are finished, and then get stuck in to a national referendum campaign. This will be more important for LU than a few local elections because it is a *national* electoral campaign. A weak LU is suffering from too much localism.

Then we have Scotland and Wales, where LU have been the feeblest of unionists, refusing to criticise or oppose the Labour Party for defending Queen Anne's anti-democratic Act of Union. How can anybody have confidence in a party so bereft of any commitment to fighting for popular sovereignty and self-determination?

Finally, LU seems very serious about debating its own constitution and its own governance and has no interest in the government and constitutional laws which enable millions of working class people to be robbed and oppressed 'democratically' and 'legally'.

LU will never be fit to govern because it is not interested in government. It should be fighting to change the UK's corrupt, broken and outdated 'democracy', in which government is run by the crown on behalf of the City, with Westminster as an irrelevant side show, like the European parliament.

Peter concludes: "Despite the fact he [me] had stood against the LU-backed candidate in last year's general election, I thought the reception he received was strangely polite and receptive." This paradox may be explained by the fact that LU members are politer or more thoughtful than the CPGB credits them.

In the Bermondsey 2015 election, I stood as a republican socialist and anti-unionist and was opposed by the Labourite Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. Left Unity simply fell in behind Tusc, backed by the CPGB, and supported economism and unionism against democracy and self-determination. The CPGB claim I betrayed Left Unity and I claim they betrayed the programme of working class democracy.

I like to think that the idea of a militant republican socialist party, linked with the democratic revolution of 1649, is Left Unity's Plan B. That was before Jeremy Corbyn blew Left Unity's Plan A (*Spirit of 45*) out of the water and stole many LU members, including all the LU candidates in south London. So Left Unity has lost Plan A and hasn't found a Plan B. How long will this continue? Watch this space.

Steve Freeman
Left Unity and Rise

Sensible

Regarding tactics in elections, would it not be a way forward for Left Unity to avoid standing candidates where there is a Corbyn-supporting MP with a proven track record of supporting socialist

policies, and standing candidates where this is not the case? Working class people would then be given a chance to support a socialist candidate in all constituencies. It would also put pressure on some Labour Party constituencies to select Corbyn candidates if they knew they were going to face a challenge from the left.

Momentum and Left Unity ought to campaign jointly where there are agreed policies and goals. This will be easier to achieve if Left Unity has been tactically sensible and non-sectarian in elections.

Peter Burton
email

Voting to leave

I see from Paul Demarty's article, 'Cameron's chauvinist chicanery' (February 4), that the CPGB will be calling for a boycott of the European Union referendum. Whilst I can see where the CPGB is coming from (sort of), in my locality a call for a boycott will be laughed all the way out of town.

Nearly all the people I talk to will be voting for the UK to leave the EU. The number one reason given is that doing so is the only way of stopping uncontrolled mass immigration of workers from eastern Europe. My home town has grown by 50% since 2004. There are now more than 11,000 migrant workers here. Thirty years ago unemployed local people could always get a job working shifts in local factories. Today that is almost impossible. Local workers are gradually being replaced by migrant workers, as the older generation of local workers leave or retire.

Most migrant workers are now employed through four big local employment agencies. The advent of employment agencies has helped destroy most union organisation in the factories and sheds - migrant agency workers don't join trade unions.

A couple of years ago the *Weekly Worker* published an interview with a female Polish organiser working for Unite in the Greater Manchester area. However, it is unlikely that Unite will be taking on any more Polish organisers any time soon, especially in areas like my home town. At the same time, trade unions' 'servicing' model of organisation does not lend itself to recruiting large numbers of migrant workers to its ranks.

I think there is much we can learn from the experiences of the socialist pioneers of the general unions 120 years ago. We can also learn from the experiences of the Wobblies - the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the USA 120 years ago. We cannot rely on the trade union bureaucracy to rebuild the unions. Socialists will have to step up to the plate here.

The least the trade unions like Unite can do is have recruitment leaflets printed in Polish and other migrant worker languages. Just as in the past Irish, Jewish and black migrants became the most militant trade union members, so can Polish and other eastern European migrant workers today. The Labour Party has an important role to play in rebuilding the trade unions amongst both British workers and migrants.

In the meantime, I'll be voting to leave the EU when the referendum is held.

John Smithee
Cambridgeshire

Lesser evil?

As yet again expressed in Paul Demarty's article, it seems to me that the official position of the CPGB on the matter of UK membership of the EU is one of implied 'immutable weakness' on the part of any leftwing involvement or intervention, alongside simple defeatism. It could almost be said weakness plus defeatism, to the extent of lying down in front of our neocon masters and mistresses and asking to be kicked to death.

Surely, it can amount to nothing more than that self-fulfilling prophecy if socialist organisations elevate some potential, theoretical or even just darkly

imagined horrors and abuses of a perceived 'heightened' capitalist rampage (namely one that might take place if the UK were to leave the EU) over and above principled Marxist-Leninist rejection of a system which exists in order to further the socio-political and cultural agenda of our capitalist elites and, of course, primarily to increase and protect their corporate profit margins?

To my mind, an attitude and position such as yours is putting the most enormous of horses in front of the most massive of carts. You can't see the common-sense wood for the intellectually 'correct' Marxist trees, so to speak. Put yet another way, you're flipping an astutely analysed and properly comprehended reality 180 degrees onto its head and regrettably ending up in the dust. Furthermore, all of that remaining true, even if couched in your advice to passively 'abstain' from the fray, most notably in the upcoming referendum on EU membership for the UK.

At least in this precise context, it seems to me this overall policy in relation to the EU puts the CPGB pretty much in the same boat as dyed-in-the-wool reformist-style trades unions, who completely oppose the scrapping of Trident or indeed the dismantling of our entire nuclear arsenal, simply on the basis that it will 'destroy jobs' for their members. An abdication of both socialist principles as well as working class internationalism at its absolute finest!

Earlier this week in its so-called mother of parliaments, our bourgeois government has been laying modified and enhanced plans to compensate 'more promptly and more equitably' any future 'victims' of 'riots', such as those triggered over recent years in many of our cities. In other words, they are putting in place the means/preparing the ground to mollify, placate or quite simply buy off the more comfortable elements of our population in relation to any forthcoming blow-back or maybe even fully organised insurrectionist activities from its otherwise entirely powerless 'non-stakeholder' citizens.

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

New EU movement

There seems to be a growing awareness that the left in Europe needs to mount an effective challenge to the status quo in the EU on a continental scale, in addition to whatever steps it takes to champion popular causes in individual countries. Some recent pronouncements by two prominent personalities in the aftermath of the Syriza debacle in Greece (which dramatically exposed the inadequacy of an attempt to push through radical measures in one single European country in the face of opposition from other European governments and the infamous 'Troika') point in this direction.

Truthout published an interview with Noam Chomsky on January 25 under the heading 'Is European integration unravelling?' While the bulk of Chomsky's remarks are about the current refugee crisis, the interviewer also asked him for his views on the ongoing tragedy in Greece. Chomsky had this to say: "I do not feel close enough to the situation to comment on Syriza's specific choices, and to evaluate alternative paths it might have pursued. Their options would have been considerably enhanced, had they received meaningful support from popular forces elsewhere in Europe, as I think could have been possible."

The interviewer then asked him about the project announced by the former finance minister in Alexis Tsipras's government, Yanis Varoufakis, for the formation of a new European political movement - scheduled for launch in Berlin on February 9. Chomsky was asked, specifically, "How far can one 'democratise capitalism'?" His response was: "How far reforms can proceed under the existing varieties of state capitalism, one can debate. But that they

can go far beyond what now exists is not at all in doubt. Nor is it in doubt that every effort should be made to press them to their limits. That should be a goal even for those committed to radical social revolution, which would only lead to worse horrors if it were not to arise from the dedication of the great mass of the population who come to realise that the centres of power will block any further steps forward.”

This was followed by a piece by Varoufakis himself which appeared in *The Guardian* on February 5, broadly spelling out what he has in mind. He writes:

“Today Europeans everywhere, from Helsinki to Lisbon, from Dublin to Crete, from Leipzig to Aberdeen, are feeling let down by EU institutions. Many are attracted to the idea of tearing up the EU, except that they remain wedded to the single market. Brexit campaigners are promising voters that they can have their sovereignty and access to Europe’s single market. But this is a false promise.

“A truly single market, a genuinely level playing field, requires a single legal framework, identical industry, labour and environmental protection standards, and courts that will enforce them with the same determination throughout the single jurisdiction. But this then also requires a common parliament that writes the laws to be implemented across the single market as well as an executive that enforces the court’s decisions.”

Accordingly, Varoufakis is set to launch his new movement, called Democracy in Europe Movement 2025, in Berlin. He declares:

“One simple radical idea is our motivating force: to democratise the EU in the knowledge that it will otherwise disintegrate at a terrible cost to all. Our immediate priority is full transparency in decision-making (live-streaming of European councils; full disclosure of trade negotiations; ECB minutes, etc) and the urgent redeployment of existing EU institutions in the pursuit of policies that genuinely address the crises of debt, banking, inadequate investment, rising poverty and migration.

“Our medium-term goal is to convene a constitutional assembly, where Europeans will deliberate on how to bring forward, by 2025, a fully-fledged European democracy, featuring a sovereign parliament that respects national self-determination and shares power with national parliaments, regional assemblies and municipal councils.

“Is this utopian? Of course it is. But no more so than the notion that the current EU can survive its anti-democratic hubris, and the gross incompetence fuelled by its unaccountability. Or the idea that democracy can be revived in the bosom of a nation-state asphyxiating within transnational ‘single’ markets and opaque free trade agreements.” [Last sentence: Brexit enthusiasts, plus Scots and Catalan radicals especially, please note.]

In this context, the *Weekly Worker* is to be congratulated on making once more available a number of relevant recent articles on its website, in particular Jack Conrad’s ‘United States of Europe - theirs and ours’, James Turley’s ‘New vision for Europe wanted’ and Mike Macnair’s ‘Mapping the alternative’. These include certain programmatic demands. I would personally add one or two more, but the important thing is to get an international movement going.

I would also urge readers, if they haven’t seen it, to look at the debate on the EU between John Palmer and Alex Callinicos in *International Socialism*, no148, autumn 2015, and also, as commentary on the Greek events, Kevin Ovenden’s book *Syriza: inside the labyrinth* (London 2015).

Chris Gray
email

NUM defamation

I don’t think there is any doubt that the response of the majority within the current National Union of Mineworkers NEC is by way of a reply to my earlier article(s) in the paper critical of them

(Letters, February 4). The letter doesn’t refer to me by name nor cite any specific piece I’ve written and also seems to lump in unknown “elements on the outskirts of the labour movement”, but I guess I come under the heading of “Some who should know better and have been willing to give air to such defamation”.

There is a problem with replying, insofar as if I take issue with any element of the response it can be said, ‘We weren’t referring to you’ or, worse, ‘If the cap fits’. But let’s deal with the poor wounded pride of the NEC majority anyway.

I have never smeared or defamed the NUM, having been a member of the organisation since I was 17 years old, and remain a retired and active member insofar as I am allowed to be. I have been an active, if not fanatical, member of the union for over 50 years. I have fought within that organisation against political and industrial perspectives my political values and class understanding have concluded are wrong. I did this whether I liked the particular leaders personally and despite personal friendships. This goes back to the days of Lawrence Daly and the social contract, through Arthur Scargill over the handling of the Lawrence Scott dispute when he was Yorkshire president, to Ken Homer over financing of pickets in 1984, to Arthur and Orgreave, to the Yorkshire leadership vetoing women’s support group associated memberships. At the same time, I defended Scargill against attacks by the media.

More particularly, over the last two decades of struggle for democracy within the NUM against the bureaucratic obsessions of the old Scargill leadership, I have defended the NUM and this current leadership in those very bitter and sometimes sadly violent disagreements. None of this has ever consisted of “smears”.

Sadly, what all these respective leaderships - ‘left’, right and centre - have in common is to associate their own views and perspectives with those of the NUM at large, so that any difference with those particular individuals on their political and industrial perspectives become ‘attacks on the NUM’. Yes indeed, we in the NUM do have long experience of those who would seek to divide us, but such a reference has no relevance in this issue, unless the authors are trying to equate my criticism of their recent political judgements with the actions of the Union of Democratic Mineworkers or Spencer’s union - an absurd and defamatory smear.

Facts are, the current NUM leadership isn’t as politically clued up as previously, has chosen the wrong side - the nominations for Labour leader and deputy leader would tell you that. There have been others, but the main question here is of Ukraine.

Put simply enough, ‘self-determination for Ukraine’ is doublespeak for ‘Nato control of Ukraine’. Ukraine already had ‘self-determination’, had already elected a government and a president, already had recognition of semi-autonomous Russian regions and recognition of the Russian language. There always had been a close relationship with Russia. The Russian trade deal worth billions of roubles was on the table to be signed and this undoubtedly would have drawn Ukraine closer to Russia.

At this point, a Nato-inspired armed coup, led by nationalists and armed fascists, many wearing Nazi uniforms or inspired by them, overthrew the president and the government. Far-right nationalist measures were introduced, withdrawing all recognition of autonomous regions and the Russian language, and history began to be literally rewritten. Within less than a week, on largely German and US urging, the EU recognised the leaders of the coup as the legitimate government despite Russian objections and international law. Within days, it had promised billions of loans and investments.

The autonomous and largely Russian regions, also the greatest centres of the coal industry, were in the vanguard of

armed resistance to the coup, and in defending their own area. The front line of Kiev’s armed forces, facing many armed miners, are the fascist and pro-Nazi armed militias. As we know, the rebel areas then held regional referendums and with almost undisputed agreement achieved overwhelming votes in mass turnouts for autonomy despite being shelled and bombed.

Nato from the start started to supply sophisticated modern weaponry to the regime, while moving its air power and military forces up to the very borders with Russia. Now, the call for ‘self-determination’ doesn’t mean for Donbas or the minority areas, or the autonomous regions. It means self-determination for Nato-inspired, EU-funded Ukraine. It is not, as it sounds, a neutral slogan; it is not a unifying slogan.

That the NUM conference adopted this position without any exploration of the big international power game being played out here, or recognition of the long-term Nato goal of militarily surrounding Russia and breaking all previous ‘Russian sphere of influence’ countries away, not to neutrality but to belligerence, is worthy of criticism. What the conference did not recognise was that there were miners’ families being butchered by the Kiev government and it was Donbas miners in the fore of the resistance, whatever the official position of the official miners’ unions of Ukraine. The delegation should have made efforts to visit these miners and listen to their case.

The solidarity of the NUM with the struggle of Donbas miners against the pit closure programme is not in question here, and has not been challenged by me.

So to get feet back down to earth, a political decision on the situation in Ukraine is being disputed. The NUM is not being attacked because “we support fellow trade unionists”, especially the ones killed by fascists in the TUC buildings! I too, believe it or not, support my fellow workers in general and miners in particular. It defies belief that any member of the NUM would suggest I ever did otherwise.

I have no allegiance to Putin - for god’s sake, get a grip - but it is clear Nato and America have unresolved cold war issues with Russia and their aggressive adventure into Russia’s backyard is a game of chicken none of us should be cheerleading from either direction. But the truth is, plans to break up and destabilise former USSR satellites and buffer zones started with the former Yugoslavia and have been ongoing ever since. Not to recognise this overall process is the height of naivety at best.

I welcome the clarification that the NUM condemns both superpower interference within Ukraine and that this is detrimental to the class interests of the working class of that country. What is not clear, however, is where, how and why you think this coup and civil war originated and that was what was missing from the original reports and subsequent resolutions, which made it look and sound like a pro-government, pro-coup statement, which prompted my criticism. I would welcome your clarification on that aspect.

The NUM letter to the TUC setting out the NUM position, prior to the TUC adopting its own (opposing) policy, spells out that maintaining the total territory of Ukraine - ie, not recognising the right of Russian minorities to secede - and withdrawal of all Russian forces were preconditions to any peace. That certainly doesn’t sound to me like a unifying or inclusive position.

I would also add that wider unity of the working class along class lines and perspectives is always superior to sectional and nationalist divisions, but all peoples, ethnicities and regions have the moral right to self-determination and autonomy if that is demanded, and that is particularly true where such peoples, ethnicities and regions are discriminated against and victimised.

David John Douglass
NUM retired

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 February 14, 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 2 (‘World War I’), section 3: ‘The resurgence of militancy’. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday February 16, 6.45pm: Introduction to social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1. ‘An Amazonian myth: the hunter Monmanéki and his wives. Speaker: Chris Knight. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Britain and Palestine

Saturday February 13, 10am to 5pm: Conference, Sarum College, 19 The Close, Salisbury SP1. £25 (£12 students). Debating Britain’s past and future relations with Palestine. Lunch included. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

No to Zionism and racism

Sunday February 14, 2 pm: Public meeting, Cock Tavern, 23 Phoenix Road, London NW1. Speakers: Ian Donovan, Gerry Downing. Organised by Socialist Fight: <http://socialistfight.com>.

Support Palestinian musicians

Sunday February 14, 6pm: Fundraiser, Saint Paul’s Church, West Street, Brighton BN1. Help pay for young Palestinian musicians to attend the Brighton Fringe. Organised by Brighton Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.brightonpalestinecampaign.org.

Rage against war

Saturday February 20, 12 noon: Rally, outside Leeds Art Gallery, the Headrow, Leeds LS1. Organised by Leeds Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/LeedsCoalitionAgainsttheWar/timeline.

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>.

Sink Trident renewal

Tuesday February 23, 7.30pm: Public meeting. Stantonbury theatre, Milton Keynes MK14. Organised by Milton Keynes Stop the War Coalition: <http://mkstopwar.org.uk>.

Own and control the future

Tuesday, February 23, 7.30pm: Meeting, Art House Cafe, 178 Above Bar Street, Southampton SO14. Talk: ‘The cooperative movement, its roots in radical politics and role today’, with Nathan Brown of Cooperantics. Free entry. Organised by Dangerous Ideas Southampton: www.dangerousideassouthampton.org.uk/blog.

Living without Trident

Wednesday February 24, 7.30pm: Meeting, Voodoo Cafe, 84 Skinnergate, Darlington DL3. Speaker: Chris Nineham. Organised by Momentum Darlington: <http://peoplesmomentum.com>.

Who is watching you?

Friday February 26, 7pm start: Public meeting, Chats Palace, 42-44 Brooksby’s Walk, London E9. No to state infiltration of protest groups. Speakers include John McDonnell. Organised by Undercover Research Group: <http://undercoverresearch.net>.

Revolutionary or dreamer?

Saturday February 27, 1pm: Public meeting, Red Shed, Vicarage Street, Wakefield. The life of William Morris. Organised by Wakefield Socialist History Group: www.theredshed.org.uk/SocialHist.html.

Organise the unorganised

Saturday March 5, 10am start: Yorkshire conference of National Shop Stewards Network, Ebor Court, Skinner Street, Leeds LS1. Organised by Yorkshire Shop Stewards Network: www.facebook.com/Yorkshire-Shop-Stewards-Network-156443814473411.

Imperialism, war and the Middle East

Saturday March 5, 10.30am: Public meeting, Institute room, Liverpool Quaker Meeting House, 22 School Lane, Liverpool L1. Speaker: Yassamine Mather. Organised by local socialists: study4socialism@gmail.com

Kill the housing bill

Sunday March 13, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble Lincoln’s Inn, Newman’s Row, London WC2. Organised by Kill the Housing Bill: <https://killthehousingbill.wordpress.com>.

Resistance to war

Friday March 18 to Sunday March 20, 10am to 5pm: International conference, Rose Bowl, Portland Crescent, Leeds LS1. Expressions of resistance during World War I. Organised by Gateways to the First World War: www.gatewaysfww.org.uk.

CPGB wills

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

MOMENTUM

Fight for political clarity

Jim Grant of Labour Party Marxists surveys the left response to Momentum's founding national committee meeting

Akira Kurosawa's classic film *Rashōmon* is based around the narrative conceit of a series of self-interested characters giving their partial accounts of the same event - a procedure borrowed by many subsequent works in all narrative media.

It seems also to have been borrowed, ingeniously, by Momentum: its inaugural national committee this weekend was undoubtedly an important moment, but the precise nature of its significance is something nobody can seem to agree on.

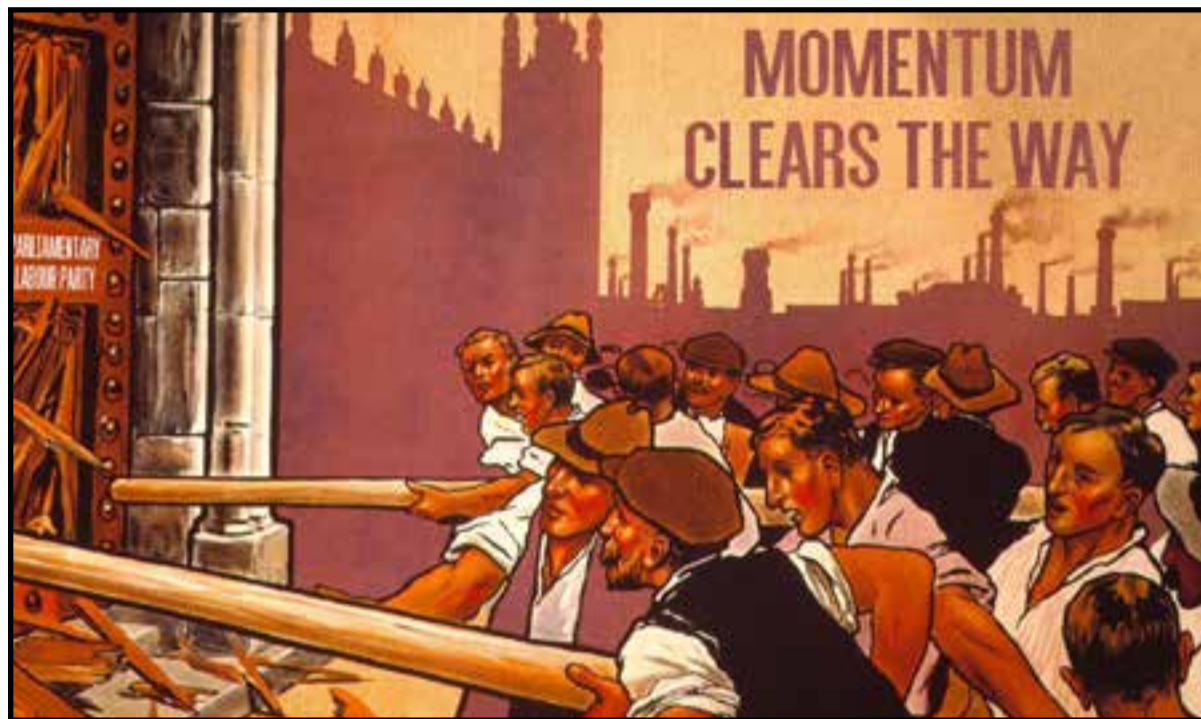
So, to the good news: proposals to ban leftwing literature from Momentum meetings were resoundingly defeated. That the impulse was there at all is, alas, hardly surprising - there is nothing a shiny new movement likes less than the reality of the haggard old Trots its meetings will attract, but it was still silly. Would Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament leaflets be banned? If not, then what about slightly more contentious campaigns (Cuba solidarity, say)? Even on its own terms, it would be a bureaucratic nightmare, and a ridiculous price to pay for the slender benefit of keeping *Socialist Worker* at bay. (There is, of course, the small matter of elementary democratic principle to bear in mind as well.)

That Momentum is - for now - relatively open to the participation of avowed Marxists can be gauged from the fact that its steering committee (which will take care of things in between NC meetings) included a certain Jill Mountford of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. Any regular reader of this paper will know that our criticisms of the AWL are legion; but, given that Momentum is screamed at in every paper for basically being the Militant Tendency with better social media nous, comrade Mountford's election is a good omen for left participants in Momentum more generally. They are not yet buckling on this one. Good.

The most contentious issue, however, is related to Momentum's membership rules. On the table were three options: Momentum is only open to Labour members; Momentum members must have Labour Party cards, but a separate category of supporters would have voting rights on all matters not directly connected to internal Labour politics; and finally, that Momentum was open to Labour members, affiliated supporters (such as members of affiliated unions) and those who support the "aims and values" of the Labour Party, provided they do not support any party other than Labour.

The third option was chosen by a decent majority vote, and its vagueness is probably responsible for most of the leftwing confusion in the period since the meeting. We have argued repeatedly that Momentum should orient itself very firmly in the direction of the Labour Party, and aspects of the agreed wording fudge the issue somewhat. Talk of 'aims and values' is plainly lifted directly from the wording of the Labour Party's 'registered supporter' category, which proved under the pressure of Jeremy Corbyn's insurgent leadership bid to be somewhat elastic, with many of those who had left Labour for the Greens and suchlike excluded on the basis of ancient Twitter postings.

In context, the Momentum agreement is pointing in the opposite



Momentum can be used as a socialist battering ram

direction: it is, after all, the most elastic of the options available. Momentum members will merely have to employ the appropriate due diligence of not openly supporting opposing candidates under their own names. Yet it is still not nearly as elastic as some would like. Again - good. Momentum has chosen not to be yet another self-perpetuating campaigning mechanism along the lines of the People's Assembly, Stop the War and sundry Trot fronts past and present. It is an (admittedly unofficial) organisation of the Labour Party, and all who sign up will at least have to stand in some proximity to the larger body.

Dogma

So, unsurprisingly, opinions divide. Many are pretty upbeat about the whole thing: "I believe the lobbying and pressure from grassroots Momentum branches won the day at the new NC on Saturday," chirruped a triumphant Stuart King, formerly of the International Socialists, Workers Power, Permanent Revolution and the Anti-Capitalist Initiative (and possibly still a member of Left Unity, but who knows?), on Facebook.

The AWL's Ed Whitby, who was present, used his own blog to accentuate the positive. "People should join the Labour Party, and it is right that Momentum will strongly encourage this; but there are still many people coming to the organisation who for whatever reason haven't joined yet. We need to encourage and persuade them, not throw up an unnecessary barrier."¹ (The AWL, of course, has a longer track record of conducting Labour work, so the result is probably easier to swallow for its members.)

Many Left Unity members are ... less enthusiastic. It is hardly surprising: as its membership shrivels, LU is more and more dominated by the 'carry on as before' tendency; those for whom the desire to stand candidates in their particular locality automatically supersedes any attention to the goings-on in wider national politics; those for whom the narrow horizon of politics is fitting in as much low-level do-goodery into a given week as possible. No doubt LU will continue to ignore the great shifts happening all around it, in favour of trying to turn out what remains of its membership on whatever

demonstration is looming.

The *ne plus ultra* of this political approach is, as ever, the Socialist Workers Party. A headline in this week's *Socialist Worker* asks: "Is Jeremy Corbyn supporters group Momentum cutting off its grassroots?"² Beyond being a great exemplar of Betteridge's law (which states that any headline which takes the form of a question can be safely answered with 'no'), it differs very little from any of SWP's recent ruminations on the topic.

"Momentum's national committee rightly agreed to support the CND demonstration against Trident nuclear missiles in London on Saturday February 27," writes the article's author, Nick Clark. "And it also committed to build for the People's Assembly national demo in London on April 16. But the committee's agenda emphasised a focus on building the Labour Party." For shame!

Comrade Clark's bizarre conclusion deserves to be cited in full:

Such a strategy risks allowing the groundswell of support that grew around Corbyn's campaign to melt away. Corbyn's strength came from the hundreds of thousands of people who voted for him because they wanted an alternative to austerity, racism and war. Sustaining that will mean building a broad-based movement.

Might we naively suggest that people voted for Corbyn because they, er, wanted him to be the leader of the Labour Party? Does the SWP really expect people to take no further interest in the matter now that he is Labour leader, and - worse - actually think that is a good thing?

We will not find out from comrade Clark, who refrains from anything so vulgar as justifying the claims he repeats mindlessly, like a penitent monk. For that, we turn to Mark L Thomas, writing at greater length in the latest *International Socialism*, the SWP's quarterly journal:

The key to social change remains through collective struggle from below. Every advance in the struggle creates a greater self-confidence among layers of workers, so weakening the hold of rightwing ideas. This in turn

is Corbyn's best defence of his position against the Labour right ... But if the mass of Corbyn's supporters are simply drawn into bitter internal battles over Labour policy and candidate selections, in practice their focus will not be mobilising in workplaces and working class communities, but on arguing with the right wing ... Paradoxically, this can weaken, not strengthen, Corbyn's position.³

Things are, alas, little better here - we have proof only of the bankruptcy of the SWP's hyper-activist tunnel vision. For decades, we have been told with increasing desperation that every passing strike or demonstration is 'really important' and the 'start of the fightback'. Well, comrades, the fightback has come - and you are reduced basically to complaining that it was not the fightback you had in mind. Would a little rethinking be too much to ask?

This sort of dogma is, as we have already seen, hardly limited to the SWP, which merely presents it in its purest and thereby most ridiculous form. Indeed, even organisations that take the Labour question more seriously as part of their operative activity slip into this paradigm all too easily. Thus we find the aforementioned Jill Mountford and Ed Whitby, along with AWL stalwart Sacha Ismail, in last week's *Solidarity*:

It would be false [sic] at this stage to push for anything like a clear, sharp statement of socialist aims, but we need to go beyond Lib Dem-style platitudes and commit to goals for changing the labour movement and developing workers' political representation. Momentum also needs a clear orientation to supporting workers' and social movement struggles, and taking them into the Labour Party.⁴

It is, we note, never the right time to push for a "clear statement of socialist aims"; nor are we certain that "supporting workers' and social movement struggles" goes beyond the platitudinous. Mountford wants Momentum to be 'socialist' in some sense, still: just not clearly or sharply so. So it is somewhat odd to find comrade Whitby ambivalent on this

point in his later blog post: "The basic statement of aims was amended to refer more to socialism and the working class [but] it is still, in my view, far from adequate." It is a difficult thing, indeed, to satisfy precisely the AWL's demand for blurry, blunt socialism!

Focus on Labour

Still, we must agree with comrade Whitby that the Momentum decisions represent movement in the right direction. And there is a small nugget of truth even in the SWP's Nick Clark, when he complains of "a focus on building the Labour Party". However, it is clear that, left to its own devices, Momentum has a very clear sense of what building the Labour Party means, and that is to support Jeremy. At all costs, Labour must be returned to government in 2020, with the honourable member for Islington North at the helm.

So, although Clark's crypto-Bakuninist ravings and the Corbynist electoralism of the Momentum mainstream may seem to be directly and diametrically opposed, they have in common one thing: the need to suppress political clarity. The object of working class struggle is the conquest of political power, and in fact the 'instinctive' class vote for Labour - as with other humdrum matters of official labour movement politics - is a distorted reflection of that reality. The existence of the Labour Party can be put down, ultimately, to the fact that even the infamously bureaucratic British trade unions of the 19th century knew that the workers' movement needed an effective 'political wing' to make anything stick.

Yet there is a vast gulf between what the extant forces of the Labour left consider to be 'taking power' and what is actually required to break the grasp of the ruling class on society. For one thing, capital is organised internationally, as the recent Google tax scandals have neatly illustrated; 'getting the Tories out' and putting in a tax-and-spend budget does not change that by itself. Organising internationally, however, renders *unavoidable* the necessity to think at a very high level about the sort of world we want to create. More immediately, the very structures of the state are organised in ways favourable to capital and hostile to labour (*in extremis*, we have had off-the-record coup talk about Corbyn from army chiefs already). Again, a laundry list of worthy reformist policies gathered into a Labour manifesto is not adequate as a response.

In short, rigorous and effective political discussion is not some self-indulgent distraction from the 'real work' - be that getting a Labour government or nudging up attendance figures at some demonstration. The great promise of Momentum is that it provides an opportunity to fight for political clarity among greater numbers of people and, by focusing on the Labour Party - an organisation that, for better or worse, actually matters - the chance to make that clarity a practical force in society at large ●

Notes

1. <https://edunionblog.wordpress.com/2016/02/09/steps-forward-for-momentum-report-of-first-momentum-national-committee-6-february-2016>.
2. *Socialist Worker* February 9 2016.
3. 'A house divided: Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party' *International Socialism* No149, winter 2015.
4. *Solidarity* February 3 2016.

EUROPE

Selling a pig in a poke

Communists cannot support either a 'remain' or a 'leave' vote, writes Eddie Ford

Keen to get the referendum out of the way as early as possible, David Cameron is still looking for a piece of paper that he can wave at his discontented backbenchers and the rightwing press. He claims to have "ruled nothing out", but it is almost inconceivable that he will do anything else but lead the campaign to stay in the European Union - which is the agenda of big business, at the end of the day. The question proposed by the Electoral Commission and accepted by Downing Street will most likely be: "Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?"¹

Of course, as this paper has pointed out before, when Cameron first mooted the idea of a "simple" in/out referendum on EU membership, just about the last thing in the world he thought he would be doing in 2016 was actually ... holding a referendum. Like everyone else, the CPGB included, Cameron was expecting an indecisive general election result: ie, some sort of hung parliament leaving him still in coalition with the Liberal Democrats. Naturally, there was no chance that the Lib Dems would countenance a referendum - enabling the prime minister to apologetically shrug his shoulders and blame parliamentary arithmetic (or the electorate).

Somewhat disastrously though, he is now stuck with the damned thing - forced to travel to various European capitals to build support for a "new settlement", recent ports of call being Warsaw and Copenhagen. Ideally he wants to secure some sort of deal by the next EU summit that begins on February 18, but says he is prepared to take longer in order to get the "substance" right. Try not to laugh.

If an agreement is reached by this point, which essentially means convincing central and eastern European member-states that limiting welfare payments to EU migrants will not be discriminatory against their own citizens, various press reports tell us that the cabinet is expected to meet on February 22 or even earlier to formally endorse the government's position prior to Cameron naming the date of the referendum - June 23 being frequently mentioned.

If you are a betting person, it would be fairly sensible to put your money on a 'remain' vote. However, upsets do happen. After all, who on earth would have thought that Jeremy Corbyn would make it on to the leadership ballot - or that Bernie Sanders would resoundingly beat Hillary Clinton in the New Hampshire primary? Putting it mildly, rocky times might lie ahead for the prime minister.

Substantial?

In this context of uncertainty, it is worth noting that the *Financial Times* recently carried out a survey of the leading 100 companies on the stock exchange, and presented the results under the headline, "Top UK businesses unprepared for Brexit" (February 5). We discover that only four (Easyjet, Persimmon, GKN and Standard Life) had drawn up any contingency plans for a UK withdrawal. One in 10 has not yet taken a position and three companies admitted they had not even discussed the issue at board level. While no FTSE100 company said it wanted Britain to leave the EU, only 18 were prepared unequivocally to state they supported continued EU membership.

This seeming complacency about the referendum is mainly because the companies think that Brexit will



David Cameron and Donald Tusk: carefully choreographed

never happen. However, in the view of Ian Peters, chief executive of the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors, it was "dangerous" to ignore the potential impact of a Brexit - all companies would be affected to a "greater or lesser degree". One thing you can say for sure is that business does not like uncertainty - and it is hard to imagine how Brexit would not deliver a big blow to the confidence of the City and investors in general. Clearly, continued EU membership is in the interests of most of the big companies - if not the smaller ones as well.

Therefore, it is not surprising that Cameron has become a bit frustrated that big business has not yet put its money where its mouth is and unambiguously come out in support of the 'remain' campaign. Last month, he urged business leaders to start "speaking out" for Britain's membership of the EU. Having said that, Downing Street has sent mixed messages about the role it wants businesses to play in the run-up to the referendum - Cameron originally discouraged them from speaking out on the topic, but now has totally reversed his stance.

As for the prospective deal itself, assuming everything does not go belly-up - which seems very unlikely - it has so far met with a hostile reception from the reactionary press and a sizable chunk of the Tory Party. Which is only to be expected, seeing as Cameron is trying to sell a pig in a poke. If anything, committed Eurosceptics have just been further enraged by the paltry nature of the 'concessions' won by him in his pseudo-negotiations with fellow EU leaders - they are utterly unconvinced, quite rightly, by the prime minister's contention that the draft deal will deliver "substantial change".

The much touted "emergency brake"² - a mechanism whereby a member-state can suspend or curtail certain in-work benefits if it gets collective approval by the other members - does not really amount to much at all. If you are John Redwood or Bernard Jenkin, it is a "sick joke"

and an "insult" to the UK parliament - sentiments shared by many others in the Tory Party, the UK Independence Party and further afield. For instance, Cameron originally demanded that people coming to Britain from the EU should be barred from claiming in-work benefits or social housing for four years - and also be unable to claim child benefit in the UK and then send it back to families in other EU states. But the February 2 draft proposals (or counter-proposals) from Donald Tusk, president of the European Council, talk instead about a "graduated" limitation, to "take account of the growing connection of the worker with the labour market of the host member state" (after being agreed by the EC, of course).

On child benefit, the Tusk plan would not "end the practice of sending child benefit overseas" - just limit the amount that is paid out. Then there is also the question of how long the UK would be allowed to apply its "emergency brake": but who exactly would judge whether an "emergency" still existed or not? Who gets to apply or release the brake? Then what would happen to migration when it was released? Under the draft proposals, the access to benefits would gradually increase. Additionally, EU migrant workers in the UK who lose their job "through no fault of their own" are entitled to the same benefits as UK citizens - including jobseekers allowance and housing benefit, for six months. Under the current draft plans, it is difficult to see what seriously acts as a disincentive to come to the UK.

As for the broader issue of national sovereignty, Cameron wanted an end to Britain's obligation to work towards an "ever closer union" - one of the founding principles of the EU - in a "formal, legally binding and irreversible way", and a strengthening of the EU's commitments to subsidiarity (the idea that EU decisions should only be taken at an EU level where necessary). But Cameron ended up with the so-called "red card" system, allowing a group of countries making up more than 55% of votes on the

council to veto EU legislation. Once again, it is arguable whether the "red card" mechanism will make much or any difference in practice.

Not impressed by Cameron's 'renegotiation' tactics, the Scottish National Party's Alex Salmond lambasted the prime minister for his "sham negotiation and this sham of a campaign" - especially the suggestion that Brexit could lead to migrant camps like the "jungle" in Calais being set up inside the UK: an example of what Cameron's Eurosceptic critics dub "project fear".³ We on the other hand, call it playing the chauvinist card - utterly foul, but very David Cameron. Using slightly more temperate language, former EC president José Manuel Barroso described the 'emergency brake' as a "creative compromise" that would not actually reduce immigration. He told BBC's *Newsnight* that levels of immigration would be dependent on "future labour market conditions" and that people who want to go to Britain, if their "basic rights" are ensured, will still be "willing to go, but, of course, with slightly different conditions".⁴

Barroso is right: the idea that workers will give up going to Britain because they might not get any housing benefit or working tax credits for a certain number of years is risible. They will continue to come, and who can blame them? Communists support the right of workers to live and work in any country they want.

Leaving

Meanwhile, the internal rivalries and splits within the 'leave' campaigns provide us with a certain amount of amusement - most notably the bust-up that Labour Leave has had with Vote Leave, an umbrella group which includes business leaders, Tory MPs and Ukip's only MP, Douglas Carswell.

Kate Hoey, the obnoxious pro-fox hunting MP and Labour Leave co-chair, informed *The Sunday Telegraph* she did not want to be associated with VL because it was "not actually doing anything at the grassroots", but rather "appointing all these people with grand titles" - a reference, of course, to the chair of VL and climate-change sceptic, Lord Nigel Lawson. Hoey is now backing Grassroots Out⁵, which was officially launched on January 23 by Tory MPs Peter Bone and Tom Pursglove as a response to the constant squabbling between VL and 'Leave.EU' - the latter regarded by many, accurately or not, as a "Ukip front". In turn, Nigel Farage - speaking on his regular LBC radio phone-in - said he had tried to get VL and Leave.EU to merge, but called VL a "Tory front" which "refuses to work with anybody", and announced that Ukip was now officially behind Grassroots Out. As for Leave.EU, it has agreed to merge into GO - both organisations having the financial backing of Arron Banks, an insurance magnate who in October 2014 donated £1 million to Ukip.

Interestingly, Carswell has openly discussed the "difference of strategy" between VL and Leave.EU. The latter, according to him, wants to "focus more on identity and immigration" - whilst the former wants an "optimistic, upbeat, internationalist message": a 'progressive' Brexit, if you like. Yes, immigration was "incredibly important", but it was also essential to campaign on economic matters and spending priorities - Carswell emphasised the crucial need

to appeal to the 87% of people who did not vote Ukip at the last general election. Rather than concentrating on the Ukip or Eurosceptic hard core, he argues, VL should reach out to the "undecideds" who will sway the vote one way or another.

The Electoral Commission has the anti-democratic task of designating the 'official' leave and remain campaigns - which will get access to £600,000 in public funds, TV broadcasts and free mailshots. Both VL and GO are claiming that they are the most deserving, of course.

What is genuinely surprising, however, is that the Labour leadership has come out with a 'remain' position. Listening to Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell speak at various platforms over the years, you never would have guessed that they would adopt this position on the EU. Obviously, you would expect it from the Blairites and right wing of the party - they have always had this stance. On the other hand, Corbyn in particular has regularly written for the left-nationalist *Morning Star* - you would have expected them to come out with some version of the 'socialist leave' line.

But what is disturbing are those sections of the left that are dancing on a sixpence when it comes to the EU and the coming referendum. Thus a mere two years ago the Labour Representation Committee voted down its previous position on the EU - which was for staying in, fighting for a "socialist Europe", etc. The LRC rejected this on the grounds that a 'discussion' was now needed (ie, LRC leaders were toying with the idea of adopting a 'socialist leave' position). It is now more than likely that the LRC will forget all about that decision and simply follow Corbyn - and the Parliamentary Labour Party. Remember, there were threats from the likes of Lord Charlie Falconer when Corbyn first put together his shadow cabinet that they would walk if he came out with a 'leave' position - that is, they were under the same impression as all the rest of us.

Whilst the new stance of Corbyn and McDonnell is a definite improvement over the 'left Ukipism' peddled by the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, or Trade Unionists Against the EU (formerly No2EU)⁶, it is still the case that a vote for continued EU membership is essentially a vote for the status quo, Fortress Europe and ultimately David Cameron himself - the man despicably trying to scare us with images of the Calais "jungle". This can in no way promote the interests of proletarian internationalism.

Communists support neither of the alternatives that will be on offer in the referendum: on the one hand, an endorsement of the current undemocratic EU of the bankers or, on the other, a nationalist withdrawal into British isolationism. That is why the CPGB will call for an active boycott ●

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Notes

1. www.electoralcommission.org.uk/find-information-by-subject/elections-and-referendums/upcoming-elections-and-referendums/eu-referendum/eu-referendum-question-assessment.
2. Not to be confused with the same term applied to a quite separate proposal to give countries outside the euro zone an 'emergency power' to stop countries within it imposing unwelcome laws on them.
3. www.spectator.co.uk/2016/01/scary-monsters-david-cameron-will-invoke-the-threat-of-jihadis-russia-and-crime-to-win-an-eu-invite.
4. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-35538074.
5. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grassroots_Out.
6. www.tuaeuc.org.

IDEAS



Honoré Daumier: 'Thirty-five heads of expression'

The problem of unequal abilities

Should socialists aim to offer incentives to the 'gifted and talented'? Marc Mulholland looks at how the question has been dealt with historically

Last summer it was reported that FTSE 100 chief executives earn on average 183 times more than a full-time worker.¹ The Confederation of British Industry defended this, with a certain amount of embarrassment, as being justified by the CEOs' "exceptional performance". This ideology of meritocracy is all-pervasive, however. It fits in with the contention that class society does not hold back the gifted and talented. Indeed, 'gifted and talented' is the name given to an access scheme encouraging state school kids to apply to Oxford University.

There cannot be a socialist in the land who has not been confronted by somebody pointing out that people are not in fact equal in their abilities, and therefore cannot be expected to be rewarded equally. This is an old argument - 'distributional justice' - going back to Aristotle. It has, however, particular resonance in considering capitalism.

There are a number of

ideological defences for capitalism, some more convincing than others. First, it has been unprecedentedly productive and sustains a global population unimaginable before the 19th century. Secondly, it is only in the capitalist era that liberal democracy has taken root over large territories and without legal slavery or serfdom. A particularly important ideological justification, however, is one of a certain form of justice. While at a basic level the intrinsic humanity of everyone is recognised - equality before the law - it seems intuitively to be only right that unequal attributes result in an equal reward. Individual effort and talent *should* lead to higher incomes and increased authority. But, when analysed, the argument for inequality from justice is no slam-dunk, as John Stuart Mill pointed out in the mid-19th century:

In a cooperative industrial association [by which he

means both capitalism and any alternative], is it just or not that talent or skill should give a title to superior remuneration? On the negative side of the question it is argued that whoever does the best he can deserves equally well, and ought not in justice to be put in a position of inferiority for no fault of his own; that superior abilities have already advantages more than enough ... On the contrary side it is contended, that society receives more from the efficient labourer; that, his services being more useful, society owes him a larger return for them ...

Who shall decide between these appeals to conflicting principles of justice? Justice has in this case two sides to it, which it is impossible to bring into harmony ... Each, from his own point of view, is unanswerable; and any choice between them, on grounds of justice, must be perfectly arbitrary. Social utility

alone can decide the preference.²

Bourgeois ideology, nonetheless, has always emphasised the justice of talent and effort being rewarded. In pre-capitalist society, in contrast, a just order was one in which an individual remained in the class to which he or she was born. Talent and ability were considered happenstance characteristics - unpredictable, unreliable over a lifetime and difficult to judge. More reliable were settled experience and expectations. From hereditary monarchy to the artisan guild, in which son follows father, training and habituation were considered to be far more predictable and functional than any innate talent.

Max Weber argued in his famous book on *The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (1904-05) that puritanism revolutionised this ideology. Each man had a *Beruf* or 'calling', a particular talent, and if he was favoured by god he would succeed at his calling. As god may

not be bargained with, there is nothing man can do to earn salvation. Salvation is a free gift bestowed by god - capriciously, it would seem. The only evidence that one might enjoy god's favour was success in this life and so, Weber argued, the puritan would work frantically hard at his calling, refuse any material satisfaction from it and reinvest all profits. All of this as a kind of psychological crutch - the comfort that one's success was providential and a sign of salvation.

Weber himself referred to this rather curious puritan psychology as the heroic age of capitalism, and one that was self-destructive. As puritans accumulated wealth, they tended to fall into temptation and the snare of this-worldly comfort and ease. Luckily, mature, 'unheroic' capitalism is characterised by an external market dynamic rather than an internal psychology - the iron cage of capitalist rationality. This "tends to protect those willing to work against

the class morality of the proletariat and the anti-authoritarian trade union".³

Whatever the intrinsic merits of Weber's theory - and this has not been satisfactorily proved or disproved, and perhaps is incapable of such - it is certainly the case that by the French Revolution religious interpretations of 'calling' had fallen out of favour. The bourgeois ideology predominant now was one of *arrière ouverte aux talents* or 'career open to talents', the thread running through and holding together the French revolutionary *Declaration of the rights of man and citizen*.

Gracchus Babeuf, the proto-communist on the extreme left of the French Revolution, rejected this core bourgeois principle. If those who have greater ability and expend more effort claim a greater share of the means of life, they are still stealing from the community. They are anti-social:

Even someone who could prove that he is capable, by the individual exertion of his own natural strength, of doing the work of four men, and so lay claim to the recompense of four, would be no less a conspirator against society, because he would be upsetting the equilibrium of things by this alone, and would thus be destroying the precious principle of equality. Wisdom imperiously demands of all the members of the association that they suppress such a man, that they pursue him as a scourge of society, that they at least reduce him to a state whereby he can do the work of only one man, so that he will be able to demand the recompense of only one man.⁴

Socialist critique

Babeuf and his 'conspiracy of equals' was destroyed by the guillotine, and the socialist critique really began with Robert Owen at the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815.

Owen was responding to a much remarked upon malaise: the demoralisation and brutalisation of the industrial worker, particularly in the factory. When he took over the new Lanark textile plant in Scotland, he was horrified by the degradation of the workers he found there. His vision was paternalistic: how were these wretches to be saved? Human personality, he was convinced, was ultimately plastic and could be improved by a generous-minded managerial elite. One of Owen's followers who implicitly rejected this elitism was the Irish intellectual, William Thompson. Thompson overtly attacked the "aristocracy of talent", which he saw as being in contradiction to his utilitarian ideals of the greatest happiness of the greatest number.⁵ His version of Owenism was much more about the self-determination of the worker.

Early socialists in France were also disconcerted by the degradation of the worker they saw in Britain and incipiently in their own country. Charles Fourier argued that human capacities should not be shaped to the needs of production, but rather that production should be moulded around human capacities. In sufficient numbers, in organisations of production he called phalansteries, natural human attributes could be found that covered all the needs of production. His most famous example was the clearing away of sewerage, which he believed was a task children would enjoy, as they naturally like playing in the dirt. Nonetheless, Fourier did see a role for rewarding talent, at any rate in the first stage of the new society. His phalansteries' profits would be distributed between labour, capital, and 'talent' in a

proportion of 5:4:3.

Saint Simon urged the organisation of society around those he called *les industriels*, by which he meant both workers and managers. He was scornful of the aristocracy and the idle share-owners, who contributed nothing to production. Saint Simon certainly believed in natural talent and ability - he wanted an elite to run society, and thought this elite was most likely to be found amongst the bankers. It was after his death that the followers of Saint Simon - particularly Émile Barrault and Barthélemy Prosper Enfantin - more clearly defined his doctrine in socialist terms. They argued that, while the French Revolution had abolished legal hereditary privilege, a new aristocracy of wealth had emerged. Those who owned capital were able to live off it without exercising their abilities. On the other hand, no matter how talented or hard-working a proletarian might be, he was unable to pull himself out of the mire. It was the function of the state to take over inherited wealth, and organise investment so that ability and talent would be rewarded.

Back in Britain in the 1820s, there was developing a socialist economics, which insisted that value derived only from labour. This served as a moral claim. Thomas Hodgskin was perhaps the first to emphasise not the degradation of the worker under industrialisation, but their acquisition of skills and knowledge. This, he thought, would allow the wage-earner to escape from capitalists by setting themselves up as small producers exchanging one with another. Hodgskin saw no role for the state, and indeed in the future he was to be a steady writer for *The Economist*. John Gray, in contrast, believed that there was no going back to tiny, self-sufficient units of production. However, while he hoped to see the potential for worker self-determination to develop in an integrated commercial society, he believed that this could only apply to the rural and artisanal trades. Wage-labourers in industry, subordinated to the machine and manager, were incapable of developing refinement, individual talent and autonomy.⁶

Owenism combined with this Ricardian socialism and, most importantly, with the worker movement in the late 1820s and early 1830s. An Irish trade unionist active in the north of England, John Doherty, was a key figure in all of this. It took shape in the great cooperativist movement of the early 1830s, which saw trade unions as the building blocks of a future cooperative society. In 1834, the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union was organised, and within two months it had a membership of about half a million. Trade unionism would train the workers in politics and association. It would make the workers ready for universal suffrage. It is significant that the greatest success of cooperative socialism was amongst the builders, who formed a national guild to undertake building work without capitalists. These were workers who already were undertaking contracts and, unlike factory operatives, they were not detail workers in a complex system of production, about which they knew little. The GNCTU quickly collapsed after it overextended itself, and the government applied repression (most famously by deporting the Tolpuddle martyrs).

Chartism, which emerged in the late 1830s, was clearly a class-conscious movement, but it did not directly assault the capitalist system. Feargus O'Connor, its most popular leader, argued for workers to set up as small farmers, which would restore their morale, and decrease pressure on the wage-labour market. Marx and

Engels associated themselves with the left wing of the Chartist movement.

In France, Louis Blanc was influentially arguing for the "organisation of labour", by which he meant national workshops financed in the first instance by the state, but thereafter becoming self-running. This was necessary to save wage-labourers from their own degradation. As he said, "We want a government that intervenes in industry, because, in the regime of inequality within which we are still vegetating, there are weak persons who need a social force to protect them."⁷ Eventually, however, the workers would become capable of independence. Victor Considérant, a follower of Fourier, explicitly warned that society was turning into a neo-feudalism, in which the elites dominated through hereditary wealth. The ability of the rich bourgeoisie to develop their skills and contacts gave the illusion that talent determined a person's life chances. "Now a person's status in the economic, social and political orders is based only on *money, education or connections*. Education and connections presuppose leisure or wealth."⁸ It was necessary to allow the proletarian equal capacity to develop his talents. Under collective production, both capital and talent would be rewarded proportionate to their contribution. The national workshops and the right to work were the driving inspirations behind social republicanism in the 1848 revolution.

German socialism was a rather more esoteric and intellectual affair. A rare contrast to this was Wilhelm Weitling in the late 1830s and 1840s. He was most famous, perhaps, for arguing that revolution could only come from below, and that the criminal classes in particular were a revolutionary resource. The technical inventions of the British industrial revolution, he insisted, derived not from abstract philosophers, but ordinary working men. But knowledge and creative genius can only ever be the possession of a minority, and this ruled out government by universal suffrage: "The majority is not enlightened enough to judge understanding and talent."⁹

Marx and Engels

Weitling had considerable influence on German artisan circles, towards which Marx and Engels gravitated. Engels published his *Condition of the working class in England* in 1845, the most sophisticated survey of the material conditions of the working class yet undertaken by a socialist. He agreed with others that industrialisation had created a drunken, rather degenerate industrial workforce. However, it was one that realised its condition could only be improved through solidarity and the elimination of competition, first within the working class itself and ultimately, Engels believed, with the elimination of competition from the economy.

For Engels, the only counterweight to proletarian demoralisation was class anger. Workers largely rejected bourgeois morality and, being "treated as brutes", they "actually become such". They only "maintain the consciousness of manhood ... by cherishing the most glowing hatred, the most unbroken inward rebellion against the bourgeoisie in power":

They are men so long only as they burn with wrath against the reigning class. They become brutes the moment they bend in patience under the yoke, and merely strive to make life endurable while abandoning the effort to break the yoke.¹⁰

Engels anticipated a cataclysmic

class war, and at any rate in 1845 saw the role of conscious communists as interceding to limit the bloodiness of the cataclysm.

Marx believed something similar. Only political organisation could bring morality to an otherwise degenerate proletariat. It was, for him, however, the only truly social revolutionary class. He opposed his ideas to those of Proudhon, who was rather scornful of the wage-earner as lacking that capacity for independence characteristic of the peasant farmer or the craftsman in his workshop. As large-scale production could not be avoided entirely, Proudhon saw "workers' companies" as an unhappy necessity. In these, payment would "be in proportion to the nature of the function, the importance of a person's talent and the extent of his responsibility".¹¹

For Marx, such large-scale production was increasingly basic to the economy, and could not be considered an unhappy exception. He went out of his way to dismiss the importance of capitalist talent or exertion. He denied that marketing, for example, played any role in the determination of value, though he could not entirely deny that it helped to realise value - a distinction, it seems to me, without a real difference. By the time Marx came to write *Capital* in the 1860s he was rather less conflicted about the question of talent. Increasingly, capitalist enterprises were joint stock, and the ownership of capital meant the ownership of shares rather than any very direct management of the enterprise.

It also seemed to him obvious now - and, to be fair, Engels had already intimated this in the mid-1840s - that individual talent was not really important at the macroeconomic level. The market mechanism, by which profits equalised across sectors, meant that any innovation born of individual genius was quickly distributed as a free gift to numerous indifferently talented capitalists. Even management was increasingly a profession hired by the capitalist for wages. Productive technique and technology - what Marx called science - was effectively socialised, no longer coming from individual capitalists, but from savants outside production as such, and generalised by impersonal market mechanisms. Capitalist production constantly innovated under pressure of these impersonal mechanisms. While the work process was complex, the individual contributions of workers were rendered increasingly simple and malleable, able to be changed at short notice.

This produced what Marx called the "collective worker", meaning social production capable of much more than its individual parts. It also produced, at the individual level, the "polytechnic worker" - no longer with a set of specific skills, but with a general aptitude for turning her hand to whatever permutation came along in the work process. This was clearly a rather idealised view of capitalist production, which is far more reliant upon skill and craftsmanship than Marx implied. However, the development of the polytechnic worker was an accurate enough description of a long-term tendency. Today, for example, general desktop computing skills enable one to undertake a bewildering amount of specific jobs.

Also in the 1860s, Ferdinand Lassalle was promoting a union of the worker movement and science, as he called it, in Germany. In this context, science represented the superior theoretical knowledge of leaders such as himself: "Only when science and the workers, these opposite poles of society, become one, will they crush in their arms

of steel all obstacles to culture."¹² Lassalle argued that the minimalist idea of the state entertained by the bourgeoisie would be acceptable if

we were all equally strong, equally clever, equally educated and equally rich ... But, since we neither are nor can be thus equal, this ... leads in its consequences to deep immorality, for it leads to this: that the stronger, the cleverer and the richer fleece the weaker and pick their pockets. The moral idea of the state, according to the working class on the contrary, is this: that the unhindered and free activity of individual powers exercised by the individual is not sufficient, but that something must be added to this in a morally ordered community - namely, solidarity of interests, community and reciprocity in development.¹²

Rather similar to Louis Blanc, this was a view of the state as protecting the weak from the strong.

Marx was rather suspicious of such elitism in Lassalle, though he was also unwilling to break from the Lassallean workers' movement entirely. Marx had close allies in Germany in Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel, but he was not entirely happy with them either, believing them to be too close to bourgeois liberal politicians seeking to educate the workers, and lacking the proletarian base developed by Lassalle.

Both factions, however, came together under an agreed programme at Gotha in 1875. Marx wrote a critique of the Gotha programme - which combined nit-picking, which missed the wood for the trees, with important theoretical insight. Notably, he argued that proletarian class-consciousness was marked by the impress of bourgeois society. The proletariat, he suggested, instinctively agreed with what Marx called "bourgeois right". By this he meant the idea that greater effort should be rewarded with greater income. This would be the organising principle of a society in which the proletariat had been victorious. Only the fading away of class society as such would give rise to a society in which productive effort would be divorced from the distribution of resources, allowing each individual to realise themselves in a multifaceted manner.

Marx to a considerable extent still held to an immiseration thesis, in which wages were held down to their minimum. His theoretical rejection of the 'iron law of wages' and admission that subsistence is historically and socially conditioned, even when combined, did not entirely dispose of the notion. However, there is a certain tension in *Capital*, where a good deal of the book is in more substantial contradiction to the immiseration thesis. A major theme was its story of how the 10-hour working day was won in England:

... the principle had triumphed with its victory in those great branches of industry which form the most characteristic creation of the modern mode of production. Their wonderful development from 1850 to 1860, hand in hand with the physical and moral regeneration of the factory workers, was visible to the weakest eyes ... after the factory magnates had resigned themselves and become reconciled to the inevitable, the power of resistance of capital gradually weakened, whilst at the same time the power of attack of the working class grew ...¹³

In this sense, reforms were important, in so far as they contradicted the

IDEAS

political economy of capitalist society and, perhaps even more importantly, restored the morale and capabilities of the proletariat.

Anarchists and Fabians

Bakunin rejected the idea that an organised and self-improving proletariat provided the stalwarts of revolution. He wrote:

Marx speaks disdainfully of this lumpenproletariat ... but in them, and only in them - and not the bourgeois-minded strata of the working class - is crystallised the whole power and intelligence of the social revolution.¹⁴

Bakunin, however, saw the lumpenproletariat as a revolutionary force only in so far as it was destructive. For the positive work of the revolution, and the construction of a new society, it was necessary to rely upon the "intelligent and noble youths, who, though belonging by birth to the privileged classes, by their generous convictions and ardent sympathies embrace the cause of the people".¹⁵ And a new order would not be built on the naturally humane instincts of the masses, but constructed by an ardent minority. If the prior destruction was sufficiently apocalyptic, and included in its sweep the organised labour movement and radical intelligentsia, no new exploiting strata would emerge.

The Bakunin ideology saw increasing success in the First International, particularly in Latin countries. Partly for this reason, Marx effectively closed the international down. Worker and socialist movements developed on a national basis. Small in number, but theoretically significant was the Fabian Society from the early 1880s. It rejected Marxist economics, building its socialism instead on the newly ascendant Marginalism. There was already a widespread opinion that agricultural rent was unearned income. An owner of real estate could see his wealth multiply not through effort, but because the property he owned happened to benefit from, for example, industrial or urban development in the locality.

The Fabians extended the idea of rent as unearned income to profits. Anything beyond the wages of management and superintendents was purely a windfall from the ownership of capital - a windfall which should by rights accrue to society, which was entirely responsible for the productivity of capital. A species of this "economic rent" was the "rent of ability". Those with particular and rare skills - whether innate or, more likely, acquired through expensive education - could charge a rent for them, even though such skills were only productive within the context of the collective resources of society at large. As one Fabian put it, "no man can pretend to claim the fruits of his own labour; for his whole ability and opportunity for working are plainly a vast inheritance and contribution, of which he is but a transient and accidental beneficiary and steward".¹⁶ In practice, Fabian socialism pressed the elites to recognise their moral responsibility to protect and improve the lot of the labouring masses. George Bernard Shaw, however, when he reflected on the first major Fabian publication 70 years later, claimed that he was, and always had been, in favour of equal pay for any job.

As mass socialist parties emerged - first in Germany, then in the 1890s in other countries - they disassociated themselves both from Bakuninite politics and Fabian scepticism about the capacities of the actually existing labour movement. They adopted a largely Marxist framework.

In most countries, the socialist parties were overwhelmingly

proletarian. This created, potentially, its own difficulties, as Engels wrote to August Bebel in 1891:

If we are to take over and operate the means of production, we need people who are technically trained, and plenty of them ... I would predict that in the next eight or 10 years we shall recruit enough young technicians, doctors, jurists and schoolmasters for the factories and large estates to be managed for the nation by party members. In which case our accession to power will take place quite naturally and will run a - relatively - smooth course.

If, on the other hand, we come to the helm prematurely and as a result of war, the technicians will be our principal opponents and will deceive and betray us at every turn; we should have to inaugurate a reign of terror against them and would lose out all the same.¹⁷

Karl Kautsky in his commentary on the Erfurt programme, *The class struggle*, argued that intellectual labour was becoming increasingly proletarianised: "The labour market of educated labour is today as overstocked as the market of manual labour." He did not prophesise, however, as to what this might mean for the socialist movement in the future: "Whether this development will result in a movement of educated people to join the battling proletariat in mass, and not, as hitherto, singly, is still uncertain."¹⁸

Émile Vandervelde argued that at the very least methodologies of the large-scale capitalist trust could be employed - "All that a trust can do to increase by a decentralised organisation, by profit-sharing, by prospects of advancement, the initiative and responsibility of its managers or by its employees, we have seen that the community could do equally well for its own."¹⁹ Vandervelde did hypothesise that under socialism a self-motivating and broadly altruistic labour force might well emerge, but he was not prepared to stake the efficacy of socialism on this possibility. There was, he insisted, space for managerialism.

The broadest reaction to this managerialism in the first decade and a half of the 20th century came from syndicalism, which conceived of trade unions as the building blocks of socialist society. Georges Sorel, was certainly aware that meritocracy was one of the strongest arguments against socialism: "With the energy of desperation, bourgeois democracy clings to the theory of ability and strives to utilise the people's superstitious respect for learning."²⁰ Himself both an engineer and a classicist by training (his first book was on the trial of Socrates), Sorel argued like Weiting that abstract knowledge was more or less useful and that practical knowledge in industry inhered with the manual and the skilled worker. He conceived of future production as a kind of interchange between machine worker and engineering manager. Drawing upon Aristotle, he envisaged the good society as one in which the individual's potential could be realised as they in turn managed and submitted to management.

Sorel was rather too eccentric to have much of a direct impact on mainstream socialist thinking, and anarcho-syndicalism as a movement was too atheoretical. However, the analogous ideas of 'guild socialism' in Britain did have a notable impact on socialist thinking. This was, as GDH Cole put it, a proposal in which the community would own the means of production, but unions would normally control them. The guilds would turn wage-workers into professionals:

In fact, they are to resemble in

their main characteristics the self-governing professions, the doctors and the lawyers, of the present. As the guilds will include everyone concerned in the industry, from general managers to labourers, they will be in essence guilds: ie, associations not of dependent, but of independent, producers.²¹

Cole admitted that unions were not yet ready to take charge, but he believed that they were capable of becoming so.

Karl Kautsky, in his 1923 study of the socialised economy, *The labour revolution*, wrote of guild socialism that "it is not too much to believe that this type of organisation has a great future, and will play a notable part in the organisation of socialist production".²² But it was only really applicable to handicraft trades, such as building, and could not play a predominant role.

Lenin

A famous discussion of the problem of talent in the socialist commonwealth was undertaken by Lenin in 1917 in his *The state and revolution*. Lenin had already argued in his 1916 pamphlet, *Imperialism: the highest stage of capitalism*, that the capitalist class had become entirely irrelevant to the organisation of production. They simply clip coupons and act as rentiers on their stocks and shares. He was further influenced by the organisation of both the Russian war economy, which was largely orchestrated by voluntary associations of the bourgeoisie, and by the German war economy, which was substantially stasified.

In *The state and revolution* he argued that production and administration had become extraordinarily simplified: "exceedingly simple operations of registration, filing, and checking", which "can be easily performed by every literate person".²³ Nonetheless, in the first instance Lenin and the Bolsheviks anticipated a form of state capitalism after the October revolution. Managers and bureaucrats would be required to stay at their desks, no longer receiving much by way of material reward, but under the pressure of workers' committees. For a couple of months, workers' committees did attempt to monitor factory production, but the result was managerial demoralisation and chaos. Before very long, the Bolsheviks introduced one-man rule within factories, analogous to the mass employment of officers and NCOs taken from the old tsarist army in the new Red Army.

In the 1930s, the Stalinist regime formalised socialism as a stage in which - as Marx had implied in *Critique of the Gotha programme* - payment would be by result. This mandated material privileges for the managerial elites, though rarely on anything like the same scale as in the capitalist west. When minded to deploy Marxist justifications, the Chinese Communist Party also cites *Critique of the Gotha programme* in defence of the inequalities of wealth evident in the country today.

Social democracy, meanwhile, more or less abandoned the idea of worker self-management. The rightwing Austro-Marxist, Karl Renner, in defending his solidarity with the state in time of war, said in 1917:

The worker demands that the state shall stipulate the eight-hour day, protect the producer in the workshop in every regard, insure him against illness, accident and old age ... 'The state shall!' - that is the solitary, ever recurring proletarian imperative.²⁴

This soon became the theme of social democracy across the board. It was an abandonment of the older socialist idea

that the aim was security less as an end in itself than as a means to destroying the dependence and alienation of the individual.

Selina Todd and her recent celebratory book on the British working class enthuses about the 1945 Labour government as the coming together of the labour movement and the professional, managerial middle classes to build the social security-based new Jerusalem.²⁵ She points out, for example, that Labour-built council estates always included a smattering of superior houses as homes for the managerial middle class, to leaven in the proletarian lump. This, indeed, was the characteristic of 20th-century social democracy. Unsurprisingly, after the devastation wrought by two world wars, which destroyed a massive amount of unearned income accumulated by the elites, the ideal of a labour movement/managerial nexus seemed like the wave of the future. Equally unsurprisingly, workers by the 1970s were rebelling against paternalistic managerialism, and the managers were rebelling against limitations on their capital accumulation. As Thomas Piketty has influentially argued, since the 1970s there has again been a massive expansion of privately owned capital multiplying under its own steam, and a widening divorce between effort and ability, on the one hand, and income, on the other.

Marx had anticipated very large industrial enterprises requiring minimal skill sets for workers. I am not at all sure that this was, in fact, particularly conducive to overcoming the division of labour. Worker self-management and practice was always more likely to emerge in handicraft enterprises, in which capitalist managerialism was particularly otiose - builders working for contractors was perhaps the classic example. Since the 1970s, the typical worker has become, much more in line with Marx's expectations, genuinely 'polytechnic' - although not quite in Marx's sense of the term. The ability to turn one's hand to a very wide range of procedures is not so much an absence of skill as a particular skill in itself, very reliant on a general education.

The very large enterprise tended to create a division of labour, which in practice was very hard to overcome. The experiential distance between

shop floor and managerial corridor was simply too wide. Post-industrial capitalist enterprises, in which massive organisations are broken down into multiple interacting and quite small workplaces, usually relating one to the other via contract or crypto-contract, are much more amenable to overcoming the division of labour.

In thinking this through, I would suggest the model of the builders' cooperative is more constructive than the ideal, such as it was, Putilov metal works of 1917 Petrograd ●

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Fighting fund

Appreciation

Last week's paper seems to have gone down well with lots of people. Even though I say so myself, it was full of fine articles, and this is reflected in the comments of our readers, including donors to the fighting fund. "Another excellent issue," commented comrade MM in the message accompanying his £100 PayPal donation.

Others who clicked on the same button were NW and MPA, who both contributed £20. MPA's was "on behalf of the Red Party (USA)", whose comrades are certainly admirers of the *Weekly Worker* and whose politics seem very close to our own - see http://red-party.com. No doubt they accounted for a few of our 3,287 online readers last week.

There were also 10 contributions via standing order/bank transfer - special mention goes to CG (£30), RK and GD (£25 each), and DV (£20). But for the second week in a row there were no contributions by cheque to the fighting fund. I know

I often recommend the speedier methods mentioned above, but I usually do so right at the end of the month, when I'm concerned about making the target before the deadline. But there are still more than two weeks to go, comrades, so cheques are just fine!

Talking about targets and deadlines, we need £1,750 by February 29. This week's £308 takes our running total to £509, so we are actually quite a bit behind where we ought to be. We need another £1,241 in just 18 days. But I know we can do it - especially if a few more comrades show their appreciation for this week's paper in the same way as MM and the Red Party did for last week's.

Over to you, comrades! ●
Robbie Rix

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

THEORY

Going nowhere fast

The present period is one of transition, argues Hillel Ticktin. But how can we escape from the current impasse?

Let me start by mentioning two types of transition. The first is the classical transition between capitalism and socialism, which, as Trotsky said, is the period we live in. He said that after the Russian Revolution and the social democratic betrayal in 1918-19, we had entered such a period. Trotsky was expressing the fact that not only was there potential for revolution everywhere, but that society would have to react to it.

However, both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were transitional forms in a different sense. Nazi Germany came into being because capitalism had entered a transitional period: the world was highly unstable, the bourgeoisie wanted a way out and ended up taking that road, even though it did not consciously seek it.

However, the Soviet Union was a very different kind of society and in certain respects was far worse. Why did it deteriorate? What happened in the Soviet Union, among other things, was the atomisation of society. Bourgeois theorists of totalitarianism - with whom I do not agree, needless to say - take this atomisation as a given. It is true that both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany were atomised societies in a sense, but the depth of atomisation was far greater in the former. This reflected the fact that it really had broken with capitalism, whereas Nazi Germany was still a capitalist entity.

At no time was production in the Soviet Union based on profit. More than that, production in the Soviet Union ceased to be based on money, either in the Marxist or bourgeois sense. Leaving aside questions of the secret police and so on, individuals cease to have the degree of independence they possess when they have money. Most people in capitalism tend to think that money is the root of all evil, but under feudalism, the serf does not have money. The serf is - not wholly but partially - dependent on their feudal lord (I am here repeating what Marx said in the *Grundrisse*, where he wrote pages and pages on the question of dependence). Capitalism began the process of abolishing dependence, but then maintained it in a particular, looser way. There was a movement away from total dependence (slavery and other forms) and, although true independence arrives only with the advent of socialism, money introduced a degree of independence that did not exist before. Obviously, whilst a very rich person may be highly independent, an ordinary worker can be so to a much more limited degree.

In a society without money the dependence can become total. It is one of the reasons why the secret police in the USSR could play such a massive role. There were at the time of Gorbachev possibly over a million secret police (and it was not just a case of occasionally listening in to phone conversations). Of course, there were civilians in both the USSR and Nazi Germany who aided the state, but the numbers in the Gestapo were a fraction of those working in the secret police in the Soviet Union.

Stalin used children against their parents and parents against their children and had no problem with killing one or the other. Under Brezhnev if you were a professor and did or said something that was seen as a challenge to the system, you would be stripped of everything - you were no longer a professor, no longer had



Marcel Duchamp: 'Transition of virgin into a bride' (1912)

any recognised qualifications, you no longer had anywhere to live. This can occur in a society where individuals lack the relative independence money affords, and it is highly unusual.

Of course, Nazi Germany was also a murderous society, but there clearly were more citizens killed by the state in the USSR than those killed by the Nazis in percentage terms. This is despite the fact that, as well as the millions killed in the holocaust, the Nazi state launched a war that killed millions. It is worth pointing out that if it was not for Stalin a lot less would have died - millions of Soviet soldiers were killed as a result of his crazy orders. Half the population of Kazakhstan died of famine, and the Soviet Union under Stalin simply could not have been worse than it was. You are talking about a catastrophe that really has no comparison.

The Soviet Union had overthrown capitalism, but it had gone nowhere and could not advance. While I was living there during the 1960s, it was absolutely clear to me that it could not last. This was a transition that did not go anywhere - a transition that held the world back for a century.

Nationalisation

However, it is worth remembering that in the Soviet Union capitalism

had been overthrown and there were considerable, lasting consequences. It is no coincidence that in Britain, for example, the vote was conceded to all men and some women after 1918, and a similar trend occurred elsewhere. From this point, and particularly after World War II, there was a gradual acceptance of the need to make concessions - it is these that the ruling class is currently trying to withdraw.

After 1945 there was extensive nationalisation. Of course, we cannot argue that nationalisation is in itself a socialist measure - the capitalist class was quick to adapt it to the system itself. However, governments were compelled to accept unions in a way that the private sector would not. Concessions on democracy also meant concessions in the workplace. Similarly, subsequent privatisation has also been politically driven. The idea is to take on the unions again.

A nationalised sector cannot operate as if it is functioning on the basis of profit, and therefore does not embody the kind of efficiency that capitalism requires - it cannot exploit its workers *in the same way*. However, while the Thatcherites' claim that the public sector is less efficient was not untrue, that does not mean that this would be the case in socialism. But it is the case that a form that lies in

between capitalism and socialism will tend to malfunction.

This has a political and ideological effect, as well as an economic one. It becomes difficult for socialists to argue their case if they do not make the point that I have just made: it is an unfortunate fact that we cannot get to socialism gradually. This does not mean that nationalised sectors do not protect workers - they clearly have done. One also has to say that in the health sector, for example, work is not carried out directly in the interest of capital, but at least to some extent on the basis of what is needed.

In a socialist society one would expect that people do the work they want to do and enjoy doing it. A socialist society, according to Marx, is one in which work becomes "humanity's prime want". This is in total contrast to the way in which people are forced to work under capitalism, in occupations in which they usually have no interest. But, up to a point, when performing a humanitarian role, such as that of a doctor or nurse, people do tend to work in a different way - one that goes beyond simple compulsion. While people are still compelled to work to earn money, the incentive system in the nationalised sector is on a much lower level.

There is a comparison here with the future society. Imagine that capitalism has been overthrown and we are proceeding to build a socialist society. You cannot immediately nationalise everything - a proportion of industry will continue to be privately owned. So how do you incentivise people who work in the nationalised sector? Once you make this point, it becomes more difficult to see what will propel society forward.

I think the answer is there would have to be education, so that people could see the way forward to a society in which work becomes our "prime want". In other words, why would somebody want to go down a coal mine? Obviously our intention is to abolish coal mines completely, quite apart from the question of pollution. You do not want people to have to perform such work, but to begin with it will be necessary.

Where next?

How do we proceed from the current transitional period? I have argued that the current system is in decline - the productivity of the future society would be higher than today. The second aspect of decline is that mediations become more and more difficult. This is very obvious at the present time of crisis. As I have said, this is not simply a cyclical crisis, but a crisis of the system itself. What it expresses is that the polar opposites are unable to come together and in fact they stand in conflict.

What we have seen in Greece is evidence that in this period reformists cannot *be* reformists: that is to say, they cannot implement reforms and in reality they have to go backwards. What happened also exposed the fact that the bourgeoisie is anti-democratic - its whole treatment of Syriza was undemocratic. Having gradually granted limited democracy after 1917, the capitalist class is today acting in an undemocratic way that also produces destabilisation. But the bourgeoisie and its representatives seem to have no understanding of history. Trotsky makes the point that when a ruling class is in the ascendancy its representatives appear to be geniuses, but when it is in decline they appear to be stupid. This is how they appear in their reaction to Greece. I actually think they had very little choice, but the way in which they imposed their will was just stupid.

However, the crass way in which those political representatives are behaving can play into the hands of the left. The *Financial Times* has stated that what is happening in Britain is becoming dangerous and from their point of view the more intelligent line would be to accept the continued need for concessions - after all, what is Corbyn calling for? Almost nothing. For instance, in spite of what I said earlier, nationalised rail would clearly be better than what exists - the private sector has been so bad at running the railways that continuing with the current situation is crazy. The political reality though is that the ruling class will not accept this.

How long this will be the case I do not know. Both here and in Europe much stronger opposition parties must surely be thrown up. In the third world also, the situation is now dire. We need a much more serious debate on the left about how the working class can take power. The way forward will become clearer, as things begin to move ●

FILM

Scams we are still paying for

Adam McKay (director/co-writer) *The big short* 2015, general release

The *big short*, based on the best-selling book of the same name by Michael Lewis, is up for an Oscar this month. Like the book, the film satirically outlines how, in the lead-up to the global financial crash in 2008 and the subsequent great recession, American mortgage lenders and investment banks engaged in a huge financial scam. Banks like Goldman Sachs packaged up a bunch of mortgages into a 'derivative' security instrument that was sold on to other banks and financial institutions around the world. This security instrument was called a 'collateralised debt obligation' (CDO).

CDOs contain a bunch of mortgage-backed securities, which, in turn, are based on different home mortgages - some with very good credit-worthy borrowers and many with sub-prime mortgages (with borrowers who will almost certainly default if the housing market collapses).

The trick with CDOs is that even if they were 90% composed of sub-prime securities, because the likes of Goldman Sachs made them up, they were deemed by the ratings agencies who vet these products for buyers as triple-A (namely hardly any risk at all). So the CDOs were rated very safe, but in fact contained very risky securities. Goldman Sachs and other investment banks could get away with this as long as US home prices kept rising fast, as they did between 2002 and 2006. As soon as they stopped in 2007, sub-prime borrowers started to default and all the securities in these CDOs eventually became worthless.

The *big short* tries to show how the likes of Goldman Sachs set up these scams. Before 2007, like other investment banks it was selling these CDOs like the blitz and making lots of money for clients who bought them (usually other investment banks and rich individuals, often from Europe). And this scam was fully supported and promoted by the US Federal Reserve and the government authorities. The head of the Federal Reserve at the time, Alan Greenspan, reckoned that the exploding housing market was a boon to American consumption and there was no risk, while mortgage derivatives and CDOs were an exciting new form of financial engineering that would reduce the risk and impact of collapse by diversifying it across the whole financial system.

When Raghuram Rajan, a Harvard economist and now head of India's central bank, questioned this in a paper presented at a meeting to celebrate Greenspan's retirement,¹ he was attacked by Larry Summers, former US treasury secretary under Bill Clinton and Keynesian guru, as a "Luddite" who failed to recognise the great new financial innovations like CDOs and other derivatives.

Credit bubble

But some hedge fund and investment managers realised early the nature of what Warren Buffett later called these "financial instruments of mass destruction". And that is what the film and Lewis's book is about. It describes how some small financial speculators recognised that the housing boom was a huge credit bubble and the creation of these new exotic financial instruments were a scam that would eventually pull down the big banks and the American economy like a house of cards. So they speculated on the collapse of the value of mortgage bonds and CDOs and took out (then very cheap) default insurance instruments, called credit default swaps (CDS), in anticipation that CDS prices would rise, as mortgage defaults - starting with 'sub-prime' mortgages



Author Michael Lewis

- started to rocket. Then they would make a killing.

As the film shows, 'shorting' the housing market in this way was difficult and risky. First, even when US home prices started to fall and mortgage defaults rose, the big banks bolstered the mortgage bond market with their own money and kept bond prices up and CDS prices down, and so our investment bank heroes (in the film) nearly lost all their money. And, second, the likes of Goldman Sachs at first refused to take our heroes' bets or would not allow large positions that would really make big money. A big short was not allowed.

But then Goldman Sachs realised what our small investment managers had already grasped. This was a housing bubble and it was all going to end up pear-shaped, big time. Goldman Sachs reckoned that CDOs were going to turn sour in early 2007, as the property bubble started to burst. As Lewis puts in his book, "Goldman Sachs did not leave the house before it began to burn; it was merely the first to dash through the exit - and then it closed the door behind it." And close the door it did. Goldman Sachs now joined our film heroes and began to bet against these same securities that it was selling as low-risk and *bona fide*. As one government regulator subsequently said, "It was like selling cars with faulty brakes and then buying an insurance policy on the buyer of those cars."

The next scam, not outlined in the film, is that Goldman Sachs executives knew CDOs were turning bad, but they still went ahead and set up more. Goldman Sachs called these latest ones Abacus and invited their clients to buy them. Goldman Sachs worked with John Paulson, a top hedge fund manager (a key figure in the book, but renamed in the film), who wanted to 'go short' on these CDOs - not only to pick out the bad CDOs, but actually to construct the worst possible CDO, so that 'shorting' it would make the most money! Goldman Sachs did not tell potential investors that the Abacus CDO had been constructed with the help of a hedge fund that wanted to short it. Indeed, Goldman Sachs told investors that it had asked a completely independent investment company, ACA, to choose the securities going into the CDO. So the SEC reckons (the US Securities and Exchange

Commission) that Goldman Sachs lied to its clients and then ripped them off.

The Abacus CDO was even more exotic (and toxic) than other CDOs. It was a 'synthetic CDO', made up not of mortgages, not of mortgage bonds, but of the very insurance premiums or CDSs themselves - a financial derivative of a financial derivative. How exotic can you get! The owner of this synthetic CDO became a huge insurer of mortgage bonds, without knowing the quality of the bonds insured, let alone the quality of the mortgages behind them. If the mortgages turned sour, the CDO owner was liable to almost unlimited liabilities or payouts to those insuring against default (ie, our heroes and GS). In the end, John Paulson, with the help of Goldman Sachs, made \$1 billion on just one Abacus CDO going bust - at the expense of buyers like the UK's Royal Bank of Scotland and Switzerland's UBS, who were stupid enough to buy it. Goldman Sachs made millions in fees and commissions in setting up the Abacus CDO and getting investors to buy it.

The film entertainingly deals with how the small hedge fund speculators played out their 'big short' with the complacency, ignorance, irresponsibility and sheer neglect exhibited by the real estate brokers, banks, monetary authorities, credit agencies and financial regulators. And it makes rather clumsy attempts to explain the nature of CDOs, including 'synthetic' CDOs - although, admittedly, they are not easy to explain, especially considering that most bankers and economists at the time did not understand them, but carried on blithely with faith in the system and financial engineering. As Charles Prince, the head of the world's largest bank, Citigroup, said at the time, "When the music stops, in terms of liquidity, things will be complicated. But, as long as the music is playing, you've got to get up and dance. We're still dancing".

A much better explanation of how the housing market and the global financial system collapsed and the role of the economists, bankers and official authorities in that disaster is provided by Charles Ferguson's super documentary, *Inside job*.² And the culture of investment banks - the greed, the reckless risk-taking and fraudulent activities - is more

dramatically developed in *Margin call*, an underrated film that came out with much less fanfare.³

The *big short* makes no attempt to look at the wider picture: why did the housing market become a massive credit bubble that went bust and why did it spread across the globe into the worst economic slump since the 1930s. Sure, no entertainment film can cover everything and it is to the credit of the likes of Brad Pitt and others that money was found to make this particular one. But do not expect to understand why the financial world went down from this film. Michael Moore makes a better and equally entertaining job of covering the wider theme in his *Capitalism; a love story*, made in 2009.⁴

No heroes

The trouble with *The big short* - both the book and the film, but more so the film - is that the small hedge fund speculators who made a killing by 'shorting' the housing market and taking on the big banks are seen as clever, maverick heroes who 'took on' the big boys and girls, when they are really just a bunch of speculators that got it right.

None of them wanted to expose the financial system or capitalism: they just wanted to make money - even though the characters in the film on occasion show some concern with those who really paid for this financial disaster with the loss of their homes (millions), their jobs and real incomes (millions) - and not banking jobs. And, on top of this, the financial collapse led to a bailout that cost billions, still being paid for by taxpayers in interest on public-sector debt and loss of public services (austerity).

For example, who sold Goldman Sachs and our hedge fund heroes the credit insurance in the form of these credit default swaps? None other than the biggest insurance company in the world, American International Group. AIG usually sold boring car or buildings insurance, as well as life insurance. But it also set up a division that specialised in selling insurance on 'financial instruments'.

AIG was prepared to sell CDSs on mortgage-backed bonds to all and sundry - it was money for old rope, it thought. And for a while it made huge profits from its financial credit division. By the end of 2007, AIG had issued \$527 billion in CDSs, of which \$78

billion was written on just those CDOs that Goldman Sachs and others were selling. So AIG became liable for most of the losses that could happen if the US property market collapsed. And it duly did. As home prices dropped and sub-prime mortgages defaulted, the value of the mortgage-backed securities fell and those who had insured against such an event (Goldman Sachs and others) with CDSs then demanded payouts from AIG. AIG's huge profits disappeared and soon it found it could not even meet the insurance payouts.

In the great financial crisis of September 2008, when the investment bank, Lehman Brothers, went bankrupt, so did AIG. But there was a difference. The US government decided to bail out AIG with taxpayers' money to the tune of \$85 billion (and more later). Why did it do this?

If you insure your car against a crash and then the insurance company goes bust, you do not get paid. Goldman Sachs and other banks had insured against losses on the very mortgage products and CDOs they were selling to others. When they went bad, they wanted AIG to pay up. But if AIG went bust, they would get next to nothing. So the government bailout - led by people who had worked only a short time before as executives in Goldman Sachs - enabled AIG to secure the funds to pay Goldman Sachs and others. Indeed, Goldman Sachs got paid \$14 billion in CDS insurance - or 100c on the dollar. Goldman Sachs did not lose a penny, while everybody else took a hit - particularly small investors and, of course, the taxpayer - you and me.

That was not the end of it. The government then handed more billions to Goldman Sachs and other banks to prop up their balance sheets and allowed them to borrow more in the bond markets with a government guarantee. Goldman Sachs got \$29 billion that way, JP Morgan got \$38 billion and Bank America another \$44 billion.

And where are we now, some eight years since the heroes of *The big short* made their killing? Nothing much has changed. The never-ending story of banking goes on, with nearly every month another fine on banks or exposure of banking fraud, like the Libor-rigging scandal, the laundering of drug cartel money by HSBC, the 'big whale' debacle of JP Morgan that lost billions after the end of the great recession. And, even just last month, the news that Goldman Sachs has finally settled fines and compensation with those banks and mortgage brokers that it scammed back in 2007.

Lloyd Blankfein is still the chief executive officer of Goldman Sachs. Back in 2010, Blankfein was interviewed by *The Sunday Times*. It went something like this:

So it's business as usual then, regardless of whether it makes most people howl at the moon with rage? Goldman Sachs, this pillar of the free market, breeder of super-citizens, object of envy and awe, will go on raking it in, getting richer than god? An impish grin spread across Blankfein's face. Call him a fat cat. Call him wicked. Call him what you will. He is, he says, just a banker "doing god's work"⁵.

Michael Roberts

Notes

1. R Rajan, 'Has financial development made the world riskier?' *National Bureau of Economic Research* November 2005.
2. Preview available at www.sonyclassics.com/insidejob.
3. <http://marginallmovie.com>.
4. www.imdb.com/title/tt1232207.
5. *The Sunday Times* November 8 2009.

BOOK

A spy in the house of drudge

Geoff Andrews *The shadow man: at the heart of the Cambridge spy circle* IB

Tauris, 2015, pp276, £20

British communist James Klugmann (1912-77) - the subject of this book - is still a notorious figure. As this book shows, he was never able to live down the fact that he had prostituted himself before Stalin in 1951 with the authorship of a book entitled *From Trotsky to Tito*, which attempted to put some execrable meat on the ravaged bones of Soviet misinformation that Tito's Yugoslavia had been penetrated by Trotskyite and imperialist agents. Klugmann had previously been a major populariser of the achievements of Yugoslav 'official communism'.

Worse, he had been active in the British Special Operations Executive during World War II, and had become intimately involved with the work of Tito's partisans, playing a not inconsiderable role in switching Winston Churchill's support towards Tito. So Klugmann was not just an example of a communist intellectual carelessly repeating lies from higher authority, but, in his case, a communist intellectual writing up toxic narratives that he knew - and everyone else knew he knew - were complete garbage.

My first reaction on reading this book was one of pity, partly because Klugmann, unsurprisingly, made himself ill through his actions (p168); and partly because the emaciation of intellect through Soviet-inspired hogwash is a depressingly familiar story. However, this pity is not an attitude that can be maintained for long. This, I would argue, is because such a reaction is predicated on a failure of historical imagination in relation to alternatives. The main sense I get from this biography is of someone trapped in their political trajectory from 'Cambridge communist' to the twilight world of Soviet intelligence, through to the mundane and narrow existence of a post-war party functionary inside a movement that was being steadily gripped by crisis. Truly understanding what this tragedy meant relies upon our perception of an alternative: a CPGB that was able to think its way out of a reliance on the less-than-intrepid dogmas of 'official communism'. However, this absence of alternatives does contain an element of truth, in that the opportunity that party members did have to think themselves out of their predicament often had highly unsatisfactory and broken outcomes (thus, those who were highly critical of the CPGB's post-war line often combined this with a wretched and self-defeating adulation of the Soviet Union). But, in this book, Klugmann tends to shift around merely as an object of either our pity or contempt.

Author Geoff Andrews might object to this, given that, as someone in and around the CPGB's late and unlamented Eurocommunist faction that ran the party in its last decade (he was involved with *Marxism Today* in the 1980s, as it became a totem of anti-communism), he does have an apparent alternative that is retrospectively projected onto Klugmann. In Andrews' narrative, there was a process of ideological renewal in the CPGB underway in the 1960s, which became a kind of intellectual precursor for the exciting innovations that his faction was to undertake in the 1980s (it is difficult to write this without a heavy dose of sarcasm, I am afraid).¹ Klugmann is pictured as someone central to this renewal with his emphasis in latter years on humanist themes (see *The*

future of man, 1970) and his role in the interminable and mostly banal communist-Christian dialogue of the 1960s and 1970s. This was paralleled by the CPGB's adoption of 'Questions of ideology and culture' in 1967 that, as an admission of past Stalinist heresy, suggested that cultural and scientific work could no longer be dominated by bureaucratic decree.²

The problem with presenting the so-called shift to Marxist humanism in this fashion is that it fails to see that its emergence in the CPGB was bound up with an initial defensive attempt in the 1950s to deal with Stalin's legacy by the 'official communist' movement. Thus Emile Burns, speaking at the party's national congress of 1954, said: "It is wrong ... for any comrade in discussing such scientific and cultural questions to take a rigid line of trying to impose some particular views on his colleagues ..."³ By the time that the CPGB elaborated such themes in the 1960s they were only significant as a somewhat stale and flatulent recital on ground already trod.

Klugmann, of course, was no Eurocommunist in any public sense; rather he loyally nailed his colours to the mast of the CPGB's right-centrist leadership, which sponsored the rise of the Eurocommunists in the 1970s as an attempt to defeat the entrenched left opposition already mentioned. Rather, Andrews pictures his subject as a shadowy figure helping younger Euros formulate arguments that he was too cautious to broadcast to the world at large (p218).

Bureaucratic

Whatever flimsy role Klugmann played in such manoeuvres, Eurocommunism in its various 'national' guises did not represent any qualitative break from the objectionable 'high Stalinist' rituals of earlier periods. Thus, in a British context we had the unedifying spectacle in the 1980s of the leading Eurocommunist faction expelling whole swathes of comrades in a quantity and venomous manner that made activists positively pine for the leadership of Harry Pollitt and Rajani Palme Dutt (both unlikely candidates for retrospective awards for openness and democracy).

The practice of 'democratic centralism' - in fact, bureaucratic centralism - was used brutally to silence critics and bludgeon the opposition. *Marxism Today*, under its 'trendy' wrapping, had the practical consequence of muzzling communists and leading to a form of legalised asset-stripping, where the party was funding something that was bleeding it to death. Underpinning the faction's attempt to trail behind feminist, anti-racist and peace movements were the same shoddy myths about the popular-front politics of the 1930s that the CPGB had been peddling for years. So what we are left with is essentially the form of an alternative that was underpinned by the politics of 'official communism', as it evolved in Britain under the tutelage of the Soviet Union. By attempting to portray Klugmann as some kind of spiritual guide to Eurocommunism, Andrews only seals his subject further into a bureaucratic tomb.

However, one area where Klugmann may truly have been a progenitor of the Euros (as they were disparagingly known) was in his sensitivity to the actual origins of the CPGB's programme, *The*

British road to socialism, which was drawn up by the British party leadership under the supervision of Stalin. According to Dorothy Thompson, she had relayed a story to Klugmann on the top deck of a London bus that had been told to her husband, Edward, around Stalin's involvement in the *BRS*. At which point, Klugmann "went pale, got up and got off the bus" (p195).

The tendency of various post-war leaderships had always been to clothe the *BRS* in a 'national' guise and downplay Stalin's involvement (although general secretary John Gollan did publicly spill the beans in 1964⁴). Thus Klugmann, in one of his final articles for *Marxism Today* in 1977, sidestepped the issue of direct Soviet involvement with the *BRS* by making reference to scarcely more edifying influences from Dimitrov (Bulgaria), Gomułka (Poland), Gottwald (Czechoslovakia) and Thorez (France), alongside a more ritualised reference to Harry Pollitt's *Looking ahead* (1947).⁵ However, the more loudly various 'official communist' organisations (and factions such as the Euros) trumpeted their indigenous, 'national' reforming qualities, the more securely they locked themselves into a generalised Soviet-inspired graveyard.

Nevertheless, it was this 'national roads' jargon, often incorporating themes of social patriotism, which became firmly fixed in the 'official communist' imagination. This shines an interesting light on another controversial phase of Klugmann's career: that of communist mentor to some of the famous Cambridge spy ring (Donald Maclean, Guy Burgess, Anthony Blunt) and his role in recruiting John Cairncross to Soviet intelligence. Surely, his job of 'talent spotter' in this arena defiantly cuts across the more 'respectable' indigenous image that he and others in the CPGB attempted to cling onto in latter years.

Klugmann was somewhat different from his more famous contemporaries named above, in that he was an *open* communist. This puts him firmly in the mainstream of the CPGB, in that spying for the Soviet Union (which usually meant passing on information gained in government departments, the military services or industry) was a major occupation for the party's rank and file during World War II (although the CPGB would yank members away from open party work if it felt that the intelligence was important enough). Klugmann was an interesting case in this regard, in that he did voice concerns about the nature of this work, over and above more immediate worries that CPGB members might have about such undertakings: ie, being caught and prosecuted by the British state, particularly after national organiser Dave Springhall was imprisoned for receiving secret information in 1943.

In 1945, Klugmann met up with Bob Stewart, then responsible for clandestine contacts between the CPGB and Moscow. In a conversation recorded by MI5 microphones and presented by Andrews, Klugmann makes a number of references to his unhappiness at working for those whom Stewart calls "buggers" and "bloody insistent": namely Soviet intelligence agents. Klugmann says that he hopes "never to be told to do two jobs which are really contradictory" and that "they [the Soviets] are out for themselves" (p103). Stewart empathises

with Klugmann wholeheartedly throughout the exchange.

Social patriotism

These are fascinating glimpses into a situation that Klugmann clearly perceived had gone awry. Of course, on a basic level, he could just have been recording his doubts about the methods of Soviet intelligent agents, which was still an awkward conclusion for Klugmann to be drawing about servants of the 'workers' state'. It would be nice to think that Klugmann had perceived the truth: that the Soviet Union was acting in its own national interest during World War II and, while it found the spying activity of CPGB members useful, its concern for a revolution in Britain and the health of the British party was almost non-existent. Unfortunately, we have to doubt the likelihood of that scenario.

Social patriotism was alive and well in the CPGB, as exemplified by the rebellion of general secretary Pollitt, JR Campbell and MP William Gallacher in 1939 upon receipt of the Comintern's instructions that World War II was an imperialist war and it should be opposed. Later, of course, after the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, this social-patriotism (which built on a certain 'national' emphasis that was alive in the popular front period before the war) was given a mighty fillip, as the CPGB sought to integrate itself into Britain's war effort.

This did not completely blunt the internationalist perspectives of years gone by, but such internationalism was debased and garbled by the growing social patriotism it had to co-exist with. This mixture is well illustrated by Douglas Hyde, a leading party member on the *Daily Worker* in this period, discussing the issue of whether spying was 'unpatriotic'. In hindsight, we might say, belligerently, 'yes'. However, Hyde put it this way:

At no point did the question of its being unpatriotic enter into our thoughts. We were, after all, agreed that a communist Britain would be a better Britain, that we should not see communism in our lifetime if Russia was allowed to be crushed and that, therefore, in defending Russia from our class enemies we were fighting for 'our' Britain. The conventional attitude to patriotism and love of country was easily dismissed with the question: 'Whose country - theirs or ours?'⁶

It was this strange amalgam of patriotism and misguided internationalism focused on the Soviet Union that was the likely frame for Klugmann's doubts about his position and it was this perspective that formed so much of the CPGB's and Klugmann's dispiriting trudge through the post-war decades ●

Lawrence Parker

Notes

1. For more detail on this see G Andrews *Endgames and new times: the final years of British communism* London 2004, pp73-104.
2. www.unz.org/Pub/MarxismToday-1967may-00134.
3. Cited in T Russell, 'Soviet culture and criticism' *The Marxist Quarterly* Vol 1, No 3, July 1954.
4. www.unz.org/Pub/MarxismToday-1964jul-00198.
5. J Klugmann, 'A brief history since 1945' *Comment* February 5 1977.
6. D Hyde *I believed: the autobiography of a former British communist* London 1951, p147.

What we fight for

■ 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.

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weekly Worker

Other unions should strike in solidarity

Don't fall for the lies

Our action is aimed at the government and NHS employers, not patients, writes **Richard Galen**

The second junior doctors strike went ahead on February 10. As readers will know, the government is insisting on the imposition of new contracts despite the overwhelming opposition of the doctors and their union, the British Medical Association. Last-ditch talks between the BMA and the department of health broke down on the eve of the strike, leaving medics with no option but to press ahead with industrial action.

It is important to note that striking is a particularly difficult decision for doctors, given the effects it has on the 'service users' - for the most part ordinary working class people who need medical care. In the majority of strikes, the aim is to hit the employer where it hurts - through the loss of production and therefore revenue that results from an absence of workers. But, of course, in the public sector that does not apply, although usually the intention is still to pressurise the employer - in this case, the state, obviously - rather than inconvenience those who use the service.

However, when it comes to the health service, it is inevitable that patients will be inconvenienced at the very least. Yes, the standing of David Cameron and health secretary Jeremy Hunt will hopefully be damaged, but the effects of a doctors' strike are mainly felt by those patients whose clinic appointments or elective operations are postponed. There is also the question of public support. An Ipsos Mori survey in January showed 66% of those polled thought the decision to strike was justified, but this support dropped by a third if emergency care was not provided.

The BMA had originally intended the February 10 action to involve a complete withdrawal of labour between 8am and 5pm, but, in my view correctly, it announced that, although the strike would be extended to 24 hours, junior doctors would provide emergency cover - what the BMA refers to as a 'Christmas Day service'. This means that all emergency departments were to be fully staffed, and all of the 'on-call' doctors throughout the rest of the hospital were present as usual. Additionally, cancer services and maternity units were not affected.

Let me stress: our action is aimed at the Tories and NHS bureaucrats, not our patients. It is correct to try and minimise the disruption caused to hospital care, and to show the public that doctors are not willing to compromise patient safety if they can avoid it. Even more preferable would be a situation where other trade unions and sections of the working class took action on our behalf - but we all know how likely such direct solidarity is right now, thanks to the draconian anti-union laws,

the need of union leaders to 'keep things safe' and the absence of any kind of *political* class-consciousness amongst the mass of workers.

I do not need to remind readers that the government has shown a complete unwillingness to negotiate over key points in the proposed contract. Sources close to the negotiations indicated that Hunt "personally vetoed" an offer from the BMA that would have allowed the strike to be called off - even though officials from NHS Employers saw it as an "opportunity to resolve the dispute".

This is not surprising, coming from a man whose rhetoric included accusations on the Andrew Marr show earlier this week that the BMA is "behaving in a totally irresponsible way" and "spreading misinformation" - an interesting comment, given his oft-repeated 'misinterpretation'

of Sir Bruce Keogh's paper on weekend mortality rates in the NHS. Keogh concluded that the figure of 11,000 'excess deaths' at the weekend (which actually includes Friday and Monday) is *not* down to staffing levels, despite Conservative propaganda - a claim described as "rash and misleading" by the authors of the paper themselves.

The truth is that we had no alternative but to press ahead with the strike, despite its impact on patients, because we know that not only will the proposed new contract result in worse working conditions for ourselves: it would also adversely affect patient safety in the long term. The drive behind the contract is the government's push for what it calls a "seven-day NHS", but in actuality it would mean an extension of routine and elective services into the weekend - emergency services, as always, are already "seven-day". It would

mean either doctors being shifted from weekday work (reducing the normal level of cover, obviously), being forced to work longer hours (making them more tired and prone to mistakes, thus affecting patient safety), or managers having to hire more doctors, as well as other healthcare staff, to cover the extra weekend services. The last option is most definitely not included in the proposal.

When faced with the accusation of not caring about the anguish and suffering caused by the strike to patients, junior doctors - who went into their chosen career specifically to help and care for ordinary people when they need it most - find it very difficult not to second-guess the motivation of Hunt and co in trying to impose a 'contract' that only one side wants. The fact that the union has made the decision to keep all emergency and urgent care fully staffed during the strike will hopefully go

some way to reducing the doubts, in the minds of both the public and doctors themselves.

A final point: to put the level of reduced cover during the strike into context, a near-identical shortage of doctors occurred on April 29 2011 (a Friday), and again on June 5 2012 (a Tuesday). No concerns about patient safety and delayed operations were raised in the media, and there was no condemnation by the department of health of this surely "irresponsible" action. In those cases, however, it was not striking doctors who were responsible for the lack of cover, but the government itself.

The reasons behind these "disruptive" and "potentially dangerous" interruptions to normal service? The extra bank holidays declared for the royal wedding of William and Kate and the queen's diamond jubilee respectively. Enough said ●

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