

# WORKERS INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

Political and theoretical journal of Workers International to Rebuild the 4th International  
No 1 Spring 2013

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*Unite the Union members: defending the gains working people have made*

## Editorial note

Welcome to *Workers International Journal* no1!

Our publication is new, but it does not come from nowhere. *Workers International Journal* will be the quarterly theoretical and political publication of Workers International to Rebuild the 4th International.

It will be a significant resource for all who want to organise and strengthen the force fighting in the working class and among working people as a whole internationally for their class interests. Within the discussion of everything that that involves, *Workers International Journal* will raise all the basic historical and political problems of the liberation of the masses in our times.

We are confident it will enable a step forward to be achieved in the theory and practice of Marxism, a step forward whose necessity is testified to at every moment and on every side.

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# Freedom for the Peoples of Africa!

## No to intervention!

Discussing the recent French military intervention in Mali, BALAZS NAGY exposes the role of imperialism in shaping the situation in the region. This article was first published in *Lutte de Classe*, the paper of French supporters of Workers International

It would be very wrong to judge France's military intervention in Mali on the basis of the deafening and unanimous press and television chorus. They think this act of war was inevitable and celebrate it. It galvanised them unhesitatingly and pompously to hail President Hollande as a great leader – the very same politician they used to dismiss as flabby.

But it would be even worse to put any trust in this “leader's” own pronouncements, or those of his aides and their allies in Europe and across the world.

And yet ... you cannot actually blame Hollande and co. directly for the long-drawn-out deterioration in Mali and the region, culminating in the present utter decay. But nor can you exonerate them either, since as loyal inheritors of the whole mess they took it on entirely and without a second thought. And in that specific sense the intervention was indeed as inevitable as the – joyful but perhaps over-optimistic – claims of “victory” and a job well done.

Despite the – to say the least – simplistic presentation of the situation in the Sahara and the Sahel as goodies vs. baddies, reality turns out to be incomparably more complex. Understanding it requires a brief review the more outstanding aspects of the historical development which prepared, shaped and conditioned the political and social scene – and the actors – leading to the current situation.

### A glance at history

For a start, the immense revolutionary wave which swept across Europe in the second half and aftermath of World War II generally speaking hit the African continent a dozen or so years later. Within Europe, the leaderships of working class parties did everything they could to channel revolutionary movements into shoring up the bourgeoisie through conventional democracies. In contrast, French (and other) imperialisms had been deeply shaken and weakened by the war and were

unable to withstand the colonial peoples' irresistible independence movement. After a shaky early start, first Tunisia and Morocco (in 1956) and then the Algerian people won independence in 1962 after eight years of gruelling armed struggle. The revolutionary shock wave travelled south, and De Gaulle, more clear-sighted than other leaders of an exhausted possessing class, was forced to accept the obvious need to re-vamp old-style imperialism and grant independence to a series of countries in the region – almost all of them by 1960 (Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina-Faso, formerly Upper Volta, Niger, Chad, Ivory Coast – Guinea from 1958).

Hopes of a promising new start roused and inspired these countries. Borrowing from Algeria and even Tunisia in their search for a path towards a system leading to socialism, Guinea, Senegal and Mali all chose more or less the same route. After Bourguiba in Tunisia and Ben Bella in Algeria, Sekou Toure in Guinea and Modibo Keita in Mali and their governments carried out a series of nationalisations of property of the colonial power and its nationals. On this basis they initiated a policy of taking charge of their respective countries. Distrustful of the continually obstructive colonial power, they turned squarely towards the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe for desperately needed support and assistance. Senegal, too, worked towards a kind of socialism, but its president L. Senghor, whose attachment to the republican bourgeoisie in France was well-known, rejected the orientation towards the USSR, preferring a kind of panafrikanism and so-called “third worldism”.

The national struggle, first for independence and then for this take-over by a kind of “anti-feudal” socialism by Modibo Keita in Mali, was particularly powerfully nourished by young people, who had previously languished in the kind of semi-slavery affecting a quarter of the population of the Sahel. But these

initial hopes and efforts and fruitful initiatives quickly came to grief on obstacles born of these countries' extreme poverty and the cruel shortage of resources imposed on them by the former colonial power.

On the other hand, the inadequacies and material shortages in the so-called “socialist” countries, trapped in the impoverishing constraints of “socialism in one country” and hampered by an oppressive Stalinism increasingly in debt to its capitalist creditors, meant that they could not provide the necessary assistance even if they had wanted to. Far from it. And so, disappointed and discouraged, most of these Arab and African “socialist reformers” turned back to the former coloniser and towards a policy of oppression. This was all the easier since their origins and education separated them from the working masses, and in any case they could model themselves on how it was done in Eastern Europe. Not everybody can boast the strength of character or consistency of view of a Keita, a Lumumba or a Sangare. Nor is it a coincidence that these three were all assassinated.

As for the leaders of the powerful workers' movement of the day in Europe, they did everything they could to bog these movements down in the swamp of deepening degradation, particularly since they everywhere resolutely drew this entire workers' movement into the false and fatal path of “parliamentary cretinism” and collaboration with the bourgeoisie.

But from the outset, this bourgeoisie went in completely the opposite direction, determined to maintain and even reinforce its prerogatives and arrangements as a class. Forced to abandon the colonial methods of its imperial system, it adapted to the new situation through the bonapartist rule of De Gaulle. Run in secrecy by his secretary, Jacques Foccart, the General's shadow organisations worked feverishly to re-organise France's political, administrative and

military networks and adapt them to the new political configuration. And so the wild beast of colonial imperialism clothed itself in the post-colonial lamb's skin of "co-operation". And that is how a whole system was forged, the sadly famous "Françafrique" which (under all Presidents!) continued the old imperialist practices under the cover of close collaboration with the African countries and lightly disguised within the forms required by the "independence" of the respective states.

A whole series of military coups very quickly expressed and made manifest the limits of "independence" in most of the African countries concerned. Even in countries which had been better prepared by a long struggle, the dissident colonels Ben Ali and Boumediene resolutely put an end to the democratic scruples of Bourguiba and Ben Bella. Everywhere the military putschists installed a dictatorship resting on an oversized army and a single party, African regimes corresponding to the "Françafrique" system and symmetrically replicating it. Almost everywhere, independent regimes of the older generation of more radical bourgeois fighters gave way to corrupt regimes of dictators. Where the old guard did stay in power, their degeneration became inevitable.

This series of African countries was independent but had been impoverished and systematically, mercilessly, plundered in the course of the long preceding period of colonial rule. In the way of things, "co-operation" between them and a highly-developed great power like France simply maintained and exacerbated the monstrous economic and social inequality between such "partners". A hungry wolf in a flock of sheep comes to mind. It is very characteristic that from the end of World War II onwards the straitjacket that was the Franc zone tied the African countries to close dependence on France. On 25 December 1945, a special Franc of the African Financial Community (CFA) was created for use in these countries (including some further south) and its value was set outrageously low by the French government: 1 CFA Franc was only worth 0.02 metropolitan Francs. (N.B. following Sekou Touré of Guinea, Keita of Mali also took his country out of this Franc zone system in 1963. But faced with economic difficulties, he had to re-join it, shortly before he was overthrown).

These decisions to leave were fully justified, since the CFA Franc embodied



### **North west Africa**

the crying inequality between these economies – often kept excessively backward – and bourgeois France, one of the most highly-developed countries. Trade imposed by this "benevolent" France provided the latter with agricultural products and raw materials of all kinds at derisory prices, even below world prices which themselves are traditionally low. Conversely, her own industrial products were sold off virtually risk-free at guaranteed high prices on these markets. So this system not only maintained flagrant inequality, but intensified it intolerably. Need we add that this imposed and legalised inequality has continued right up to the present? To be more accurate, it was pushed by the Balladur government (under President Mitterrand in 1994) to the point of an explosion when the CFA Franc was devalued by 50%! The French bourgeoisie carefully retained this shamefully super-exploitative rate when the euro was introduced: in 2011, 1 euro equalled 655.957 Francs CFA. And they insult our ears with fairy stories about the end of imperialism!

In this re-vamped framework of imperialism, these countries were put under pressure – both directly and through successive dictatorships – to abandon dreams of progress. But worse was to come. Within the modified political configuration of the imperialist system, they still had to maintain their traditional role as providers of very cheap agricultural products and raw materials. Open, violent force had been replaced with sly economic constraint. In this sense, these countries objectively contributed, kicking and screaming, to the ability of a thus reinvigorated world bourgeoisie to take on and sustain its "thirty glorious years". And so the rela-

tive "social peace" that prevailed in the course of that expansion secured by that same bourgeoisie's pact with powerful (reformist and Stalinist) bureaucracies, which kept the workers movement under lock and key, was largely paid for by super-exploitation of the former colonies. It led inevitably to colossal indebtedness on the part of these poor "independent" countries, over which even the bourgeoisie's various nerve centres shed copious crocodile tears.

### **Economic, social and political deterioration**

The situation got even worse when the bourgeoisie set its neo-liberal agents to work to reduce these debts overall. Starting in the early 1980s, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank forced all the countries concerned to adopt massive "structural adjustments" in the form of drastic budget and expenditure cuts and extensive privatisations in return for "aid" in reducing these debt levels. French (and other) firms bought up a great number of local enterprises for peanuts, while huge companies like Total, Areva and a multitude of others made themselves at home. Catastrophic results quickly followed. (It is a remarkable fact that what is going on in Europe at present is not some novelty arising out of the crisis; the Latin Americans had painful experience of it even before the Africans).

In Africa, too, the first victims were the education and health systems, whose often remarkable initial achievements had been a source of legitimate pride to these young nations. Ever tighter budgetary constraints laid waste to these promising beginnings.

Merciless cuts in expenditure also deprived agriculture – bankrupt state farms as much as independent farmers

ruined by lack of access to credit – of all aid. Across Africa, already low rural wages saw a general fall of 30% in those years. Mali's agriculture, for example, which at the end of the 1980s contributed 67% of the country's exports through cotton production, saw the latter smashed up and the peasantry crushed. Moreover, from the 1960s onwards a series of terrible droughts hit the whole region, resulting in regular desert encroachments. The funds needed for big irrigation networks and effective water supplies were cruelly lacking, as were the cheap credits essential for small farmers.

These calamities led on the one hand to the terrible famines which periodically descend on the region and on the other to the massive rural exodus which drives tens and hundreds of thousands of people into the terribly overpopulated slums in the cities. The inhabitants of Nouakchott in Mauritania, extremely poor as they are, describe the slums in "their" shanty-town as "rubbish dumps". As for famines, the hypocrisy of successive food-aid campaigns launched and supported by the bourgeoisie and beloved of right-thinking petit-bourgeois only slightly masks the formers' direct responsibility for these disasters, and their organic inability to do much about them, and the latter's deferential complicity. Having said that, no one would want to prevent good souls from helping the starving, but reality puts us on guard against this rather unreliable substitute which does nothing to attack the root of the problem.

Chronic unemployment also affects the whole population, which has undergone geometrical growth in the period in question. By 1989 it exceeded 22% of the active population, including more than half of young people in Algeria, for all that this country is better off than Mali or other countries in the Sahara or the Sahel. A significant proportion of the population has persistently sought a way out of this social catastrophe in emigration. This explains the very high number of Malians (2 million) living in France around 1990, as many as a quarter of the whole population of the

country! But vigilant France kept a close watch on the situation, and Charles Pasqua – a worthy successor to "Françafrique's" organiser Foccart – started forcibly repatriating hundreds of thousands of Africans. His successors, also under all Presidents, have virtually institutionalised this into a regular procedure. Following the regular expulsions organised by Guéant, Manuel Valls has most recently filled an aeroplane with several dozen immigrants. A veil is drawn over how they carry this out. Be that as it may, journalists estimate that there are currently still 120,000 Malians living in France. But who knows exactly how many of these working class pariahs there are who have escaped utter poverty over there only to be hounded and persecuted here for the lack of an all-important piece of paper?

While the people – especially the young – are fleeing the country, businesses large and small, French and other, are settling in there as a kind of Eldorado to exploit the natural wealth of the country and its cheap labour. Apart from the odd kick-back, these businesses repatriate the whole of their profits and operate above the law. According to studies by comrades at *Survie* (a French NGO founded in 1984 to fight hunger and corruption in the "third world"), France's trade surplus with Mali was over 300 million euros in 2010-2012, five times more than the derisory public "aid" she grants to that country!

Alongside these destructive activities went a long drawn-out process of reducing these states to subservience, adapting them more and more to the needs of capitalists in the French "protector". Metropolitan agents of "Françafrique" carefully guided this convulsive change by remote-control. Enriched local cliques devoured each other in order to establish, in an endless series of coups, which one would seize control of a state which itself was reduced little by little to its repressive apparatus. Having laid its hands on the manna from the "co-operation" community and other so-called "development" loans, the winning group would set out to fulfil

its role as a substitute for the former colonial power. As poverty grew in these states, their role was more and more reduced to one essential: securing, preserving and reinforcing power in order to consolidate France's economic and political position and influence while maintaining a repressive regime against working people. Those currently holding power, such as the puppets Deby (Chad), Compoaré (Burkina Faso) and Touré (Mali) have nothing in common with the independent figures of the first generation of leaders. They are even the opposite of someone like Keita, for example. The most important, if not the only, means they use to achieve their objectives has been and is the army. Now, the rapid overall worsening of the situation has provoked a series of coups in which the impoverished masses' role of detonator has become increasingly visible, reflecting the economic and social deterioration that has been eating away.

#### **Unpicking the tangled politics of North Africa**

Above all we must reject the simplistic way the interventionist power presents the context and conditions in this part of Africa. Even if – and this goes without saying – it is constantly and noisily parroted in the media that certain political tendencies and individuals, despite reservations about "neo-colonial ulterior motives", nevertheless give this military action guarded support as a necessary "pre-requisite". These include the French Communist Party parliamentary deputy François Asensi (*L'Humanité* newspaper 18 January 2013) who swallows the intervention whole but hastens to add: "...France must state clearly her aim to re-build a democratic state". He actually seems to think that is possible on the basis of this intervention!

Despite all the resounding statements and those who are taken in by them, there is no way that trends and programmes in this region of Africa, or the political formations and groupings to which they give rise, can be reduced to isolated groups of Islamic fanatics on the one hand and loyal government supporters on the other. Reality is much richer and more complicated. Before even attempting to sketch a few lines, with no claim at all to presenting the whole picture, it is enough to describe the interventionists and their accomplices as the famous bull in a china shop, especially given the brutal military aggression and lack of concern for "details" that are innate and natural



**Jacques Foccart (left) with De Gaulle**

characteristics of so-called “neo-colonial” imperialism.

As described above, after a very short period of national awakening in the aftermath of World War II, successive economic setbacks in the newly independent countries turned into a sustained social regression. The vast majority of the popular classes (workers, farmers, stock-breeders, pastoralists, etc.) have become considerably poorer, particularly the many peoples and ethnic groups at the bottom of society. Their degradation provided the ground for the astonishing explosion of a whole series of programmes and the most varied social and national movements. It is impossible to list them all here, but in general they rested on previous currents and movements, some of them going back to the nineteenth century. Several great traditions of thought and social movements have remained alive to this very day. In the majority of cases, social and national demands have overlapped inextricably. The roots of some movements are to be found in the distant past.

The European workers’ movement of the twentieth century in particular inspired by example a powerful trade-unionism among workers in these countries, as well as the appearance of labour and communist parties. The present-day UGTT union confederation in Tunisia, which opposes the Salafists, is one of the fruits of this co-operation whose powerful resurgence can be considered as an important opposition factor to the government of religious people, but also of a positive political change. We also know that Sekou Touré of Guinea (secretary of the CGT federation of black Africa in 1948!) rested on the Guinean trade unions for support in the national independence movement and spiced up his conceptions with socialism of a kind. The Algerian independence movement was also in large part influenced by the French workers’ movement.

It would therefore be unforgivable to look down on the movements for the social and national liberation of these countries from the heights of some imagined European supremacy. Often centuries-old traditions and a wealth of ancient experience also nourish the struggles of workers and people in Africa and its northern part.

These movements exist, despite the extremely difficult situation they are in because they pay the price of the backwardness imposed upon their countries, suffering from isolation and repression which are bound to mark the immediate



**Lumumba (above) and Bourguiba (right)**

future of the region. This social and national situation was essentially what we had in mind when we published the press release from the comrades at *Survie* in issue no. 1 of our journal (*Lutte de Classe*), expressing the desire to “look at certain important aspects of the rebellion in a different light”. Of course the comrades from *Survie* not only bravely condemn the intervention, but are also well-known for having brought together a mass of precious facts in relation to this part of Africa. But in the indignation which informs their timely and correct condemnation of the intervention, we believe they erred in losing sight, behind the inflated bubble of religious fanatics, of precisely these movements and their national and social base. But that is precisely the direction in which to look for the key to the situation, and a way out, and not at all the “armies” of corrupt regimes or their UN protectors. The *Survie* comrades talk about French intervention as “significant pressure on the Malian authorities” as if the latter actually existed independently of the former. They also say France “must respect UN resolutions as soon as possible”.

But in the first place, rather than acting as “pressure”, French intervention is necessary to save these “authorities”. And not only the Malian authorities, but all the rest in the region, too! The comrades should not just see French (state) authorities, but also those of these countries, these African states, as the agents and representatives of a quite definite social class – the bourgeoisie. With the significant difference that the latter do not exist and act on behalf of their own bourgeoisie, since even the feeble shreds of that native

class are merely a subaltern appendix of the metropolitan (and world) bourgeoisie. These states, therefore, exist and act as the local organ of the latter, even though they are endowed with the fig-leaf of independence.

From the 1980s onwards, when the capitalist-imperialist system started moving over to so-called ultra-liberalism, this remarkably intensified the exploitation of these countries and revived all the traditions of struggle, and their direct and indirect heirs started moving. The great liberating risings of 2011 which journalists called “Arab revolutions” are also manifestations of these struggles, at the same time acting as a significant precursor to the European and world revolution that is gestating. The outstanding role of the UGTT union in the Tunisian revolution and the overthrow of the regime – even though it was itself contaminated by the latter – is well known. Less well known, perhaps, is the decisive action the Egyptian working class developed in its revolution, organising strikes and renewing its unions. Today its sporadic but incessant struggles constitute a significant element in defending and advancing that revolution. As for the UGTT, we can all see its decisive participation in the current mobilisation.

While the “Arab spring” is an integral component of the European revolution currently gestating and undeniably contributed to the still stuttering awakening of young people in Europe, it also lived on in the convulsive but still disorganised movements of the despoiled and uprooted masses of that region, of which Islamist movements form a large but unfortunately distorted and adulterated part. Be that as it may, certain



### ***Polisario Front leaders***

ancient and modern political movements and organisations have raised their heads again, often inspired by the European workers' movement of former days, but also by their own old traditions, and – closer to home – by the revolutionary overturns of 2011.

#### **“A people which oppresses another cannot emancipate itself” (Engels)**

For centuries the immense Sahara and Sahel regions of north and west Africa have constantly been disturbed by movements and rebellions of this or that nation or ethnic group living there. Its artificial division into separate countries by colonial powers only served, in the majority of cases, to reinforce national oppression by devastating and wrenching apart ethnic or national units.

During independence, some of these peoples, like the Kabyles in Algeria and their Berber relatives, the Tuareg in Mali (and more or less everywhere) hoped to achieve national recognition in return for their participation in the anti-colonial struggle. But right from the outset, all of the newly independent states, based on the primacy of the dominant ethnic group (or tribe), refused to allow any concessions at all, still less any form of autonomy, to ethnic or national minorities.

This serious defect left a profound scar on the democratic awakening of the bourgeois revolutions which shook these countries, even those who ventured furthest into a kind of proto-socialism. We do not have the space here to examine all these national movements in detail. Nevertheless the most important ones must be mentioned.

Turned down in no uncertain terms by the new Algerian government, the Kabyle people started a prolonged struggle for autonomy. Not only was this refused from the very start, but the Kabyle people suffered repeated bloody repressions and a national oppression which continues to this very day.

Far away from there, another region steeped in prolonged national-ethnic struggle, Casamance in Senegal, has battled against oppression. The region has been demanding autonomy ever since Senegal achieved independence. However, despite L.Senghor's evasive promises, it has not been forthcoming. The region went into open armed struggle in the early 1980s, when Senegal was trying to ward off a massive debt crisis (almost 2 million dollars). The cultivation of ground nuts appeared to offer a way out, but when the government assigned land to colonists from the north for this, the inhabitants of Casamance, traditionally rice-growers, revolted. Ever since, cease-fires have alternated with fresh confrontations and the conflict has persisted, particularly since the Senegalese state, exactly like all the others also in its constantly growing poverty, has shown itself less and less able to resolve the situation and has even imposed further burdens on the region.

When one considers the vast Sahara and Sahel territory from the point of view of the many different peoples inhabiting it, what becomes evident is a profound interweaving of the social degradation of the peoples – often linked to sudden changes in their mode of life also imposed by the neglect of nature – and the subordinate or even

oppressed character of their ethnic or national lives. History teaches us that those who try to separate them from social difficulties, or with more reason to oppose them, have paid a high price.

For a long time now the nomadic Saharoui of the western Sahara have undergone a veritable calvary. While they struggled for autonomy, Franco's Spain would not allow them any rights. In 1975, following a call by King Hassan of Morocco, hundreds of thousands joined a “green march” to invade what they thought was “Moroccan Sahara”. In reaction to this, the Polisario Front, founded in 1973 by young Saharoui students, proclaimed the “Democratic Arab Saharoui Republic” under Algerian protection. The Algerian and Moroccan armies have confronted each other in a rivalry that has nothing to do with the interests of any peoples whatsoever. Algeria has protected the new Saharoui republic since Spain left in 1976, whereas she has never allowed Kabylia or the Tuareg movement the slightest degree of autonomy.

Following a cease-fire in 1991, Morocco has controlled 80% of this territory, leaving 20% to the Polisario Front. But despotic King Hassan has installed a 2,500km (!) security belt called the “Moroccan Wall”. (This is the nth “wall” built to contain some people to disfigure the world and bring the powerful into disrepute!) As for the new Saharoui Republic, recognised by a few countries rejected by the majority – including the UN! – it has no legal existence at all.

The Tuaregs' problem is even more complex. Because of the arbitrary and fantastic division of this great region by the great colonial powers, the almost 2 million Tuareg find themselves artificially split up between five different countries. They are just one of many peoples who, carved up between several countries, have no right to a legal existence and are often persecuted. When discussing them, one inevitably thinks of the Kurds or the Palestinians in the Middle East. If you want a shameful image of imperialist reality dragged down to the level of simple banality, then look no further. The Basques divided up between the north of Spain and the south of France might have a thing or two to say about this, or the Irish, with the north of their country still under the iron heel of Britain.

On the other hand, the break-up of several multi-national countries and the revival of virulent national feelings also testify to the growing contradiction

between capitalism-imperialism and the facts of national existence. (To say nothing of the inability of the Stalinist bureaucracy to solve this problem in the former USSR and its criminal role in the break-up of several multi-national states it used to govern, like Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia).

Be that as it may, the Tuareg people were among the losers in the post-war anti-imperialist wave of liberation. In a way, their fate contains just about all the problems of the national question in this part of the world in compressed form: – the capitalist nature of the states in which they live and the role played in this by religion, particularly Islam.

It is really remarkable that even the leaders of the first wave of bourgeois-democratic revolution just could not grasp this problem at all. And so as early as 1963 Modibo Keita severely repressed a Tuareg revolt in Mali. He was helped by his Algerian colleague Ben Bella, who handed over to him the Tuareg leaders who had fled to Algeria. One Tuareg author wrote: “The thousands of deaths caused by repression were met with general indifference”.

But we lack the space here to tell the full story of the many rebellions by this people, their lengthy negotiations with this or that state in the region, and the massacres and flights of thousands of their members which punctuate the life of these states which have degenerated into vassals of imperialism.

As a result of general economic decline and collapse and the consequent successive setbacks to the Tuaregs’ national struggles, they toughened up their behaviour and adopted a more radical attitude. All states in the area felt the effects of imperialist super-exploitation, but the Tuareg people suffered it twice over (and they were not alone in that). Besides the dismantling of services, there was no investment to assuage sufferings which were made greater by massive unemployment exacerbated as the introduction of motorised transport and the severity and frequency of drought put an end to caravans. Hundreds of thousands of them fled Mali and lived under extremely precarious conditions in Niger, Mauretania, Algeria, Burkina-Faso, etc.

As we know, after the overthrow of Ghadafi, who enlisted many of them among his “protectors”, a significant number of these armed men returned to Mali. But this detachment did not start the armed struggle of the already strongly-radicalised Toureges. All they



*Tuareg in Mali in the 1970s*

did was to contribute a considerable force to a movement which had been present for a long time but, hardened by serial disappointments, was only waiting for the right opportunity. The extreme fragility of the Malian state, made worse when army Captain Sango’s attempted coup fell apart, furnished the signal and the opportunity for attack. The “Azawad Liberation Movement”, formed some months previously, allied itself with armed islamist groups to bulk out its numbers. And so they were able quite rapidly to pulverise the Malian army and occupy the north of the country as far as the River Niger.

Of course this was a mistake, but a very understandable one, as the Tuareg movement was very contaminated by its own islamist faction. Mistake though it is, this movement as a whole should not be confused with its islamist faction “Ansar Eddine”, even if the latter has undoubtedly pushed the movement a long way in a radical direction. But it should never under any circumstances be identified with it, as French imperialism and its lackeys strive to do.

Contrary to all the claims of the propaganda machine, political islam – even the most radical kind – is not a recent foreign import to Africa. Even in the nineteenth century, locally-based islamists inspired great anti-colonial struggles. Exploited peoples sought refuge and consolation against all kinds of oppression in religion. Since Engels wrote *The Peasant War* in Germany we have known that religion serves to encourage and stimulate the resistance and struggle of oppressed classes when they are still insufficiently developed or – we may add – when their elder sister,

the world working class, is on the back foot constantly.

If Islamism has in recent years – sometimes aggressively – taken the place of secular leaderships of social and national movements, it is a consequence of the considerable weakening and retreat of the international workers’ movement. Over the last fifty years or so, the emphatic way social democratic parties have gone over from being supporters of the bourgeoisie to being its direct and settled political representatives has been one of the most outstanding features of this historic collapse. The other is the destruction of the Soviet Union and the dominant role played by the Stalinist bureaucracy within it, followed by workers massively deserting communist parties and their inevitable retreat. A whole series of communist and non-communist parties and groups which used to lead social and national struggles have been marginalised across the world as a result. In their place, religious islamist movements have emerged from Afghanistan to Morocco, by way of Palestine, Egypt, Tunisia, etc.

Obviously this “opium of the people” works like any other drug. While bringing temporary consolation and relief, it cannot cure the ailment but poisons the organism even further. The muslim religion (like any other) brings no improvements but on the contrary preserves the backward and desperate situation working people are in, as we see very clearly in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Tunisia, too. Moreover, this religion contains within itself, as the cloud carries the thunderstorm, its radical Salafist wing with its medieval customs. The people of Tunisia have recently started to struggle even more powerfully against

this “opium”, as have the people of Egypt. We should also note that there has recently been a significant internal split in the Tuareg salafist group “Ansar Eddine”.

### **The situation is bound to get worse**

Only recently forced to accept cuts in its material resources, the French army has become trapped in an inextricable tangle of intertwined difficulties which it cannot overcome. It is no coincidence that Hollande’s European and American allies have very parsimoniously calibrated their own symbolic rather than real “contributions”. They obviously have a better grasp of the implications and extent of their devastating setbacks in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are more than happy to let the French bourgeoisie and its puppet Hollande have the more than dubious glory of pulling their shared chestnuts out of the fire. In fact the French “Socialist” Party has suddenly revealed itself to be the advance-guard not just of its “own” bourgeoisie but of world imperialism as a whole. Only recently the US vice-president conferred a metaphorical knight-hood on Hollande, confirming him in this role with a lordly “well done!”

Obviously the forward patrols of world imperialism didn’t have a clue what they were getting into. Incredible but true: neither the army nor its political bosses had any idea of what a simmering cauldron they were involving themselves in. Hollande kept saying they only wanted to stay in Mali a few days, then various unpleasant experiences made them change that to “... an indefinite period”. It was brought home to these ardent interventionists that they would have to re-make the state and army, not just in Mali, but more or less across the whole region – a massive task far beyond the capacity of the French state.

The colossal expenditure such an undertaking entails massively exceeds the meagre resources of a French bourgeoisie mired in persistent crisis. There will be a growing contradiction between the no-doubt long-term financial cost of these involvements and their categorical refusal to allow even the slightest relief of the ever-increasing burdens placed on working people. Obviously, the latter will not tolerate the government making them bear not just the cost of the crisis, but also of the considerable expense of patching up the system oppressing their African brothers. If you believe the French Ministry of Defense (and their figures are almost certainly an under-estimate) the cost of the army

alone up to 5 February 2013 is 60 million euros.

This will hardly scratch the monumental cost required by a situation of total breakdown. Everything has had to be re-created: all the machinery of administration, not to mention the health and education systems -- all far beyond the reach of a French exchequer swamped and riddled by debt.

As for the army itself, it is quite unable to tackle even such priorities as protecting the civilian population. Journalists report several mass lynchings perpetrated by the depraved Malian army, protected by its French army “big brother”.

These facts demonstrate not only the hatred and lust for revenge the country’s ruling strata cherish for all Arabo-Berber peoples, but also the appalling values and moral standards of the French army, which must have looked demurely away while these lynchings were being committed, as it did a few years earlier in Rwanda, so as not to notice the massacre of the Tutsi people. And as the Dutch UN Battalion did in former Yugoslavia, which let General Mladic’s soldiers execute 7000 Bosnians in the town of Srebrenica without lifting a finger. Such are the execrable political and ethical standards of both these armies and the UN, swathed in hypocritical high-flown phrases.

There is not the slightest doubt that this intervention will get even more catastrophically bogged down than that in Afghanistan. The inevitable consequence will be that the situation in Europe and internationally will get even worse, with the recrudescence of an even fiercer international class struggle. For what is happening in and around Mali and concretely also in the mobilisation of working people in Tunisia and Egypt prefigures not only a considerable deterioration in their conditions of life but also, and above all, the mobilisation and emergence on the scene of masses of working people, broadening their activity and toughening up their struggle.

But when one reads the statements of those groups and parties which oppose French intervention, one is struck by their purely declamatory character. Of course given the massive number of dupes, the very fact that they condemn it at all is commendable, and we stand with them. But even when they resolutely condemn the military intervention, they confine themselves to verbal protest. To put it another way, almost all of these organisations (Com-

munist Party, Left Party, Left Front, New Anti-Capitalist Party, etc.) adopt a position more or less clearly **opposed** to military intervention but steer well clear of stating the orientation or outcome they are **for**. These political formations adopt the profoundly negative attitude of rejection. At most, these comrades add a generalisation devoid of meaning, i.e. that what is needed is to solve the (economic, social, national) problems these countries face. This great general truth is hardly brilliant in its originality, so much so that even the government has given up repeating it.

### **We need a clear orientation!**

To tell the truth, most of these organisations and groups do point to what they think is a way forward. They say – indeed, often demand – that military intervention must be left to African states – Mali and her neighbours, under UN patronage. It is quite obvious that they think this would be a suitable solution since (and this is how shallow their thinking is) it would be a better fit with the African ethnic image and the sacrosanct authority of the UN. They are completely unperturbed by the fact that Hollande and his government have spent long months trying to achieve precisely that arrangement.

Such a “solution” amounts more or less to re-establishing the status-quo, i.e. the situation preceding the debacle of the Malian state and army. But trying to apply it without the French army is simply a bad joke, since the preceding state of affairs was precisely what brought about that debacle and ended up with the present disastrous situation. The French army intervened precisely in order to save the apparatus of the Malian state from complete collapse. Despite appearances, it was not directed against those Islamic terrorists. That pretext was blown up by propaganda to keep everybody happy. In truth they did it to shore up a native administrative apparatus in mortal danger -- as it happened, from the Islamist attack. The delight the population of Mali showed and which was obligingly filmed by French TV was less at the arrival of a foreign French army than at getting rid of a cruel medieval dictatorship. To present it as enthusiasm for the arrival of a foreign army is to indulge in the same degree of mystification as the attempt to interpret the vote against Sarkozy as support for the plans of the Socialist Party.

So the French army stands there nakedly exposed as the only cement that can hold this feeble state together, or



any of the others that share the same congenital weaknesses. In that sense it is not only the chief factor in that African Union, but also the only one that can put up any opposition and organise any resistance to its ineluctable decomposition. It is high time for the parties and groups and their leaders who speak in the name of the working class to break with the backward and grotesque way of thinking which takes African states as if they were an emanation of their peoples and formed a group independent of imperialism by its very nature. Whereas in reality they form a quite specific – subaltern but essential – part of the mechanism of imperialism’s world system, officially run by the omnibus substitute, the UN.

The clear regression in these states in relation to fundamental problems of African society is the logical consequence and obvious indication of the manifest setback to the attempt by the bourgeoisie – even what were at first its most radical elements – to solve elementary tasks of the bourgeois revolution. The way these regimes are currently decomposing is a striking proof from the negative side of Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution; specifically, that in our imperialist epoch the bourgeoisie of any country at all – even a backward one – is organically incapable of solving the tasks posed by such a revolution. Every orientation towards a so-called popular front, every policy of alliance with a wing of the bourgeoisie, has led to setbacks. That is the cruel lesson of events.

Thus, in the absence of a clear orientation towards the theory of permanent revolution and its application in order to mobilise the workers of the whole region, a catastrophic situation has got even worse even quicker. Indeed the choice put forward in the past by Rosa Luxemburg and taken up later by Trotsky: Either the working class succeeds in overthrowing capitalism and opening the road to socialism, or humanity will fall back into barbarism – is today an immediate practical question.

In this respect, this part of Africa at least (like the Middle East) is a little ahead of Europe. That continent, too, is now confronted with the same direct choice. It is only the many and various reserves at her disposal which still retard the explosive maturing of the same historical dilemma, as well as the general lack of preparedness on the part of the workers’ movement.



***Survivors of the Srebrenica massacre and their supporters commemorate the event at a Downing Street, London, vigil on 10 July 2004. Like the French Army in Rwanda, Dutchbat soldiers in former Yugoslavia “looked away demurely” as civilians were slaughtered***

The working class in the region of Africa under discussion already has several political organisations, even if they are still weak and enjoy only minority support. But that can change quickly, not to mention the unions which, like the UGTT in Tunisia and in the big cities in the region, are sometimes powerful.

Without going into detail, there are a fair number and variety of organisations which described themselves as Marxist and/or working-class, and they have the capacity to work together for a united struggle in the region. The first pre-condition for such a struggle and for their own development is undoubtedly their ability to take fully into account the orientation offered by permanent revolution and on that basis work out and apply democratic slogans for revolutionary change.

Revolutionary and working class organisations in Europe can and should

do everything they can to help clarify this essential issue.

That way they will be able to find their way back to their proper role, making the link with their history and tradition of supporting brothers and sisters in Africa.

A valuable contribution to this would be to adapt and develop the Fourth International’s *Transitional Programme*, the only one to express concretely the orientation of permanent revolution. Although it needs changing in places, as a whole it remains valid. It is the one and only path to solving weighty problems which can at the same time correct wrong orientations and go beyond passive contemplation of events when African activists need clear and active support.

*Balazs Nagy,*  
February 2013

# The genesis and nature of the SWAPO caretaker government in Namibia

HEWAT BEUKES traces the real history of the struggle for national independence against imperialism in southern Africa

On and before 16 August 2012, the South African police massacred more than 40 striking mine workers at the Marikana Mine at Rustenburg in the North Western Province. Workers had also reportedly been murdered by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) in the same incident. The NUM had turned against their members and was the cause of their deaths.

Likewise in Namibia as early as 1996, the Namibian Police intended to massacre striking TCL (Tsumeb Corporation Ltd.) workers at three copper mines (Otjihase, Kombat and Tsumeb) were it not for the fact that the workers at one mine were armed with weapons taken from management. Nevertheless, one worker lost his eye and another a leg at the Kombat mine where they were not armed.

## Chased away

By 1998, the Namibian Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN) chased away the TCL workers from their offices when they turned up to collect their pensions.

On 5 November 2012 the then Namibian Prime Minister Nahas Gideon Angula threatened teachers striking nationally, as reported in the Namibian Sun:

*"That will be unfortunate," remarked Angula. "If they continue with the illegal strike, I guess it will be a matter between them and the police."*

*"We recently saw the events of Marikana in South Africa where demonstrators had a run-in with the police and the police eventually used force that got many killed. I hope our situation does not reach such heights."*

The Teachers Union of Namibia (NANTU) denounced the strike as illegal. (The strike could not have been illegal in terms of bourgeois law itself as the theft of pensions of civil servants was a clear illegal and criminal repudiation of the employment contract.

Upon such a repudiation, teachers were no longer obligated to perform in the employment contract. Civil servants had released a document setting out the theft of 10 billion Rand from the Govern-

ment Institutions Pension Fund.) The above events are the culmination of the following process: ANC was launched in 1912 in South Africa and SWAPO in 1960 for Namibia by the controlling castes in their respective tribes with the unequivocal objective to benefit from capitalism, not to abolish it.

## Propped up

They remained weak political organisations, but in Southern Africa, they were propped up by the Stalinists of the South African Communist Party and sections of the South African corporate ruling classes. Internationally they were propped up by the imperialists themselves, the European labour unions, the Anti-Apartheid movement and Stalinists in the Communist Parties.

The prime objective of this support was to counter the struggles and both intrinsic and explicit demands of the working peoples for fundamental economic reforms and democratic solutions to amongst others the land question, the socialisation of national resources and the institution of fundamental rights in general.

The nature of the support was as follows: massive financial resources were poured into these movements, groups such as the Anti-Apartheid movement created and printed literature distorting history and assigning mythical and fraudulent feats to these organisations which usurped the history of the working class.

The truth is that these organisations contributed minimally to the changes of independence for Namibia and universal franchise for South Africa. These gains were brought about by the unrelenting struggles of the working peoples especially since 1976. The South African working class in particular was the colossus.

## Isolate

The Anti-Apartheid movement also lustily went along with these organisations to isolate the political cadre who maintained or might maintain independent political ideas in the liberation struggle. They easily discarded the bourgeois democratic values and principles of individualism originating in Europe where one was "innocent until



*Homeless campaigners in Namibia: SWAPO "did not see it as their business to articulate the democratic demands of the urban and rural working class and landless peasantry.."*



**Former TCL workers and their supporters march through Windhoek in 2012 demanding the restoration of their pension funds**

proven guilty”, “the onus of proof rests on the accuser”, where the rights of the individual was hitherto the highest embodiment of the achievements of human civilization, even though it rested on the bourgeois concept of private property and not on the application of social wealth for the benefit of the individual.

(Many individuals who came to Europe found themselves slandered and ostracised by SWAPO and the Anti-Apartheid movement, if not demonstrably mistrusted. This was a rotten, filthy and treacherous manner of shackling and bounding the struggle to keep it within the dictates of imperialism and the ravenous objectives of the petit bourgeoisie.)

These values, nevertheless sublime compared to the savage inquisitional values of earlier systems, and which were material aspirations of the political fighters of Southern Africa too, were trampled into the dirt and thousands of Namibians and South Africans lost their lives as a result.

To illuminate the above process, we concentrate on Namibia, our operational base.

Ironically and tragically, funds from the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation are being used as the main resource in Namibia to distort and confound history, in particular the struggle for trade unionism and workers’ rights. A series of purported research publications have dealt with the history of workers’ struggles and in particular the bloody struggles for the right to organise and belong

to trade unions. The publisher is the Labour Resource and Research Institution (LaRRI) funded by the foundation and associated with the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW).

One such publication, *Strikes in Namibia*, traces a false history of trade unionism, assigns it to SWAPO’s leadership and conceals the nationalist abuse and dissipation of the workers’ struggles in favour of their class collaborationist aspirations. It erases the most significant events of independent self-organisation of the working class, such as the historic 1978 Rössing strike and SWAPO’s treacherous and murderous role therein. It would take an encyclopaedic rewriting to restore the true history. It is necessary.

#### **Strikes**

Strikes in Namibia started a long way back. A strike against repressive conditions was recorded as early as 1893. Since then many have taken place, albeit in the early years for very limited demands and with ad hoc organisation.

However, the coming into being of the South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO) is significant in the historical dilemma faced by trade unionism and the working class in this country:

In 1960 the Communist Party of South Africa literally organised the Ovambo Peoples Organisation (OPO) for its Ovambo leaders in the face of the South West Africa National Union (SWANU), a party led by urban academics and intellectuals. The leaders of the OPO came from a social caste of tribal

chiefs and their kinsmen. The chiefs financially benefitted from the Contract Labour System as they agreed to provide contract workers and received commission, royalties or payment from the colonial government for selling their tribal members.

SWANU led the Windhoek Old Location uprising on 10 December 1959 in which 13 people were massacred and many wounded, but by 1967 it had fallen foul of the Stalinist bureaucracy for insisting that the Namibian People must decide their own modes of struggle. They lost their membership of organisations such as OSPAAAL (Organization of Solidarity of the People of Asia, Africa & Latin America). OPO, which had by now changed its name to SWAPO on the insistence of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), instituted an armed struggle, which they and the OAU themselves sabotaged and curtailed throughout.

The significant General Strike of 13 December 1971 to 20 January 1972 against the Contract Labour System by contract workers in various industries in the central and southern regions broke open the contradiction in which a social class which benefitted from the system also led a movement for independence, more accurately, was put/contrived (by brutal means nonetheless) into its leadership.

Urban working class youths had been organising the General Strike. The colonial authorities then used the tribal chiefs to have the youths stationed in the north publicly flogged with palm

branches. A mass exodus of youths to SWAPO in exile ensued in 1974 where they found that the counterparts of the chiefs were smuggling weapons, food and medicine intended for the armed struggle. By 1976, Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda and Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere militarily crushed the political challenge of the youth and the Peoples Liberation Army against the SWAPO leadership.

### **Struggles**

After 1976, workers' struggles increased dramatically in both South Africa and Namibia against educational, economic, social and working conditions under apartheid. These uprisings also targeted police brutality, inadequate municipal services, etc. A feature common in both countries was that these struggles took place outside and independent of the nationalist movements, who did not see it as their business to articulate the democratic demands of the urban and rural working class and landless peasantry.

Indeed, this is an understatement. Both SWAPO and the ANC were virulently against independent mass action and against the kind of demands which espoused common ownership of national resources, especially. (In the struggle of the youth against the SWAPO leadership during 1974 to 1976, they demanded a socialist programme for the nationalisation of natural resources and the commanding heights of the economy. The leadership pronounced that they were "fighting for the country, not an ideology".)

However, the petit bourgeoisie managed to drag this independent working class movement under the nationalist programme of nationalist class collaboration with the ruling classes. (The United Democratic Front in South Africa was an epitome of this process). This became possible because of the inexperience of the emerging working class leaderships and the edifice of apparent power and influence wielded internationally by the nationalists – an edifice mainly constituted by the imperialists themselves with the Anti-Apartheid movement and the Stalinist movement.

This usurpation was further strengthened by the operations of donor agencies heading off the independent action of the mass movement. Civic organisations and organised movements which sprang up in struggle were diffused by donor moneys and petit bourgeois elements who took over from the workers' own leaders.

A quintessential example: The most significant working class strike in Namibia took place at Rössing in December 1978. Workers of all nationalities and groups rallied under a worker leadership which articulated demands on a living wage, health protection, and housing. They also demanded a stop to victimisation by the security police amongst others. Henry Boonzaaier and Jassie Greeff were leaders of the workers. They declared that their movement was fighting for workers' rights and for the right to form and belong to a trade union. Together with the mine workers of Krantzberg and Uis mines, these workers numbered thousands.

Boonzaaier was jailed in Gobabis in April 1979. In jail he declared that he was not interested in nationalist politics, but in the struggle for the rights of workers. Shortly after his release he was coaxed into fleeing to SWAPO in exile in Zambia and obscurity, with the promise that he could direct the union struggle from exile. There he was forced to write a constitution for a union federation, then to build jails (3m deep holes in the ground) in Lubango in South Angola and then he was the first to be put in them for 10 years, from 1979 to 1989.

### **Dissipated**

The powerful workers movement at Rössing of 1978 to 79 was halted and deliberately dissipated by the nationalists.

In 1982, communal organisations sprang up over the country against police brutality and lack of adequate municipal and health facilities in Luderitz, Keetmanshoop, Rehoboth, Karibib, Windhoek and other towns. The student movement also started to organise on educational issues. SWAPO together with the Anti-Apartheid movement showed intense hostility towards and vilified the leaders of these organisations. Nevertheless, opportunist elements were eventually able to align these organisations with SWAPO.

The organised resistance of the communities gave a new impetus to workers' struggles which were quickly diverted by SWAPO elements.

In 1986, the nationalists formed the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) an umbrella of unions with Boonzaaier's constitution. These 'unions' had very little to do with unions as we know them. They were Ovambo tribal organisations in essence using the genuine (and intensifying) strife of workers to articulate a thinly disguised nationalist and class collaborationist agenda with a veneer of workers'

demands. From 1986 to 1989, the 'unions' resorted to wildcat-strikes involving the most vulnerable (albeit militant) unskilled labourers which resulted in numerous job-losses around the country. One of these wildcat strike leaders was Anton Lubowski, a corporate lawyer directly representing corporate interests within SWAPO.

### **Brokered**

In July 1987, the Tsumeb Corporation Limited (TCL) mineworkers went on strike led by the Mine Workers Union (MUN) with (besides the workers' pay and benefits demands) the demand for the implementation of resolution 435 of the United Nations. The essence of this resolution brokered between the UN and the Five Western Powers (USA, Canada, France, Germany and Britain) was that the protection of private property would form the bedrock of an independent Namibia. This perverted anti-working-class demand indelibly proved the bad faith of the 'union' leadership.

Three thousand one hundred workers were evicted after a court order in favour of the management. The union leadership was unfazed as the strike made international headlines and the European unions poured in money to the NUNW and SWAPO. The SWAPO-supported newspaper, *The Namibian*, advertised the vacant positions after the evictions in August 1987.

On the eve of formal independence on 1 August 1989, packers at the Namibia Breweries went on strike. They were unskilled and therefore vulnerable. Other sectors – in particular the drivers – came to support them. The Namibian Food and Allied Workers Union (NAFAU), an affiliate of the NUNW, immediately tribalised the struggle by meeting only with the packers in the Ovambo contract labour compounds, excluding the other sectors in strike, who abandoned the strike in disgust. On 5 September 1989, in the presence of the United Nations Task Force (UNTAG), police fired rubber bullets at a group of around 50 workers assembled by the NAFAU and severely beat them with plastic whips.

It took two Workers International members, Erica Beukes working as an occupational nurse and Jacobus Josob working as a shop steward at the Breweries, 10 years – until 1999 – to restore the workers' confidence in organised struggle and to get them to re-join the NAFAU.

Independence ensued in 1990 with universal franchise the first casualty.

SWAPO's bogus popularity as harbinger and engineer of freedom had plummeted due to the international exposé of mass killings, torture and jailing of SWAPO members in exile since 1978. The campaign of exposure was conducted by the relatives of the victims from December 1984.

It is widely known that the SWAPO failed to win the necessary two-thirds majority in the first election, but was handed victory by connivance between South Africa and the UN. Since then, the SWAPO has rigged each and every election, but was protected by its courts and by the imperialist governments who claim to be maintaining bilateral relations with it.

During the campaign against the mass murder by SWAPO, the Anti-Apartheid movement, the international churches, and the Stalinists attempted to shield SWAPO from the effect of the disclosures, in the process compromising their credibility. However, when the truth finally broke in 1989, it set them back a bit in that it silenced them. But, it did not resolve the issues.

#### **Institutions**

None of these institutions rejected these crimes against the Namibian people. In 2012, with the Marikana massacre, it became clear that these forces are still in support of SWAPO and the ANC. It is clear that they represent the interest of imperialism.

The SWAPO administration was characterised by the following:

It left the imperialist and colonial bourgeoisie's property intact while it laid claim to state ownership of the various national groupings' property and lands except for Ovamboland where the tribal kings maintained control over the land.

The colonial corporations did not allow the incumbents to encroach upon their own traditional areas of debauchery and theft such as the land and the multiple overpricing of infra-structure costs, but allowed them to plunder such areas as the State pension fund, Social Security and parastatals. Thus only a new parasite was added to the old parasites.

It immediately 'outsourced' the public educational system to Cambridge Education to conjure an educational system without reviewing the old educational system. Poetry and literature were expunged from this system. History was distorted in school books with a comical rendition of heroic resistance by the members of the Government who had come from exile. In addition,

they built a Heroes Acre on the slopes of the Auas Mountains at Windhoek where they bury falling Ministers of the Government.

#### **Careers**

Immediately after independence the union leaders started using the unions to launch parliamentary careers through the union affiliation with the SWAPO.

Strike activity immediately plummeted. In 1992 the NUNW negotiated a 30% cut in salary at the MKU furniture factory in Okahandja. The workers subsequently killed the factory owner in November 1992. The LaRRI is quiet on this cut.

From 1994 the regime (and the union leadership) started plundering the State pension fund when the former president Sam Nujoma and his brother-in-law embezzled 4,6 billion Rand from the fund. A trend quickly developed whereby the fund was used for the Black Empowerment scam of the regime which enriched Ovambo functionaries.

Private companies quickly picked up the cue and from 1996 to 1998 Goldfields South Africa (TCL) liquidated the mineworkers' pension fund with the collaboration of the MUN. After 2005 the Rössing Uranium (Rio Tinto Zinc) mine, fishing companies and a cellphone transnational MTC started preparing to embezzle their respective funds. The decisive action of the TCL workers who exposed the scams nationally and internationally stopped this trend and the copy-cats abandoned their plans.

#### **Resentment**

The regime from its inception created an administration along tribal lines causing national resentment. Coupled with unbridled and open corruption of theft, it caused a situation which is clearly drifting to tribal confrontation. In April 2012, 400 homeless families seized land in Keetmanshoop and resisted a court order and the armed police who tried to evict them. A few days later a 400-strong armed Herero commando stopped the regime from settling Ovambos on their land.

This regime is today faced with national resentment and insoluble crises. The working people who were left leaderless after 1990 have begun to reorganise themselves and are taking the old lessons in consideration. Another spectre facing this regime is the

struggle for reparations of the southern peoples against in particular Germany for its holocaust.

It is within the above emerging situation that this regime is threatening to inflict Marikana on the working class.

We are convinced that Marikana has finally consummated the fact that the struggle for Southern Africa is the class struggle and that race is a subordinate feature thereof just as all other presumptions and perversions accompanying the exploitation of man by man. This should free the workers movements' from the ideological vice-grips of the petit bourgeoisie and should release them to focus directly on the issue of socialism.

We face the task (daunting nevertheless) to restore and analyse the true history of Southern Africa as a material part of the class struggle. In this process, we should consider the argument of workers to form new unions as it appears that a struggle to oust and replace the bureaucrats of the statified, tribalised unions is not a democratic possibility.

#### **Clear position**

We need to fight within the European trade union movement for a clear position on the regimes of SWAPO, and the ANC and a clear break between it and the statified unions of Cosatu and the NUNW in favour of the South African Strike Committees and the Namibian Strike Committees and workers committees.

We need to reassert the principle laid down by Lenin that we only support the national bourgeoisie in so far as it advances the struggle and interests of the working class. This principle has been broken a thousand times in Southern Africa as can be seen in the support for ANC's Freedom Charter against the NUMSA's workers' Charter; the support for the SWAPO leadership against the SWAPO Youth League's demand for a socialist programme; support for SWAPO's and the ANC's mass murder of Namibian youth and the post 1976 youth of South Africa. It was not only broken by the forces identified above, but by the Left in South Africa generally.

*Hewat Beukes,*

5 January 2013

# What kind of leadership is necessary?

BRONWEN HANDYSIDE discusses questions raised by Unite the Union's General Secretary election in the UK and Ireland

The Unite General Secretary election has thrown into stark relief a mistaken idea of working class leadership held in common by Jerry Hicks (Unite General Secretary candidate) and an array of other groups and individuals within the UK workers' movement.

Their idea of leadership arises from an inadequate understanding of the present state of working class consciousness, and the necessity and the methods for its development.

These views (of leadership and the class) emerge particularly from those who are not seriously engaged in trying to organise within the class (in the trade unions and working class communities) to take it forward as a united and class conscious bloc in the face of the most ferocious onslaught from international capital it has yet faced. In other words, it emanates from those who have not taken up serious leadership positions within the class.

## Preachers

The chief holders and preachers of these views (in the political groups) have been badly equipped by their organisations' lack of theoretical development, which has an impact on individuals outside their groups as well as inside. The inadequacy of these ideas arises from the class nature of the petit bourgeoisie (middle class) which feels it (unlike the working class) can always find a back door out of the class struggle.

According to the SWP, Jerry Hicks et al, on one side we have the working class (aka the rank and file) lined up, ready and eager to go into battle against the class enemy. The only factor holding workers back is the parlous state of their leadership in the trade unions, and in the Labour Party, which are all – without exception – bureaucrats and traitors. All of the trade union leaders and officials are by definition traitors because they are paid by the union. ("Four legs good, two legs bad" as George Orwell wrote.)

The job of revolutionaries is to seize the occasions when the trade union bureaucracy makes its rotten compro-

mises with the ruling class (which it always does) and use those occasions to explain its treacherous nature to workers – most important of all to condemn loudly and publicly those defined as bureaucrats.

## Hymn sheet

The Socialist Workers Party never ceases singing from this hymn sheet. For instance, in the deal Unite negotiated in the British Airways (BA) dispute in 2010 (a settlement democratically agreed and supported by the BA membership); Unite's so-called "pause" during the public sector pensions' dispute (after the big unions in the public sector, GMB and Unison had walked away); the current demand for the TUC to "name the day" for a general strike; and now their backing for Jerry Hicks as Unite General Secretary.

This simplistic vision believes that once workers understand the treacherous nature of their existing leaders, they will turn instead to the leadership of the SWP/Jerry Hicks et al, who will lead them forth to defy the anti-union laws, engage in a General Strike, overthrow the Coalition government and implement a workers' state.

This view of the state of the workers' movement is based (I believe) on a vastly over-simplified reading of Trotsky's *Transitional Programme*: "The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership", which removes that statement out of its contemporary context and background and rejects the fact that the workers' movement has changed – and suffered great degeneration – since 1938. It also owes much to Trotsky's pamphlet on the trade unions *Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay*, similarly taking that publication out of its historical context.

This outlook leaves out in particular the past 30 years in Europe. In the UK it leaves out the destructive effects on working class consciousness of 30 years of defeats and strangling of disputes by anti-union legislation (unrepealed during 13 years by the Labour party – "their" party which is supposed to rep-

resent workers' interests). It leaves out the effect of the usurpation of the leadership of revolutionary movements in South America, Africa, Vietnam, China and elsewhere by non-working class forces (supported by Stalinist parties driven by Stalinist ideology, in particular the theories of the two stage revolution and socialism in a single country – the same ideology that brought about the eventual demise of the Soviet union).

And of course it leaves out the effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Despite the bureaucratic degeneration (which sowed confusion in the ranks of many of the best class fighters and led to its demise) it remained the outstanding bastion of working class rule ever achieved in the history of humanity. It was a bitter blow for the international workers' movement when the Soviet bureaucracy handed it over – without a shot fired – to the rapacity of the class enemy. Today we see the results – in the vast gulf between the lives of the majority and the new capitalist kleptocracy (of whom many are the very same bureaucrats who betrayed the workers' state).

## Degeneration

Part of the decay of the productive forces under capitalism since the Second World War has involved a degeneration of the class consciousness of the working class – its understanding of itself as a class in itself and for itself. This level of consciousness has enabled this mistaken notion of leadership to loom much larger than it deserves.

The low level of class consciousness is integrally bound up – co-extensive with – a low level of class organisation. Oft-quoted are the figures on the decline in union membership, and this is the most visible reflection of a great degeneration. Both the level of class consciousness and the organisations of the working class must simultaneously be rebuilt.

The most crucial organisation to be reconstructed is its revolutionary party, but this can only develop out of the reconstruction of working class consciousness and organisations as a

whole. In rebuilding itself as a class for itself, the class must also rebuild its conscious head. In the UK this will emerge from the trade unions in particular – and, we must hope, from a split in the Labour party itself of those who can no longer stomach the class betrayals.

The low level of class consciousness is manifested in the trade unions in the lack of independent working class positions on crucial questions (e.g. on Europe – Unite’s last policy conference debated only the Stalinist/bourgeois alternatives of “in or out” of the European union) and in the way in which the most theoretically deficient political groups can intimidate workers from discussion and attempt to break their confidence in their own capacity for leadership simply through petit bourgeois arrogance and their joint conviction of their petit bourgeois programme. It has a damaging effect on the movement and its capacity to mobilise the class and take it forward in successful collective actions.

#### Instinct

Out of class instinct, workers’ reject the SWP/Jerry Hicks line on working class leadership. But the movement as a whole can only integrate and rebuild if it understands the roots of their thinking, why they are wrong, and how they cause damage.

In the UK, the low level of class consciousness arises from the last 30 years of attacks and defeats for the class which has seen:

- **A long series of defeats for our big battalions (miners, steelworkers, printers, dockers) by the enemy class**
- **The physical removal of the big battalions, together with their developed class consciousness, from the movement.**
- **The imposition of the anti-union laws.**
- **The collapse of the Soviet Union**
- **The “globalisation” agenda which has seen the multi-nationals move the manufacturing industries to the countries where they can profit through the super-exploitation of workers – keeping UK workers in line with the threat (and the carrying out of the threat) to relocate industries.**
- **The failure of those who are supposed to represent us, in the Labour party, to speak out for the class and defend us on any of the class issues constantly erupting – manifest in the retention of the anti-union laws, their fundamental agreement with the market and the privatisation of the public services, and the abolition of the welfare state.**



*Unite members campaigning on pensions and public services*

There has been damage even to the fundamental concept of class solidarity which resulted in the walking away of Unison and the GMB from the public sector pensions’ dispute. The damage shows itself in the low level of union organisation in many sectors, and a collective forgetting even of how to conduct a picket line – that you endeavour to persuade those coming in to work not to cross it.

Those who are genuinely trying to lead the class into this battle are aware of these problems, and are working to overcome them. They are working to achieve the maximum unity and to build the confidence of workers’ leaders (and the confidence of workers in their leaders) at each stage in a divided movement. They are building the ship as they sail in it.

That means working to rebuild class consciousness and unity in the new battles coming up – and ensuring that we don’t lose any of our members along the way to futile defeats. It means building on the gains Unite (and the other unions) make in building for big cross-union actions, and developing members’ confidence that they can achieve victories through united action by ensuring that they do achieve something when they take action.

#### Pensions strike

Let us look at one stage in the workers struggle which the likes of the SWP and Jerry Hicks call a sell-out – the joint union public sector pensions strike on 30 November 2011.

Those who seriously worked within Unite for the success of this joint union action were clear that the secession of

UNISON and the GMB struck a great (but not really unexpected) blow at the primary aim – to beat the government using the united industrial strength of the unions.

#### Gains

But they also felt that there were a number of gains to take forward in the hard work done to build for the strike day.

1. No matter what happened afterwards, the unions came together to carry out this action – that remains within public consciousness and within the consciousness of those trade union members who took part.
2. Ditto for the point at which unions collectively faced down the government when it threatened to take all offers off the table if the strike went ahead, and again (after the strike had gone ahead) at the point where it was pumping out propaganda saying the strike had had no effect
3. In the course of preparing for 30 November, which involved meeting as many of the stewards as possible, and taking round a “Pensions Roadshow” to every public sector workplace to educate members on the issues, Unite got to know our lay organisers in the public sector. We got a much better picture of where we are organisationally strong or weak, and where we needed to put our organising resources.
4. In proceeding with caution, returning to the sector leaders’ committees after the defection of UNISON and the GMB to find out what strength and purpose was in the sectors, we did not lose members along the way to futile and confidence-sapping defeats.

5. In a huge operation, Unite's databases were cleaned – putting us in the best possible position for any future ballots.

The Jerry Hickses of the movement say that despite Unite having the smallest membership in the public sector of all the unions – 10 per cent – the General Secretary and the union's Executive should have told our members to carry on with their industrial action – with no hope of victory, standing on picket lines watching 90 per cent of their fellow workers in the other unions going into work.

### **Shout "charge!"**

In a period in which class consciousness and the confidence of the movement must be carefully built, which faces the most ferocious onslaught worldwide from a capitalist class which sees its opportunity to deal a death blow to all resistance, the Jerry Hickses say – all our leaders need to do to show "leadership" is to shout "Charge".

To say we are not yet at the level of class consciousness and organisation we need is not to give up the fight. On the contrary, to rebuild our union (and our movement) so that it is fit for purpose involves (of necessity) starting with the most clear-sighted view possible of where we are - in order to get to where we must be.

The process of reconstruction of working class organisation and purpose is underway – the 26 March (2010) TUC march (the biggest ever trade union march in the UK), the 30 June and 30 November (2011) joint trade union pensions strike and the 20 October 2012 TUC march were all stages in that. Every successful battle waged by the trade unions is a stage in that. The leaders in the trade union movement who take responsibility for the class as a whole, who have pushed for these joint trade union actions must be supported and assisted with all our strength.

In Unite this leadership (at the top Len McCluskey) is rebuilding the physical and organisational structures of the union – as an essential part of the rebuilding of class consciousness. The building of confidence for the battles ahead demands that our organisation is visibly powerful, well-coordinated, able to act swiftly while including the massive strength of the views of all our 1.5 million members across 23 different sectors. In short, fit for purpose.

Unite is engaged currently in a massive reorganisation of our union branches so that they are (as much as possible) based on the workplace. Following a long series of mergers (most

recently with Amicus which was itself the product of a whole series of mergers), Unite looked like a federation of individual unions, each with its own (different) identity and traditions, rather than one united structure which could deploy its strength as one coordinated whole.

We were also stuck with a huge number of geographical, "composite" branches – which included members randomly allocated from all our 23 sectors – i.e. they had no industrial logic. We found when we visited those branches that (despite being anything from 500-5000 members in size and covering large areas) they were kept going by three or four (usually retired) members, and that the branch meetings did not involve anyone other than that tiny number of retired members.

We recognised the way that those groups of members had kept those branches going – sometimes for decades – out of principle and conviction. (NB: Sometimes we found more mundane motives in that branch secretaries are paid a fee for administering their branches). But we worked to break up and reorganise those branches into workplace based bodies, because we were confident that that would encourage the members to participate more fully in the life of our branches, which are the structural base of the union through which individual members can become incorporated into full participation in the union and its democracy.

### **Promise**

Jerry Hicks' campaign is actively promising members that they will not have to leave their branches without their agreement. This is used to attack branch reorganisation, falsely claiming it's a top down, unaccountable exercise. It isn't and wasn't. Unite consulted and listened to its industrial sectors and engaged with them over at least a year, and every branch had the right of appeal to regional and then national structures. The promise to stop any serious reorganisation is reactionary. It reduces the union to an array of 1.5 million individuals, rather than the united class conscious bloc that it must be in order to achieve progressive change in society.

Unite is also carrying out a "100 per cent" recruitment campaign (named for the aim of the campaign – 100 per cent union membership in every workplace), and has concentrated substantial resources into its organising unit and now into its "leverage" unit (which produces campaigns for union justice

where there are problems getting strike action). The 100% campaign means Unite is one of the few unions to buck the trend and be recruiting new members – despite mass redundancies in many of the sectors we cover as a result of the recession.

In the face of these redundancies, and what they so often mean in terms of union organisation and the loss of union activists, Unite has also launched a unique "community" membership, open to the unemployed, students, pensioners etc.

### **Support**

The aim is to unite the employed with the unemployed, and with their communities under unprecedented attack. It also means the union holds on to its organisers and leaders as they are tossed onto the scrap heap, giving them support and organising them together with the rest of Unite to wage a united fight against the class enemy. It has enabled the Liverpool dockers to continue their working class internationalism as members of a Unite community branch.

Unite's leaders have also ensured that the union is tolerant and inclusive, that we conduct no divisive witch-hunts against activists like those carried out by, for example, Unison.

What you may call these "administrative" sides of the trade union reconstruction are inextricably bound up with our union's belligerent class attitude. Since Len McCluskey's election, and the election of a left Executive Committee, the union has not repudiated a single strike. When a group of workers within a sector take a decision for industrial action, that decision is backed unreservedly by the union.

Well aware that the onslaught of international capital and our reactionary government will be fought through industrial action, Unite set up a strike fund, with plans to accumulate £25 million – and strike pay has not only increased, but now starts on the first and not the third day of any action.

In addition, Unite has pushed forward the Prison Officers' Association (POA) motion calling for an examination of the practicalities of a general strike against austerity and was instrumental in getting it passed by the TUC. We are now actively engaged in working out what that strike action would look like for Unite as and when it is called.

The most class conscious workers in the UK have expressed their anti-capitalist views by voting for trade union leaders, like Len McCluskey, standing on



socialist policies to take forward their fight to defend jobs, wages, pensions, public services, the NHS and the vulnerable in society. These workers' views have not yet been shown in a vote for socialist candidates against Labour. The mass of workers have expressed their opposition to Labour by abstention in elections. In both cases there has been no decisive split from the Labour Party (Social Democracy).

Unite provides the largest amount of funding to the Labour party of any union (some £4 million in affiliation fees). In 2011 the union put forward an organised strategy to reclaim the Labour Party, which it has taken extremely seriously. It arose from exactly the same criticisms of Labour made by those currently calling for a new party (unfortunately some who make that call are mistakenly convinced that their own party is already that new party).

#### **Socialist politics**

The strategy includes the recruitment of 5000 Unite members into the Labour party to steer it at constituency level towards socialist politics, the prising open of its policy forums to adopt socialist policies, a methodical campaign to replace middle class Labour party careerists with trade union activists as MPs and local councillors, and "Constituency Level Agreements" which withhold Unite funding unless an MP's constituency actively pursues pro-union policies. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/97870410/Unite-Political-Strategy>

Unite's strategy has been entirely appropriate to this stage of the workers' movement, before its break from Social Democracy. The Workers' International will do what it can to support Unite's endeavour, because we are convinced that this will contribute to the necessary development in working class consciousness which will enable that decisive split to take place. Out of that split will emerge a new party for the class.

Hicks says he is neither calling for a new party for the class, nor does he believe that the Labour party can be reformed. The organisations he cites as models for the class are UK Uncut, the Occupy movement, and 38 Degrees. These are all organisations emerging out of the movement against austerity which have achieved excellent things out of the campaigns they have conducted, but none of them base themselves on the organised (or unorganised) working class. Their social base is petit bourgeois, and they suffer from the volatility of that class layer;



*Len McCluskey*

they appear at times of crisis, and can just as quickly disappear, like the organisation "Reclaim the Streets" which came to prominence in the mid-1990s. 38 Degrees in particular has no orientation towards the working class. These are good organisations which can work extremely well in an alliance with workers, but they must be led by the working class through its organisations.

The profound (and childish) error made by Jerry Hicks, the SWP, and other "left wing communists" is to completely separate the call for strike action from the necessity of the painstaking efforts that are taking place to rebuild the movement and its class consciousness by a group of (paid and unpaid) leaders who are taking responsibility for the class.

#### **Impotent anger**

Without that effort, workers can only respond with impotent anger, and no understanding that it is possible to confront the united force that faces us. In fact the only way serious and successful industrial action can be carried forward is in the context of those efforts. Every serious leader in the workers' movement who takes responsibility for the class as a whole knows this - as they know how to breathe.

Those who take responsibility only for themselves are completely oblivious to this, because they do not give a toss about taking the whole movement for-

ward, but only about their own image as the most "left" and most representative of the "rank and file".

However, their method of taking the movement forward is to stand on a soap box and shout "Charge" - and then look around in astonishment to find no-one behind them, confirming to them yet again that they must be the most left of the left. In fact, if you delve into the background of such "militants" who say they embody in themselves the interests of the rank and file, you will find that they are often not elected representatives of workers.

The question to be asked is - who made them the leaders of the rank and file? And the answer is - they elected themselves. The great glory of rank and file for them, and the reason they are so devoted to it, is that at all times that they can self-declare themselves to be its leaders, and because they are not elected, they are accountable to nobody.

They can dream up any dirty lies they like about any aspect of the movement, and any individual in the movement (and they do) because (as self-elected representatives of the rank and file) they have zero accountability. This puts the correct perspective on their fine statements about accountability and re-callability of trade union officials and officers.

What stinking hypocrisy to demand such things when they themselves hold

themselves accountable and recallable as “leaders” of the “rank-and-file” to no-one.

There is of course a crucial role for rank and file organisations in the movement (see the National Shop Stewards Network – a good attempt at a cross-union rank and file organisation. The essence of a rank and file however must be that it develops freely, in particular that it is not controlled by any leadership outside of its own – sadly for the NSSN it is now controlled by the Socialist Party. If that party could relinquish its grip, the NSSN could again play a key and positive role in developing the workers’ movement.)

Instead of taking positions of responsibility in the movement, these self-elected leaders devote their time to attacking the real leaders. In Unite, these unending attacks on all officials and officers as traitors create a destructive splitting of the movement. The trade unions need their good officials and officers, just as they need their lay membership. A great deal of the trade union’s strength in operation derives from a close, democratic and accountable relationship with its good officers.

#### **Confidence**

In this period when we must develop the confidence of our whole movement, leaders and “rank and file”, these nitwits are working night and day to dent our leadership’s confidence, and members’ confidence in their leadership. Their motivation includes a large element of petit bourgeois, anarchistic delight in the destruction of the movement.

To return to the British Airways dispute of 2010, which these rank and file leaders said was a sell-out, it is very helpful to read Lenin’s pamphlet *Left-wing communism, an infantile disorder* in which he describes their predecessors as “petty-bourgeois revolutionaries of even very respectable age and great experience”. NB: These elements in the workers’ movement have degenerated even further since Lenin’s day.

*‘Of course, to very young and inexperienced revolutionaries, as well as to petty-bourgeois revolutionaries of even very respectable age and great experience, it seems extremely “dangerous”, incomprehensible and wrong to “permit compromises”... However, proletarians schooled in numerous strikes (to take only this manifestation of the class struggle) usually assimilate in admirable fashion the very profound truth (philosophical, historical, political and psychological) expounded by Engels. Every proletarian has been through strikes and*

*has experienced “compromises” with the hated oppressors and exploiters, when the workers have had to return to work either without having achieved anything or else agreeing to only a partial satisfaction of their demands. Every proletarian – as a result of the conditions of the mass struggle and the acute intensification of class antagonisms he lives among – sees the difference between a compromise enforced by objective conditions (such as lack of strike funds, no outside support, starvation and exhaustion) – a compromise which in no way minimises the revolutionary devotion and readiness to carry on the struggle on the part of the workers who have agreed to such a compromise – and, on the other hand, a compromise by traitors who try to ascribe to objective causes their self-interest (strike-breakers also enter into ‘compromises’!), their cowardice, desire to toady to the capitalists, and readiness to yield to intimidation, sometimes to persuasion, sometimes to sops, and sometimes to flattery from the capitalists.”*

The SWP notoriously during the course of the BA dispute invaded Arbitration Service (ACAS) talks between BA management and Unite officials representing the BA workers. In an extraordinary act of arrogance (led by SWP secretary Martin Smith whose credentials as a leader have been thrown into stark relief by revelations over the past few months) these unelected leaders attempted to replace the official representatives of the union. Who gave them that right? Certainly not the BA membership who were appalled and angered by their destructive antics.

The SWP in the statement they later issued on the strike say “We recognised the onslaught faced by BA workers, and particularly the victimisation of UNITE activists by a vicious employer backed up by the full might of the establishment and millionaire press.”

#### **Pious**

This statement showed itself to be just pious word mongering – as is demonstrated by their criticism of the acceptance of the deal.

The BA settlement was the very best that could be extracted during that dispute, and during this period.

“Compromises” taken during the course of the struggle to assert the rights of the majority against the privileges of the few are given meaning by their history and context.

You cannot have your rigid unchanging formulae for all times and circumstances about what is right and wrong: “No compromises”, “Officers must be

electd”, “Officers of the union will always sell you out”, “All union committees are useless”.

In some times and circumstances (quite a few actually) to ensure the survival of the union, you have to make compromises. It is entirely (and utterly stupid) to say that all officers of the union will always sell you out. Election of officers may not be the best way to select officers in all times and under all circumstances – Unite’s most recent Rules conference decided that. It is fundamentally untrue to say all Unite’s committees are useless (as Jerry Hicks’ election material said in 2010).

#### **Inflexible**

These inflexible principles that take no account of history or context belong to the petit bourgeoisie. When their inflexible principles clash with the real nature of the class struggle, they simply walk away from it. Witness the SWP’s long history of junking the organisations it set up, or helped to set up, without explanation, because it could not keep control of them: the Anti-Nazi League (ANL), Rank & File organisations set up in the unions in the 70s, “Women’s Voice”, the Socialist Alliance, Respect, Right to Work, and many more. How long will it be before they junk “Unite the Resistance” and dream up some other outfit which suits their recruitment and control agenda? This kind of inconsistency is the mark of a “leadership” that takes responsibility only for itself.

With every action and decision made during the fight for social justice and a new world order, real leadership takes responsibility for the union as a whole – and in fact the workers’ movement as a whole – to preserve it and to strengthen it as much as possible at all times. This is in order that the class can develop its confidence and its understanding of its role in taking on and defeating the class enemy. The assumption of this kind of responsibility - for the movement as a whole - by working class leadership is the one principle that does remain the same throughout all times and circumstances. Out of this principle arises the flexibility of tactics necessary to take us forward.

*Bronwen Handyside,*  
April 2013

# Jerry Hicks – wrong politics

Writing in a personal capacity, JIM KELLY, Chair, London & Eastern Region Unite the Union argues through the politics of the recent election for General Secretary of the union

I am putting this note forward to challenge the claim of Hicks and his confederates that somehow he is the candidate of the left and McCluskey just another bureaucrat. It is time to go beyond the hallmark of Hicks and his cohort's infantile attempt to see all those in official positions as the same, and to see McCluskey as someone whose occupation is selling out the rank-and-file (R&F). The starting point for unravelling all of this is to consider Hicks' claim to be the candidate of the R&F. We need first to consider who the R&F are.

So who are the R&F? The main plank of Hicks' campaign is that he presents himself as the champion of the R&F, indeed their self-anointed leader in waiting.

## Elbowed

There have been no meetings of this "R&F group" to democratically decide on a candidate; Jerry didn't even attend the last Grassrootsleft (GRL) national Annual General Meeting in November in Birmingham. He just elbowed any potential alternatives out of the race in late December, by anointing himself. Even the Catholic Church has to go through the ritual of an election by a conclave of Cardinals, but apparently not our "R&F"

Now, while any trade unionist worth their salt will identify with the R&F, who does Jerry Hicks speak for, and what does he mean by the R&F?

One thing I share in common with Jerry Hicks is that I joined a union in 1976. I joined the old Union of Postal Workers (UPW). I went on to join the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) in 1976. I became a rep in one of the largest and most militant sorting offices in the country, and went on to help found the Rank & File Post Office Worker Group with other SWP activists.

Our R&F group was one of a number at the time, R&F Docker, Teacher, Building Worker to name a few. While they were called R&F groups in fact all they were, was the SWP and its periphery, with no independent political life of their own. Once the SWP decided to close them down they struggled to sur-

vive. The point is that all of these R&F groupings, like the SWP of the late '70s and Jerry Hick's Grassrootsleft, are constituted by either one or more political organisation, or groups of and populated by the organisation's membership and contacts.

The fact that the GRL is comprised of people in different and no political organisations does not invalidate its political nature. Read their organisational structure clearly; it is a political formation with its own discipline and committee structure. Its political character is, I think shown rather neatly by the following piece of idiocy:

*"For the right of the rank and file to veto all management decisions and workers control over all aspects of production, including hiring and firing, for workers' control over and nationalisation without compensation of all firms sacking workers in the interests of profit."*

Call me old fashioned if you will, but to me this demand is a call for dual power and rather than a union, they are demands for workers' council (soviets) linked to the formation of a workers' government. Now is it that the Unite bureaucracy is stopping the members making this demand realisable (the bastards) or maybe is it a bit of an aspiration? ... and by the way this will not be a right – as if in a state of dual power these rights would be given to workers, rather it is something we will struggle for and take.

## Represent

So do they represent the authentic voice of the R&F? Well, only in a post-modernist sense whereby asserting something makes it real. What Hicks and the political organisations supporting him have in common is rather than being part of the R&F they appropriate the term R&F as a label for their political project.

So when Hicks (SWP /GRL) speaks about the R&F he is inevitably talking about the political programme he wishes union members to adopt. This is not unique; all organisations attempt to influence the union in one way or another, to their own end.

Of course there have been many rank and file movements in the past which have been just that; movements. The common denominator which binds together all such R&F movements is, they came into existence when a leadership pursues a policy opposed to members' interests: – close down democracy, block a militant industrial action etc. Herein is the second problem for Hicks' use of the term R&F: there is no movement because there is no need for such a movement. Consider the following:

- **Are there any bans and proscriptions on organising in Unite? No, contrast this with the attacks on the left in UNISON.**
- **Is there any attempt to close down industrial action? No, this has been fully supported.**
- **Is there an attempt to promote industrial action? Yes, the Union has sponsored industrial action. For example enhanced strike pay.**
- **Is there a democratic lay member structure? Yes, this was fought for and won against the old Amicus leadership.**
- **Has Unite attempted to build the union through militant activity? Yes, the organising unit is testimony to this.**
- **Is there lay member control over officers? Yes, seen in the role of the Executive Council and in the National Industrial Sector Committees (NISCs) and Regional Industrial Sector Committees (RISCs).**

These are the reasons there is no R&F movement. Does everything work in Unite? Clearly not, much seems to me dysfunctional. I could write out a list of errors, mistakes etc. However when I criticise the national leadership, I do so in the context of the leadership building a democratic, open class struggle union.

Given that McCluskey's record is one of strengthening the union, encouraging lay participation and providing a national political voice for members, why do we have the spectacle of left groups campaigning against a strong effective fighting-back left general secretary? Because Hicks (the SWP & GRL)

have set up their watertight division between the R&F and the leadership; to admit anything other than the leadership are selling out the membership would break down that division and with it the political dogma on which they rest.

Looking at the facts: The real question for the R&F is this: has McCluskey strengthened or weakened our movement? What is his track record in the disputes where we have membership density? In the three biggest private sector disputes of the last five years – with Willie Walsh and British Airways (BA), over BESNA in the construction industry, and the London bus workers' Olympic 500 campaign – Len was instrumental in achieving historic victories by building on the energy of lay activists with the resources of the full-time administration and uniting the union in difficult struggles. Let's look at the Building Engineering Services National Agreement (BESNA) and the bus actions.

#### **BESNA dispute**

The BESNA dispute is viewed as being run and won by the R&F. Indeed the dispute was going nowhere until Len called for the Organising and Leverage Department to work out a strategy for victory. At one of the final "R&F mass pickets" at Kings Cross station the construction workers present were vastly outnumbered by Left paper sellers.

An excellent set of Unite leaflets in many languages were produced by the region and the organising unit, but the paper sellers steadfastly refused to give these to building workers going into work, choosing instead to distribute obscure tracts amongst themselves. The dispute in London was rudderless and ineffective by this time. Any building worker present could be forgiven for thinking the circus had come to town rather than an effective trade union protest. Here we see how the term R&F can be used to mean anything you like. In this instance the R&F equalled the left rather than R&F building workers.

Then there was the bus workers' dispute. In a major feat of organising, the London & Eastern Region brought together workers from 20 or so bus companies and won what was described by the press as a union's first offensive victory in many years while London's Conservative mayor Boris Johnson bemoaned: "we stuffed their mouths with gold for nothing".

This presented a model relationship between officers, the lay officials and

members. Also, as with Besna, McCluskey supported the strike 100%, providing the Region with the resources needed to win.

Of course, with hindsight it is possible to criticise aspects of the tactics of these strikes. However, this would be to miss the point; the leadership enabled maximum support in which officers and lay members acted. There are a number of points Hicks and his friends should take note of:

- **Rather than sell out these strikes, the leadership supported them and led them in conjunction with the lay members. It would be good to know why anyone would think they would do anything else.**

- **Many strikes today (including the ones cited) can only be won by the R&F and leadership working in tandem. If unions are going to develop industrial muscle, then there has to be a new relationship between the R&F and the leadership.**

As one looks closely at Hicks' claims, we can see he does not represent the R&F but has appropriated the term for his political project. The conditions to move the R&F agenda forward from being an amalgam of left wing groupings to a movement do not exist because of the openness of the leadership and their commitment to militant industrial action. Indeed the entire rationale of the R&F candidate against the bureaucrat falls apart. It is however impossible for the R&F to admit that the union leadership could give full support to industrial action, let alone sponsoring it. Unable to explain this, they either ignore it or they put forward rationalisations such as the trite, R&F pressure.

What does Hicks stand for? Once removed from his R&F wrapping, what is Hicks' radical programme? This is what his web-site tells us:

#### **"Some of what I stand for:**

- **Branch restructuring is chaotic but can be remedied: No member will be re-allocated to a Branch without their prior agreement.**

- **The election of all officials, elected by members, not appointed by an individual or a panel.**

- **Lead a fight to repeal the anti union laws UK & EU and when necessary to confront them.**

- **For a General Secretary to live the life of the members they represent, on an average member's wage not a six figure salary.**

- **A Public Works programme, with the first jobs offered to blacklisted construction workers.**

- **The creation of one million 'Green' jobs. One million potential members."**

**Lead the fight?** It may come as a shock, but Unite is in the forefront of fighting to repeal the anti-union laws. Under McCluskey we have not repudiated any strike. So what's the point in this statement? I think it must be the rev, rev revolutionary bit at the end; '...and when necessary to confront them'. We are left wondering what that means. Is it always right to confront them? Should it be a tactical question when to confront them? Who should decide? Should you take into account the wider consequences for the union? The statement is meaningless except as a polemical device of upping the ante.

**"A Public Works programme, and the creation of one million ..."** For sure we need an alternative economic programme, now one can either put forward a revolutionary or a Keynesian programme, but a couple of random slogans are not serious. There is also the not unimportant question of who will implement this call, how will you make this happen?

I guess these points are just there to make up a list, a botched attempt at transitional-type demands

The meat of Jerry's programme is the following.

#### **Election of officers.**

This was debated at Unite's first Rules Conference in 2011. It was overwhelmingly defeated by democratically-elected lay delegates to the conference. So having gone through the Unite lay structures, this key demand of Hicks has been rejected. Of course he has every right to raise it, but it is not something the General Secretary can implement. Why make such a big deal of this except as a political gesture.

I spoke against the motion for election of officers at that 2011 conference. Then as today there are several reasons why this would be a crazy idea for Unite:

- 1. How would officers be elected – by everyone (including retired members) in a region or by sectors?**

- 2. Who would officers be accountable to, the members who elected them, or, as now, the RISCs, regional committees and regional secretaries?**

- 3. What member would leave his or her job to sign up for a limited time period of employment which in some cases could necessitate a wage cut?**

- 4. Officers working in full-time election mode, gravitating towards workplaces or factions in their allocations which deliver a decisive vote. This**



**Unite members in London and Eastern Region support BA workers**

would detract from any objective strategic recruitment, organising or retention strategy. It would further plunge our structures and working lives into a permanent state of confusion. It would give officers a political mandate, which should be the prerogative of the lay members.

**5. Most importantly it would mean permanent factionalism in the union as left and right mobilised to get their person in office. Pity the rank and file!**

Many of our members who see election of officers as a panacea for all our troubles are not informed that our present system of appointment by a lay panel of the Executive Council, where no EC member can sit on an appointment panel for their own region, is far better.

The problems for the left in the union will not be solved by election of officers.

The answer to issues surrounding officer control is to make our lay committees and branches function more effectively, ensuring a proper lay scrutiny of officer performance and making sure the committees have the politics and confidence to tackle the issue of non-performing, ineffective officers.

Maybe Jerry Hicks only listens to the R&F when they agree with him, or maybe he is so out of touch with our new union's democracy that he is oblivious of this important decision of our Rules Conference.

**A General Secretary on a worker's wage.** A further key pledge is to only accept an average worker's wage. Jerry says he is prepared to accept £26,000 a year. When a leading Hicks supporter put this to a training course of reps and branch secretaries he was met with a mixture of incredulity and laughter. As a long serving branch secretary put it-

"that is less than I earn driving a bus in London. You must be joking!"

Unite is a general workers' union, where many of our members earn anything from around £25,000 to £60,000 plus for senior grades in some sectors. It has many hundreds of employees, manages many properties around Britain & Ireland and most importantly fights back on behalf of well over a million members. Ask the majority of our members if the highest position in our union, with such enormous responsibilities, should be paid a wage that would mean you couldn't afford to live in many parts of London or Birmingham. You would not be taken seriously.

The issue of wages should be focused on negotiating more money and better terms and conditions for our members and increasing the amount of British and Irish workers covered by collective agreements, especially in the private sector. This is exactly what Len's strategy is aiming to do.

This is an infantile plank of Jerry's platform. It shows an opportunist "showman" attitude which runs through much of his manifesto.

**Branch Reorganisation - a view from Unite's largest region.** Jerry started his campaign by stating that all individual members objecting to moving branch would not have to, that composite branches would stay, in effect, intact. He now has changed his position to agreeing with the principle, but states that branch reorganisation is chaotic and accuses Unite of being dictatorial.

This issue really exposes Jerry Hicks as out of touch. In my region the process was carried through by our lay committees reporting back to branches. The committee which oversaw the process consisted of myself, a lay Regional Chair and a lay Executive Council member overseeing, alongside the Deputy Regional Secretary.

Every Chair and Secretary of our 23 industrial lay committees was tasked with bringing forward proposals. These were scrutinised and amended where necessary. The Lay Regional Industrial Sector Committees (RISCs) then debated all proposals and amendments, finalised their proposals and resubmitted them. Where there was an issue the lay Chairs were again consulted and agreement was reached. Updates were reported to the Regional Committee. We even held a special Regional Committee to discuss proposals and progress. Composite branch secretaries were informed of the strategy. Branches

affected were allowed to raise objections. Finalised proposals and objections were dealt with by the lay Executive Council.

Why branch reorganisation? Unite was a merger of 2 unions. AMICUS itself was a merger of 5 unions, all with different traditions and culture, all suffering the scars of 20 years of employer attacks on our organisation and our fighters and activists.

One of the consequence of this was our composite branches with no industrial logic were allowed by our legacy unions to fill the vacuum. These composites were clearly bloated and dysfunctional in many regions and sectors. Yet within most, were many thousands of members who would be better organised in workplace, sector, or sub sector branches. In our Region we recognised this would be a better platform to rebuild our bargaining strength in the workplace and, alongside the 100% campaigns and Organising Units, help to halt a strategy of managing decline. Not only was it the right thing to do, it was done democratically bottom-up. It also allows for new members to be better placed participating in branches which are organised around an industrial logic.

### **Composite**

It is not difficult to see why many composite branch officials want to stop change. However it is beyond me why Hicks, his SWP and GRL are supporting this conservative block to developing a militant trade unionism. The only answer is simple opportunism; let's all abandon our R&F principles and garner a few votes by supporting the conservatives.

A policy which is now even more absurd when he demands: 'No member will be re-allocated to a branch without their prior agreement'. What is this nonsense? Let's not forget we have been through a collective decision-making process, How are we to inform the members? What happens if, say, one decides they don't want to move? Do we keep the branch open? This is simply not serious. It not only stinks of opportunism, it should tell all that Hicks has not a clue about how to lead a trade union.

**The Hicks programme and the union structure.** While Hicks has a lot to say about the R&F and industrial action, the issue he fails to address is the existing Unite structures and his view of them. We can guess by the fact he has held no lay office in Unite. As far as I am aware, he has never been a Unite

delegate to a Policy or Rules conference. He has never sat on a regional committee or any of our Unite regional or national Industrial Sector Committees. Despite his high-profile attendance at many construction picket lines, he has had no experience of working within our lay structures; he has not been involved in the discussions within our union around our lay structures. This is one reason why the R&F approach is disconnected from, and unconcerned with, our union committee structures, the sinews which bind the union together.

**Fighting the battle of several unions ago.** When you strip down what Hicks is saying, remove all the political verbiage, what makes sense comes from how craft unions organised and the radical tradition of militant shop stewards. Here stewards negotiated over pay and job control and along with the members of the shop had a large amount of autonomy from the Region and National organisation.

Many craft workers in Unite see this as the natural form of union organisation (as do many on the left, who would not know a capstan lathe if it hit them on the head. They have been told this form of union organisation is the road to militancy). So Hicks can and does call on the past in his campaign and there will be many who, like him, wish to roll back the clock. But it cannot happen.

Even if Hicks was to win (God help us), he could not run Unite on such lines. It may have passed him by, but Unite is not a bigger version of the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU). Even in workplaces where this model is still appropriate, there is often an ineffective membership density.

For example, one of our SWP members (always banging on about the need to be more militant) had less than 5% density in his British Aerospace workplace, despite having a recognition agreement locally and national agreements.

This is replicated to a greater or lesser extent across workplace organisation in semi-skilled and skilled sectors. However, if this was our only problem we would be in a far better place than we are. We are also faced with:

- **A lack of shop stewards; Unite has far fewer stewards than the T&G had in the early '80s, and maybe even fewer than the T&G did in the 1950s when there was neither legal recognition nor any formal role within the union.**



***building on the energy of lay activists with the resources of the full-time administration and uniting the union in difficult struggles.***

- **Huge numbers are in workplaces where there are less than 50 members.**
- **Collective bargaining has declined from around 70% to 30%. A large number of members do not have any bargaining rights.**

Without collective bargaining and stewards to undertake it, craft unionism is not possible. So, while a small minority within Unite are still able to function in this way, the vast majority cannot. For the majority, Unite is a general union.

If Hicks and his friends only kept their eyes open instead of putting negatives wherever McCluskey puts a positive, they would see a new pattern of industrial struggles emerging which link together the 'real' R&F (the members) and the full-time officials. But hey, why bother about taking the class struggle forward when you can call black white? Much more fun.

Jerry's campaign is not a progressive campaign. He is standing against the most outstanding Left leader of the British and Irish trade union movement, a leader who has not repudiated one strike as General Secretary, who has given his support to all the major Unite

industrial disputes over the last few years, British Airways, Besna and London bus workers. Len McCluskey is a General Secretary who has a clear vision and strategy: to rebuild union strength in the workplace and in working class communities.

Jerry Hicks' campaign is a bringing-together of large sections of the sectarian left, who like Hicks live off dogma rather than address the nature of today's class struggle.

Jerry Hicks is also, in my view, going to receive a big vote from right wingers manoeuvring to undermine Len McCluskey's strategy for building a fit-for-purpose, fighting-back union. The Right, not the Left will gain from Jerry's decision to continue, even though he received only around 135 branch and workplace nominations to Len's nearly 1100. Jerry's campaign is more about the divisions and manoeuvrings in the sectarian left than anything else. More than that, Jerry Hicks is clearly a member lacking the vision or politics to take our great new union, Unite, forward.

*Jim Kelly*

Chair, London & Eastern Region Unite the Union (personal capacity)

# A key moment in the struggle for a revolutionary party and international

The enormous value of this book is documentary: activists and scholars can now easily access and judge for themselves a key moment in the history of the struggle for a revolutionary party and a revolutionary international immediately after the Russian Revolution.

In the summer of 1920, the Second Congress of the Communist International (CI) got seriously to grips with the establishment of a world party of socialist revolution. This involved building an organisation out of many different and often conflicting tendencies. One thing that united them all was the huge international groundswell of support for the new soviet state.

Delegates included revolutionary grouping of workers to one degree or another outside of political parties, like the British shop stewards and the Spanish anarcho-syndicalists; some sectarian Marxist groups highly critical of any lapses of political theory; representatives of anti-colonial struggles; and also socialist organisations of various sizes moving away from the “official”, reformist socialist parties towards support for the Communist International or internally divided over the question.

One of the most prominent in the latter category was the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany (USPD), which had broken from the main Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) because of its support for Germany’s war effort in World War I and the social truce it had made with the German ruling class for the duration.

## Revolutionary

The supporters of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were avowed revolutionary Marxists who broke away from the USPD to form the Spartacus League (Spartakusbund) in January 1919, which quickly rallied to the Communist International. The main body of the USPD, on the other hand, was much more mixed.

It contained the old leader -- and for years upholder of the Marxist, revolutionary tradition in the SPD -- Karl Kautsky. But it also contained (from 1917 to

## ***Martov and Zinoviev: Head to head in Halle***

With introductory essays by Ben Lewis and Lars T Lih  
November Publications, London,  
2011. ISBN 978-1-4478-0911-1. £14  
“Dedicated to the United Opposition  
and all the victims of Stalinist  
counterrevolution”  
(This review was first published in  
*Revolutionary History*)

1919) his main “revisionist” opponent, the man who epitomised and expressed theoretically the reformist, parliamentary, and ultimately class-collaborationist outlook which came to dominate in the SPD, Eduard Bernstein.

Many of the leaders of the USPD were experienced officials of the SPD and its affiliated trade unions. The issue of the war had forced them out of the old party, but it did not alter their outlook fundamentally.

## Collapse

However, the military collapse of the German Reich after four years of total war and the political and social collapse it brought unleashed violent class struggles across Germany. Soldiers and sailors mutinied and joined with workers to establish proto-soviets. A socialist republic was actually established in Munich and mutated into a soviet republic as it struggled to survive armed repression.

Encouraged by “majority” socialists terrified of social disintegration, reactionary paramilitary units were armed and equipped and unleashed on the revolutionaries. Early in 1919 Luxemburg and Liebknecht and Leo Jogiches were arrested and murdered. Many revolutionary workers were slaughtered.

Besides formal political organisations, there were mass movements of working people, including the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, workers’ own paramilitaries and groups of non-party communists and anarchists. (Quite a varied literature about these developments is starting to become available in

English.) The mass of rank-and-file members of the USPD were closer to this ferment and to what was going on further east than they were to their own leaders.

The Second Congress of the Communist International adopted a set of conditions for membership (the 21 points) and in the months that followed a great debate broke out in the USPD over affiliation to the Communist International.

Feelings ran high on both sides, and in the upshot the USPD split, with a majority joining with Spartakus League in a United Communist Party of Germany while most of the USPD leadership subsequently returned to their old home in the SPD.

The climax of the dispute came at the USPD special Congress in Halle in October 1920. Comintern leader Grigory Zinoviev made a speech that lasted 4 hours defending the Bolsheviks and inviting affiliation. Pitched against him was among others Julius Martov, one of the outstanding leaders of the Russian Mensheviks. These were Russian socialist opponents of the Bolsheviks, who broadly speaking supported the Russian Revolution but opposed the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks and the establishment of a state based on soviets, the councils of workers’, peasants’ and soldiers’ representatives.

## The texts

The four documents here assembled for the first time as a whole in English are

1. “Twelve Days in Germany”, Zinoviev’s own report of the event written on his return to Russia;
2. His address to the Congress, recorded as “World Revolution and the Third International”;
3. “May the USPD be Preserved”, Martov’s speech in reply to Zinoviev and
4. Zinoviev’s “Closing Words” which were not actually delivered at the Congress, as his already over-taxed vocal chords had succumbed to an infection.

The undoubted leader of the right wing of the USPD and most prominent theoretician opposed to affiliation to the CI was Karl Kautsky. However, he was not at the Congress. Many leaders were



**Martov**

in attendance and did oppose affiliation, but until the whole proceedings of the Halle Congress can be made available in English, the selection of the two Russians, Zinoviev and Martov, (neither of them members of the USPD of course) as representatives of the two opposing trends is probably the happiest.

It was indeed a confrontation of revolutionary and reformist politics.

Martov is the more intelligent and intellectually-gifted of the two speakers. He is lucid and logical and steeped in a theoretical understanding of Marxism. However, all this is mustered to serve conservative ends, to curb action, to warn against initiatives and persuade socialists to remain in the halfway house of the USPD.

Martov has two main lines of attack. The first is to emphasise that a post-war political collapse and general crisis is a bad time to have a socialist revolution. Malignant "elemental" forces are unleashed, he argues, which can end up who knows where. Socialists, Marxists, should oppose their mistaken fanatical zeal to remake a world that is not ready for it, but the Bolsheviks have succumbed to these forces.

#### **Eschew**

Socialists should eschew this madness, remain dispassionate, knowing that the objective pre-requisites for socialism must first be assembled, while workers gradually absorb enough theoretical class-consciousness to achieve and organise the new society rationally.

He views the revolutionary ferment arising from the war and its aftermath as a distemper, a dark fever which clouds minds and opens the door to every kind of breakdown.

He points out that revolutionary Russia is saddled with a peasant mass. The country is not really ripe for socialist revolution because Russian capitalism is not yet sufficiently developed. Furthermore, hopes of an international response are illusory; the country is isolated, and does not possess the resources to construct a socialist society on its own. The Bolshevik leaders are behaving irrationally and increasingly frantically. He foresees a disaster.

In his opinion, the extent and violence of revolutionary terror practised by the Soviet regime show the dangers. Martov goes into detail on this: how the Bolsheviks claim to have abolished the death penalty, only to resurrect it again in order to kill political opponents; how they take hostages in order to terrorise; how they punish people whose only "guilt" is by association; how the leadership of the Social Revolutionary Party is collectively punished for the actions of a few members.

#### **Terror**

His second main argument is to show up apparent logical inconsistencies in the Bolsheviks' actions. They denounce reactionary terror against socialists, but practice terror themselves. They accuse majority socialists of allying with the bourgeoisie in the west, but happily ally themselves with murderous, genocidal Turkish nationalists like Enver Pasha, and even establish a statelet around Vladivostok (to block Japanese incursions) with a socially very mixed regime.

In the name of the socialist revolution, they make alliances with muslim clerics. They arouse the worst passions in the peoples of the east but have no future to offer them. Will they go on to whip up hindus to fight the very muslims Zinoviev is currently inciting to jihad?

In the name of "super-Marxism", they preach the doctrine of Michael Bakunin, against which Marx fought all his life. Martov ends with a plea for a rational western Marxist international

Martov's speech is a diatribe against Bolshevism which obviously rests on profoundly-held beliefs. However, essentially it is sophistry. It is the deployment of logical and legalistic arguments against a living force, which is why it was applauded by the USPD leaders and simply exasperated the USPD left.

Superficially convincing, many of Martov's arguments turn out to be logic chopping. An alliance with the local elite in a colony or semi-colony in order to

fight together against imperialism is not the same as joining with the imperialist Kaiser to fight the imperialist Allies. Rejecting Narodism in the late 19th century is not the same as repudiating a Russian revolution in the early 20th with massive peasant participation as the first blow in the world revolution brought on by a general imperialist crisis. Opposing the official church in an imperialist state is not the same as defending the rights of religious groups that the same state oppresses. An alliance with one oppressed nationality or its religion does not automatically mean disrespecting another.

The rest of his arguments merely rehearse things which people knew very well. Russia was a backward country and the biggest part of the population were peasants. The Russian Revolution could not succeed in isolation. The price of failing to overcome these two problems, many people understood, would be very high indeed.

(Incidentally, Lars T, Lih asserts that "Martov's analysis overlaps to a considerable degree with various interpretive arguments from the Trotskyist tradition, although with the value signs changed from plus to minus". And he goes on: "The difference between the two interpretations mainly concern timing" [p. 165]. They concern a great deal more than timing. The problems facing the Russian revolution were fairly clear to many of the leaders at the time, and became clearer. And yet, where Martov prostrated himself before these established facts, the Bolsheviks devoted themselves to overcoming them. That is what revolutions do.)

#### **Altered**

Thought tends to strangle movement. Theoreticians continue to repeat "truths" when reality has changed. The world during and after World War I was profoundly altered.

This is why Zinoviev repeated (as he had at the Second Congress of the Comintern) Nietzsche's phrase about the need to "re-evaluate all values" ("eine Umwertung aller Werte").

Zinoviev bluntly asserts that: "...the working class is already strong enough that - if we are tightly united and openly fight for communism - we can bring the bourgeoisie to its knees ... If workers are still slaves, then that is because we still have not stripped off the legacy of rotten ideology within our own ranks".

"Who is saving the bourgeoisie?" he asks. "The so-called social democrats".

He is careful to deny charges that the Russian Bolsheviks dominate the CI and



dictate to other parties, an accusation which he derides as “the ‘knout’ is coming from Moscow”.

He accuses the USPD right of “fear of the revolution”, for worrying about the disruption it will cause. He asserts that “the economic preconditions” (for socialism) “are present”, and mocks: “Do you first want to put capitalism back on its feet and then tear it down again?”

While socialists might have hoped there could be a smooth transition, “the war threw a spanner in this calculation”, so that the path to socialism includes famine, suffering and “a long stage of civil war”.

### **Dividing**

Zinoviev knows that the CI’s negative attitude to the “so-called Trade Union International” (“a weapon of the international bourgeoisie”) will attract accusations of dividing workers from each other. To counter such an attack, he emphasises the revolutionary wave in the working class which animated actions like the refusal of London dockers to load ships with arms for Poland.

He has to soothe USPD members’ concerns over the 21 conditions for membership of the CI, especially the fact that they had been toughened up so as to exclude the right-wing USPD leaders. His core argument is that these leaders oppose Bolshevism on principle and slander the soviet state.

He has to defend the CI policy on the land and the national question against formal Marxist assertions that the working class alone is the force to achieve socialism.

Rudolf Hilferding sneers that: “the mullahs of Chiva are communists!”, but Zinoviev explains: “... we in the Third International are aware that we really have to speak to the workers of the whole world – and not merely from a European point of view” and: “The Second International was restricted to people with white skin; the Third International does not classify people according to the colour of their skin”.

He brushes aside the caveat that many of what he describes as “the oppressed of all countries” are themselves “young capitalist states”.

All these are issues which still resonate in the socialist movement.

Against the accusation that the CI is encouraging religious obscurantism, Zinoviev talks about what happens when women in the Orient become conscious of communism, join demonstrations and abandon their veils: “I say



*Zinoviev*

to you, that is a world historical event”. He quotes Rosa Luxemburg about breaking the resistance of the bourgeoisie “with an iron fist”, explains how in the course of the revolution the Bolsheviks in Russia and Finland were forced by bloody experience to abandon any illusions, and adds: “It is not a matter of morality versus immorality.”

### **“Abstract”**

Anticipating Martov, he roars: “...you are still thinking about the revolution in a completely abstract way. You think that it will come in a hundred years. You do not want to deal with concrete circumstances as they are in Germany ...”.

He justifies terror against Social Revolutionaries, quoting an SR party resolution which called for the “liquidation of the Bolshevik government” and offered to allow Allied troops into Russia. These people, he says, call themselves socialists but they are bourgeois agents. He rehearses the need to use terror against the bourgeoisie: “The struggle for socialism is the most violent war known in world history, and the proletarian revolution must

prepare itself with the munitions necessary in order to fight and win”.

Zinoviev defends the dictatorship of the proletariat and the 21 points. He accuses the USPD of confusion and vacillation: “It stems from the fact that you are still not quite clear on these decisive questions of principle. A whole number of shades of opinion exist in your leadership and the individuals within it.”

USPD leader Crispian attacked the Communist International’s policy on the land and the peasantry. (German Social Democrats had a longstanding policy of nationalisation of the land and the socialisation of agricultural production, to be run on rational, scientific lines. The Bolsheviks had nationalised the land but left it for the time being in the hands of the peasants).

Zinoviev explains that many countries in the world only have a “thin layer” of proletarians and that the workers are obliged to find allies among the peasants. He calls on the delegates to recognise that seizure of the land by poor and middling peasants is a revolutionary act. He accuses Crispian of wanting to “prepare the soil from

which the counterrevolution can recruit its armies.”

He explains that the CI was prepared to countenance situations where large agricultural units (*latifundia*) are taken over by peasants and broken up. (“Heckle from Crispian: ... ‘Back to the Middle Ages!’”)

### Resolution

Zinoviev has to defend the CI’s attitude on national questions, quoting the actual resolution that was passed on Enver Pasha at the Baku Congress and saying: “without this support we cannot make world revolution”.

He accepts the criticism that the system of workers’ and peasant’s soviets gives a voice also to backward elements, but explains that the soviets themselves “will become very generous universities for these workers. They will soon get rid of their own prejudices”.

Describing the situation in Russia, he cannot help “mirroring” some of the criticisms of the socialist opponents of the Bolsheviks.

The situation is critical; many of the best people have sacrificed themselves in the struggle; the necessities of life are in such short supply that “our workers from Petersburg and Moscow looked like ghosts”. “Dodgy and shady types” have “forced their way into the party”. But “proletarian revolution cannot be had cheaply”.

His speech brims with confidence that the revolution can be spread “with the bayonet and with all other possible means”, that an aggressive spirit will be enough to break through to further revolutions in western Europe, and that only the reactionary ideology of bureaucratic leaders is barring the way.

### The introductory essays

Ben Lewis and Lars Lih have their own “takes” on the history of Marxism which they develop explicitly elsewhere. A general discussion of their conceptions deserve serious consideration which cannot be accommodated within the scope of this review. Nevertheless the point about Zinoviev’s reputation does require comment.

Years later, Zinoviev was accused of complicity in the Kirov assassination and of plotting, with Trotsky, terrorist attacks on the Soviet Union. He was – apparently despite a promise from Stalin that his life would be saved -- executed in Moscow on 25th August, 1936 as an enemy of the Soviet Union.

Stalin’s torturers made him say: “I would like to repeat that I am fully and utterly guilty. I am guilty of having been the organizer, second only to Trotsky,

of that block whose chosen task was the killing of Stalin. I was the principal organizer of Kirov’s assassination. The party saw where we were going, and warned us; Stalin warned us scores of times; but we did not heed these warnings. We entered into an alliance with Trotsky.”

Zinoviev was a committed Bolshevik, a close associate of Lenin and a devoted servant of the world working class and the cause of the socialist revolution. Restoring and rehabilitating his reputation in history involves re-asserting that against the vile slanders of Stalin, Yagoda, Yezhov and their creatures.

However, his actual role in the Communist International and in the struggles in the Soviet Union has been the subject of serious criticism. He is mentioned as something of a bag-carrier for Lenin (c.f Pierre Broué: *Histoire de L’Internationale Communiste*, Fayard 1997 p. 21). Isaac Deutscher’s character sketch of Zinoviev (*The Prophet Unarmed*, OUP 1960, pp 77-79) sizzles off the page with a searing contrast of strengths and weaknesses: “His temper alternated between bursts of feverish energy and bouts of apathy, between flights of confidence and spells of dejection. He was usually attracted by bold ideas and policies which required the utmost courage and steadfastness to pursue. Yet his will was weak, vacillating, and even cowardly” (p.77).

Deutscher accuses Zinoviev, with Kamenev, of initiating “the exalted glorification of Lenin which was later to become a state cult” (p.95) at the Twelfth Party Congress, and of leading the charge for the “Bolshevisation” of the Comintern, starting at the Fifth Congress of the CI (p. 146). Deutscher’s account of the damage which was done to the International and Zinoviev’s role within it (p.147-8) is quite devastating.

Broué criticises Zinoviev for neglecting to prepare the Communist Parties he influenced for a united fight against fascism (*Histoire de L’Internationale Communiste* p.242) and shows him representing the “party” or “apparatus conservatism” which failed to recognise the need to turn to a new tactic, the “united front” in 1921 (p.250).

Zinoviev and Kamenev allied for a period with Stalin against Trotsky. They helped to facilitate the arrival in power in the Soviet Union of a bureaucracy which had appalling consequences for the USSR and the world working class.

Deutscher’s description of Zinoviev and Kamenev in the collapse of the Joint Opposition (“...whose hopes had

swelled with expectations of easy success, were crestfallen ... They regretted that they had ever made the attempt to rouse the cells against the Central Committee. They were anxious to beat a retreat and to placate their adversaries” [p.291]) speaks very clearly of a political inconsistency in practice. (The volume under review is rightly “dedicated to the United Opposition and the victims of Stalinist counterrevolution”).

### Samples

These authors are merely samples of a wider literature. No wonder Lar T. Lih feels the need to redress the balance.

However, the essay in which he seeks to restore Zinoviev’s reputation (“Zinoviev: Populist Leninist”) does not deal with any of those matters, but “... examines his” (Zinoviev’s) “outlook as revealed in two interconnected themes: the relationship of the party to the working class as a whole, and the battle Zinoviev thought was being waged for the soul of the peasantry.” (P. 40).

He can easily show a consistency in Zinoviev’s outlook on these questions on the basis of speeches and writings. However, consistency of that sort is mere words. It is no proof that Zinoviev could put up a consistent fight on the principled questions.

*Hic Rhodus, hic salta!* Lih’s essay would be more convincing if it answered the questions set by previous scholars.

Bob Archer

# Mistakes of a misleading ‘introduction’ to Karl Marx’s *Capital*

**T**HIS book is a concise summary of the views of the German academic, Michael Heinrich. It is thoroughly misleading about *Capital* and about Marx’s relevance in general.

A critical review of Marx’s theory and practice and of the movements which have claimed to take them forward is certainly needed. Without it, the ideas of Marx and his supporters cannot live and new generations will not be able to find sustenance in them. But this attempt takes several wrong turnings.

The first mistake is that Heinrich condemns out of hand what he calls the traditional “worldview” Marxism that prevailed in the early Socialist International and later in the Communist International, and of course more recently in the Trotskyist movement. There really are mistakes to be identified and lessons to be learned from the history our movement, but it is and has been the movement to liberate humanity from capitalism. We should try to reclaim it critically, not just junk it.

## **Separates out**

Heinrich separates out certain selected features and tendencies of these Marxist movements, particularly when for various reasons they degenerated, and then uses these features as a stick to beat them with. All the things he condemns can be identified, but they are far from the whole story; as often as distortions have been inflicted on Marx’s thought in the course of building working class political movements, just as often the forces have come together to correct those distortions and find a way forward.

The second major mistake is to over-emphasise the claim that these “worldview” Marxists have not understood Marx, or at least the Marx who wrote *Capital*. Heinrich explains that many self-proclaimed Marxists have not understood Marx’s criticism of political economy: in arguing to prove the labour theory of value against opponents who justify the way the bourgeoisie “make” profits, many socialists have missed what Marx is driving at in *Capital*. They love to denounce the greedy bourgeois, when the point is that categories such as value, exchange value, money and

## ***An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx’s Capital***

by Michael Heinrich,  
Monthly Review Press.

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But created as they are (blindly and behind everybody’s backs) by human beings in the mass and in the course of history, these economic categories are fetishes.

## **Social**

Their validity is social. And because they are social they are taken for granted by the whole of society. They are norms which everybody subscribes to.

What Heinrich will not have is that (1) these fetishised forms are themselves the product of the history of human society and (2) these forms, i.e. value, exchange value, money and capital also reflect and express the

capital – the economic categories which embody exploitation – are not natural but social forms created by human beings and associated with particular systems of production.



***Karl Marx***

process of production but above all the class struggle.

Because he rejects this, Heinrich says one cannot count on the working class to act to abolish capitalism. Working people, too, he says, are dominated by the same fetishised forms as the rest. He does not agree that workers have any special position that enables them to see through the roots of their exploitation. The point for him is not to improve the lot of the exploited, but for right-thinking individuals to abolish the kind of society in which these categories prevail.

#### **“Critique of politics”**

For Heinrich, this also provides the basis for a “critique of politics”. *“Politics must always accommodate the general capitalist interest in successful accumulation. Parties and politicians might be quite different in terms of their backgrounds and value systems; in their policies, particularly when they are in government, they generally orient towards this general interest”* (p.211). He goes on to describe how any party which looks likely to come close to office is groomed and trained into consensus.

Another mistake is to separate *Capital* out from Marx’s other works. Irrespective of what Marx wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*, or any of his other works, Heinrich says, *Capital* is

not an account of how the categories of economic life developed over time (such as one finds in *The German Ideology*, for example), but of how they are derived out of each other in the process of capitalist valorisation. And all this is true, but it does not mean that the two approaches to analysis exclude each other.

Heinrich roundly attacks “Marxists” who interpret the book to mean that capitalism itself generates the material for its own destruction. (Sadly, it seems Marx shared the same “hope”, and at the appropriate point he, too, is told firmly by Heinrich to forget any such “historicism”).

Heinrich denounces Marx and his followers for “determinism” in expecting the capitalist system to collapse of its own accord. (It must be said Marx also understood the cost of a failure to abolish capitalism, “the common ruin of all the contending classes”, a situation where the whole of society descends into barbarism).

#### **Destructive**

Heinrich’s own view is that capitalism is destructive enough of human beings and of nature to warrant its abolition and replacement with an “association of free men”. He opposes the view that capitalism is a historical formation with distinct periods – a

beginning, a middle and an end, as it were. For him there is no point in identifying a situation or a force within capitalism out of which a political movement can be built to forge a path to the next stage of society; no point in political perspectives, agitation and propaganda, programmes, strategies and tactics.

#### **Inhuman**

In his view, individuals can and may reflect upon the destructive, inhuman nature of the system and decide that a society stripped of the fetishes of value, price, money and profit would be better.

This is an approach Marx himself would have rejected as “contemplative”. It offers no field for practical action. In the end, that is why Heinrich’s approach is sterile.

(For the more determined reader, all the issues Michael Heinrich raises are discussed very much better in Geoff Pilling’s 1980 book: *Marx’s Capital: Philosophy and Political Economy*, which is now accessible online on [www.marxist.org/archive/pilling/works/capital/index.htm](http://www.marxist.org/archive/pilling/works/capital/index.htm). It is slightly denser than Heinrich but has the advantage of being more carefully thought-through).

Bob Archer  
December 2012

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To meet the challenge of presenting the way forward for the working class and all working people in the face of the crisis of imperialism, comrade BALAZS NAGY is engaged in writing a three-volume study taking in the development of economy and society since 1945; the struggle of Marxists to grasp and explain this, particularly in relation to Marx’s political economy; the unfolding characteristics of capitalism in its imperialist phase; the often-neglected history of class struggle throughout the period and the fight for revolutionary leadership.

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