

weekly
worker



**CPGB members' aggregate
agrees perspectives for coming
period of heightened struggle**

- Arab revolution
- Debating Libya
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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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LABOUR: TAKING ON REDDER HUES?



LETTERS



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

Reject Labour

I write as a working class, trade union militant and non-party socialist who has attended many demonstrations over decades. I also write as a long-standing Public and Commercial Services union branch secretary who managed to encourage 17 other PCS members of the branch to come along to the March 26 TUC demonstration - some also took friends or partners along as well. The majority had never attended a demonstration before in their lives.

The official estimate seems to be 250,000 but it felt nearer 500,000. Thousands of people, like us, didn't bother with Hyde Park, as the march took so long and moved so slowly we had to give up at Trafalgar Square and head back to our trains/coaches. It was huge and it was good-natured. There was such a friendly, carnival atmosphere that it was hard getting any anti-cuts chants going. Proof again that the vast majority had never been on a march in their lives before.

I was outraged that Ed Miliband was invited to address the crowds in Hyde Park and hope he was heckled for 'being brave enough' to mention that "some cuts are necessary". This invitation shows we face a fight on two fronts. The obvious fight is the cuts. The less obvious but bigger battle is where the Trades Union Congress and Labour-affiliated unions are carefully pledging only to fight the coalition government's cuts, leaving the way open once again to push workers to vote Labour and to accept their cuts.

The question of supporting the Labour Party and what that entails is the question facing the anti-cuts movement, although it would be better if more accepted the big question is really forming a revolutionary Marxist party, as the *Weekly Worker* constantly stresses.

We will clearly not get unity across public sector unions unless it is on the stifling basis of all agreeing to help elect another Labour government. That sort of unity will mean few strikes, even fewer cross-union ones and any further mass demonstrations being a vehicle for the Labour Party's re-election. I don't want the false choice of having an executioner who will be more gentle with the noose and give me a little longer to live, which is what voting Labour instead of the Tories or Lib Dems amounts to.

Every opportunity I get to discuss this question sees a handful of Labour Party supporters sneering, but everyone else well up for their union and communities standing anti-cuts candidates. The 'only show in town is the Labour Party' trade unions have no mandate to continue giving millions of pounds of members' subscriptions over to a party which in government started the attacks and cuts now being pursued by the coalition government. They have no mandate to urge their members to vote Labour when such unions will not allow their annual conferences to debate motions calling for disaffiliation (or at least a substantial reduction in donations) by ruling all such motions out of order.

I am surprised to see the *Weekly Worker*, which so regularly campaigns for maximum democracy in left organisations, look the other way, as those trade unions refuse to allow their members to have any debate about what relationship they should have with the Labour Party. The *Weekly Worker* and trade union barons are united in saying, 'No halfway houses' then!

All these decades (whether Tory or New Labour) of propaganda putting

individualism and selfish consumerism first have had a massive setback. We will not allow our public services to be privatised without a fight. For all the welcome community groups and 'local issue' protestors present, for all the voluntary groups, pensioners, unemployed, even the anarchists, the fact remains - the trade union movement called this huge protest and delivered it. No-one else could have pulled this off. If the trade union movement were not divided by those unions affiliated to the Labour Party putting electoral considerations above fighting the cuts, we could see ever more massive protests organised and more strikes. The battle is within the unions, not the LRC or Labour Party.

I'm proud of PCS and its constant calls for public sector unity and proud that we are not affiliated to the Labour Party and stifled (stupefied?) as a result. I hope the PCS conference in May adopts my proposed selection process for choosing independent anti-cuts candidates (and my other motion arguing we should back anti-cuts and only anti-cuts Labour MPs, such as John McDonnell).

Reclaim the Labour Party? No thanks. Reclaim our unions from Labourism? Yes!

Dave Vincent
email

Incompatible

I don't really understand why Peter Manson thinks I distorted his argument (Letters, March 24). If it is because I paraphrased Peter as saying that "only in a factory or office do workers have sufficient 'common interest'" for the election of their own individual representatives, while Peter actually said this is often the case and that in geographic districts it is rarely appropriate, that's a fairly fine semantic distinction. Readers of Peter's original article ('Socialism means winning the majority', March 10) and his response to my letter (March 17) will come away with the impression that he gives a pretty emphatic thumbs-down to the concept of electors in wards and constituencies directly electing and recalling representatives.

I agree with the main thrust of Peter's article, which backed a 'yes' vote in the referendum on the alternative vote and criticised the support by the Labour Representation Committee for first-past-the-post. It is the section discussing the differences between proportional representation and district representation with which I have strong differences.

Again in his letter, Peter calls for "a system of genuine PR, where recallability is exercised by parties and voters can give their verdict on the performance of those parties through annual elections". In his previous article "genuine PR" is defined as the list system in which voters put a cross against one party. My view is that such an electoral system is incompatible with the CPGB's advocacy of "extreme democracy".

If democracy is to mean anything it should surely involve as direct participation as possible by electors in the political system - whether in workplaces, trade union branches, political parties or elections for national and local assemblies. Now, there is no question that party list systems provide highly proportional results. But the problem, as I see it, is that (a) representation is at the remotest possible level with no element of local control whatsoever (the clear advantage of district representation), which means that (b) electors effectively subcontract all political decision-making to political parties. In between elections, there is no way for electors to lobby a representative to try and get them to

vote a particular way on a specific issue - let alone to subject them to a recall election.

The single transferable vote in multi-seat constituencies does not share these problems and actually successfully combines district representation with a large degree of proportionality. It is not compatible with the right of recall, but in the election itself allows electors a high level of flexibility in how they cast their votes. For some elections I think it can be appropriate. My preference, however, is for an electoral system that gives electors the right to intervene at any time in the electoral system by recalling representatives.

The CPGB's proposal that parties do the recalling of representatives under the party list system makes matters even worse from the perspective of the elector. It is presumably representatives who flout the party line (perhaps under electoral pressure) who will be recalled and replaced with a loyalist. No more John McDonnells and Jeremy Corbyns then.

More to the point, there would hardly be a need for individual representatives. Most political business could be conducted just as well, if not better, between party negotiating teams, each wielding a block vote weighted according to the party's national vote. Formally democratic but with genuine democratic content hollowed out.

An individual party can be highly democratic and we would expect a mass Communist Party to develop mechanisms that empowered members and catered for a close relationship with the working class as a whole. In these circumstances, a party would have the right to discipline its representatives. They could remove them as candidates for the next election or expel them from the party.

The flaw in the CPGB's proposal is to suggest that the electoral system itself should directly incorporate party discipline. The CPGB's advocacy of extreme democracy should rather aim to accentuate the direct disciplinary rights of electors. The argument raised at the CPGB conference in January on the *Draft programme* that giving electors the right to recall representatives would allow the Murdoch press to run riot reveals a surprising lack of confidence in the ability of communists to connect with the working class and a conception of democracy that is anything but 'extreme'.

No electoral system is going to guarantee communist representation. That depends on the support we establish within the working class. The reason that the argument for democracy should be at the centre of our programme is that democracy provides us with both a road to power and the only way of building a communist society. If building communism is the task of the working class itself, then we need to facilitate independent action by the working class. That is why the kind of democracy we advocate now is a crucial question.

Peter's point about "the difficulty of any individual ever being able to truly 'represent' all the electors in a current council ward or parliamentary constituency, with 'all their disparate, often antagonistic interests and views'" is certainly more substantial than the Murdoch press argument. He thinks I haven't answered it. But my citing of the Paris Commune was intended precisely to point to a real historical example of district representation that allowed the working class to express its interests and take power.

As Marx explains in *The civil war in France*, "The Commune was formed of municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the

various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms." Yes, each representative on the Commune would have gained the support of only a portion of the electors, but elections to all sorts of bodies tend to involve majorities and minorities.

Yes, a variety of classes representing "antagonistic interests and views" participated in the election. Marx observes that "the party of Order was again allowed to try its strength at the ballot box". It was the act of holding an election that allowed the working class to demonstrate its hegemony over other social forces - even if it delayed the decisive action that Marx thought might have saved the situation.

It is because the working class is a majority class that I see no reason why majoritarian electoral systems should pose any particular challenge of principle or practice to partisans of the working class.

Nick Rogers
London

Genuine

While I enjoy Eddie Ford's writing generally, and agree with the anti-imperialist principle in his most recent article, I feel he does not consider some important specifics of the situations at hand ('Imperialism out, down with the Gaddafi regime', March 24).

He writes: "... such hyperbolic language is being deployed in an attempt to fool us into believing that Libya - unlike other, pro-western, Middle East dictatorships - is a special case and that this 'humanitarian' or liberal imperialism will somehow be beneficial to the long-term interests of the Libyan masses. In reply, communists argue that the Libyan intervention will no more bring liberation or democracy to its people than the imperialist overthrow of Saddam Hussein - a former client regime of the west - relieved the suffering of the Iraqi masses. Instead, the brutal imperialist invasion and occupation of Iraq just brought about new horrors and suffering - leaving the country traumatised and dismembered."

While I can't see into the future, I think one can say there will be no occupation force in Libya. Politicians of the coalition have universally ruled out this possibility. So effectively that makes the coalition merely an air force for the rebels to use against Gaddafi's forces. Through this they seem to get the best of both worlds: the help of western military power, yet no occupying force to control the country after the dictator has been overthrown.

I cannot but disagree strongly with Eddie's statement that some on the left have "totally misguidedly" come out in support of 'no-fly zones'. Without the air strikes, there's a high chance that right now Gaddafi's forces would have retaken Benghazi. At best, that means the pro-democracy uprising is over. At worst, it results in a massacre of the rebels. As much as I hate US foreign policy, I think we should look at each action specifically. This could actually be a genuine western intervention for democracy.

I think the situation in Libya is key. If Gaddafi wins, the other Arab governments will realise they can just suppress the democratic movement violently. If the rebels win their struggle for democracy, regardless of how they needed western intervention to do so, it would give a massive boost to the regional movement.

Ollie Sutherland
email

Conspiracy

Much self-flagellation is currently taking place amongst the western 'left', or at least it should be, given

their atrocious reading of the Libyan 'revolution'.

Right from the very beginning, something just didn't smell right. From the outset, this was no peaceful, civilian insurrection such as those taking place elsewhere in the region. In other words, it started life as a civil war - heavily disguised, with western help, as a 'people's revolution', but one armed and dangerous.

All the while many on the western 'left' were joining the imperialist chorus calling for western military intervention on 'humanitarian' grounds and all the while the empire was plotting to get rid of another 'troublesome' puppet, partition Libya right down the middle, with the east (where most of the oil is located) led by the 'revolutionaries', mostly ex-Gaddafi hacks and CIA 'assets'.

It's outrageous that allegedly civilised people can agree to rain death and destruction down on the Libyan people based on nothing more than an opinion. It's based simply on the fact that the rebels faced defeat in Benghazi and the assumption that Gaddafi's forces would then go on the rampage raping and slaughtering the inhabitants of Benghazi. So, instead of Gaddafi doing this, it's being done by the combined forces of the most powerful military machine on the planet.

Isn't it about time the western 'left' stopped passing judgment on the workings of other countries with words that essentially reflect the imperialist mindset? The 'we know best' attitude is something I have come across all too often in my travels around the planet and is heavily imbued with racism, albeit of the patronising kind.

As with everything else about the Libyan 'revolution', nothing is what it appears. The chance for the Libyan people to really take charge of their own future has been aborted by the empire.

Kim James
email

Marxist tripe

"The imperialist air and sea attacks on Libya since Friday can only be welcomed by readers of this paper," says Dave Gannet (Letters, March 24). Well, not this reader. How a Marxist can come out with such tripe is beyond me.

We have to face it, revolutions do fail, some disastrously and bloodily. I am certain that the Libyan uprising was premature, doomed from the start. The conditions for successful regime change by Libyans in Libya did not exist as they existed in Tunisia and Egypt. We have to accept that. In those latter countries the overthrow of the Ben Ali and Mubarak regimes are not in any sense complete revolutions. It remains to be seen whether those insurrections will eventually become successful revolutions. Any involvement of imperialist agencies or military forces will inevitably ensure they will not.

DG continues: "The democratic hope in Libya requires the defeat of the Gaddafi regime." He then goes on to say: "Of course, it would be better if Libyans did it all themselves." No. It would be absolutely crucial that they do it without the involvement of imperialist forces. Marxists and anti-capitalists should never welcome or applaud imperialist intervention in a popular uprising. Revolutionary movements will not gain mass support if they are perceived as being in league with imperialist powers. For whom are the imperialists 'saving the day'? In whose interests are they operating? Certainly not those of the Libyan people - I think we can be assured of that.

The waves of Arab revolts seriously unsettled and alarmed

the imperialists. But now the Libyan situation has given them the opportunity get a handle on things and the chance to thwart the flowering of anti-imperialist, democratic regimes. But now that the revolutionary wave has been compromised by imperialist intervention, the US/UK-backed dictators in central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa can now sleep easy and be assured of stability in their fiefdoms.

The idea of Marxists being even temporarily in step with such 'progressives' as Hillary Clinton, Sarkozy and William Hague quite frankly sickens me.

Dave Callaghan
email

Class act

While I agree with much of Anne McShane's article on the Irish elections and the United Left Alternative ('Now the left has TDs', March 24), her critique of the ULA misses one rather essential point: the ULA is a partitionist organisation that fails to take up the national question. When Ireland remains divided by imperialism, with part of the country still annexed by Britain and with some thousands of British troops there, just what kind of 'left alternative' is it that manages not to mention this?

Surely, for revolutionaries, it is not possible to separate the economic issues in the south from the political issue of imperialist-imposed partition. This, it seems to me, is actually more relevant now than ever - most particularly since the economic woes in both the six- and 26-county states are similar, as are the attacks on the working class. What more auspicious time could there be for promoting a real left alternative - namely, a vision of a 32-county workers' republic, as opposed to two clapped-out, anti-working class pseudo-states?

While the ULA TDs can play a useful role in helping build protests against the Fine Gael and Labour attacks on the class in the south, it's not the unity of the economic left that is needed; it's the unity of the socialist republicans, since they are the only ones who are prepared to use words like 'occupation', 'partition' and 'socialism' - ie, they combine the national and class questions.

Philip Ferguson
New Zealand

Pick and mix

Maciej Zurowski not only has a sense of humour failure in his letter about sexual freedom, but is seriously mistaken in his belief that D'Emilio's understanding of the development of gay identity "complements" Foucault's account (March 24).

On the contrary, D'Emilio flips it on its head. Foucault argues that modern sexualities were developed in the second half of the 19th century by early sexologists, whereas, in *Capitalism and gay identity*, D'Emilio argues that these "theories did not represent scientific breakthroughs, elucidations of precisely undiscovered areas of knowledge; rather they were an ideological response to a new way of organising one's personal life." So, while there may well be interplay, gay identities were developed by gay people prior to the intervention of science.

Zurowski is making a classical mistake of collapsing gay history into the history of sexual prejudice and conflating gay identity with development of heteronormalism as an ideology. The logical extent of this position is to see the demise of one as somehow linked to the passing of the other. If you implied this logic to the class struggle, you would come to the post-Marxist conclusion that class-consciousness perpetuates rather than undermines capitalism.

Z u r o w s k i s o m e w h a t disingenuously misses my point

when he calls me a workerist in my comprehension of sexual prejudice in the working class. I am not claiming that workers are somehow immune from sexual prejudice, or that it has not been used or amplified by the powerful. Rather I am saying that sexual prejudice in the working class is more complex and cannot simply be turned on and off by the ruling class; or evaded by gay workers hiding their identity. On the contrary, sexual prejudice can only be thwarted by the conscious acceptance of all forms of diversity. Moreover, it needs to be recognised that sexual prejudice is reproduced in the working class by perceived experiences that make non-heterosexual relationships seem abnormal - particularly the structure of institutions under capitalism from schools, housings services to the organisation of supermarkets which are designed to support the nuclear family.

Given the root-and-branch restructuring required to achieve sexual liberation, imagine my disappointment when I come to study the 'Sexual freedom' section of the CPGB's *Draft programme*. To use a rather hackneyed phrase, they are okay as far as they go. Sexual freedom or liberation is more than legal parity for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people. Rather, as Oscar Wilde observed in *The soul of man under socialism*, "The chief advantage that would result from the establishment of socialism is, undoubtedly, the fact that socialism would relieve us from that sordid necessity of living for others which, in the present condition of things, presses so hardly upon almost everybody."

Part of this is about transforming social institutions, so that all forms of consensual sexual and non-sexual relationships are respected and validated. What this would mean in a comprehensive list of demands I will not venture off the top of my head. Perhaps some pick and mix of rights and responsibilities or perhaps a more comprehensive support for the individual through things like the individualisation of tax and benefits, so that relationships are only ever maintained for their own sake.

Richard Farnos
Upper Norwood

China

Reading Ben Lewis' article about the overtly capitalist nature of today's China, and taking into consideration the fate of both Maoist China and the Soviet Union, perhaps it is worth attempting to place the Soviet-style socio-economic formation in the broader historical context of the development of capitalism on a world scale ('Capitalism with Chinese characteristics' March 17).

If one strips the Soviet socio-economic formation, as established during the initial five-year plans in the 1930s, of its ideological facade, and considers it as what it really was - a programme of intense national economic and social development in a country in which a state apparatus under a forceful leadership takes the place of a failed bourgeoisie - rather than an experiment in building socialism, then some interesting factors come to light.

The Soviet Union and China were the last significant countries to undergo a profound process of modernisation. Both were huge countries containing vast amounts of natural and human resources. Both had at their helm a national leadership that was determined to push aside internal resistance and external opposition in order to carry out its programme. And under this leadership, and with these essential resources, these countries were indeed transformed into modern industrial societies. The process was often haphazard, wasteful and inhuman, but, all in all, the basis for

such a modern industrial society was indeed laid down.

This begs the question: where else was this process carried out? There have been examples of all-round modernisation, such as the British dominions and South Korea, but the process here was encouraged by imperialist states and carried out under their aegis. In most of the non-imperialist world, modernisation has been patchy and lopsided, and modern industry, where it exists, sits incongruously alongside primitive agriculture and vast, barely productive shanty-towns. The national leadership in India has proved unable to root out pre-bourgeois social forces; the current industrial development of Brazil is largely dependent upon investments from the big powers.

Well over a century ago, Marx and Engels wrote how capitalism was forced to distort its own laws of motion in order to advance. The experience of the Soviet socio-economic formation takes their observations to a new level. Under Stalin's five-year plans and the equivalent in Mao's China, far-reaching modernisation necessitated the destruction of the law of value. The modernisation that took place under Stalin and Mao could not have occurred if the ruling criterion in their societies had been profitability.

As so often, the dialectic exerts its revenge, and the irony of the Soviet socio-economic formation is that, whilst it can forcibly modernise a big, backward country, there is a limit to its ability to maintain the process of modernisation. As the Soviet economy matured under Stalin's successors, its growth rates declined, and during the mid-1960s the Soviet elite considered introducing market measures to reverse this process. But, as it saw the continuation of quantitative growth and looked fearfully at the risks involved, the Soviet elite backed away from embarking on any serious reforms. The result was stagnation and ultimate collapse: the transition under Gorbachev and his post-Soviet successors was not to a modern capitalist society, but to Russia becoming more akin to a third-world supplier of primary products. The institution of a serious process of market reforms in the 1960s would have enabled the Soviet elite to embark upon a far more successful transition to the market.

The Chinese elite, however, keenly watching the stagnation to their north, realised that, if they were to survive, let alone thrive, they needed carefully to guide the Chinese economy back to the market. This they have done with considerable success. Ben states that China is still a long way from enjoying the normal conditions of bourgeois rule. That is true, but it could also be mooted that, if China maintains its economic rise, things that the imperialist bourgeoisies have taken for granted over the last half-century - constitutionalism, separation of powers, private property protection and so on - may be seen as an encumbrance to their ability to compete with China.

Who would have thought, back in the glory days when we were told by advocates of Stalinism that 'actually existing socialism' was being built in the Soviet Union or China, that what we actually had there was a temporary process of non-capitalist national modernisation that would enable the Soviet and Chinese elites to build up their societies so that they could at some point rejoin the capitalist world? Quite a few of us never believed in their tales of a happy land far, far away; and today's wreckage in Russia and the thrusting capitalists in China are proof that Stalinism had nothing to do with communism.

Paul Flowers
London

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

Every Monday we upload a podcast of commentary on the current political situation. In addition, the site features voice files of public meetings and other events: <http://cpgb.podbean.com>.

Communist Students

For meetings in your area, contact info@communiststudents.org.uk or check out www.comuniststudents.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesdays, 6.45pm to 9pm: St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (Camden tube).

April 5: 'The hunter Monmanéki and his wives' (Amazonia). Speaker: Chris Knight.

We're no fools

Friday April 1, 2pm: Meeting, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. 'We're no fools - another way is possible'. Speakers include: Jeremy Corbyn MP, Bob Crow (RMT), John Cryer MP, Mark Serwotka (PCS). Chair: Ann Green (BPTUAA).

Organised by the British Pensioners and Trade Union Action Association and Greater London Pensioners Association: glpa@capital5.freeserve.co.uk.

No to education cuts

Saturday April 2, 3pm: Meeting, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1.

Sponsored by National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, Right to Work, Education Activists Network and Coalition of Resistance: againstfeesandcuts@gmail.com.

Unite against EDL

Saturday April 2, 1pm: Demonstration, Suddell Cross, end of Preston New Road, Blackburn.

Organised by Blackburn and Darwen United Against Racism, Unite Against Fascism, Blackburn Trades Council, Blackburn College Student Union and the Youth On a Mission organisation: www.uaf.org.uk.

Lancashire against cuts

Saturday April 2, 1.30pm: Rally, 53 Degrees, Brook Street, Preston.

Speakers include: Chris Bambery (Right to Work), cllr Simon Blackburn, cllr Matthew Brown, Billy Hayes (CWU), cllr Michael Lavalette, Alice Mahon, John McDonnell MP.

Organised by Lancashire Coalition Against Cuts: www.lancashiretradeunions.org.uk.

Marxism 21

Saturday April 2, 1pm: INCA Italian Confederation of Labour, Italian Advice Centre, 124 Canonbury Road, London N1. 'After the TUC March - next steps for the anti-cuts movement'. Speakers include: Jerry Hicks (Unite), Gabi Quevedo (Latin American Workers Association) and George Binette (Camden Unison). Further information: <http://rikowski.wordpress.com>.

The revolutionary tradition

Tuesday April 5, 7pm: Meeting, Salsa Cafe, 89 Westgate Road, Newcastle. 'Karl Marx and the revolutionary tradition' - discussion of his philosophy, economics and politics.

Organised by Counterfire: www.counterfire.org.

Where next?

Tuesday April 5, 7.30pm: Meeting, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. 'After March 26 - building the fightback'. Speakers include: John McDonnell, striking Camden and Tower Hamlets teachers, council workers and UCU lecturers.

Tuesday April 5, 7.30pm: Meeting, STUC offices, 333 Woodlands Road, Glasgow. Speakers include: Pete Murray (NUJ), Sasha Callaghan (UCU), Dave Moxham (STUC).

Thursday April 7, 7pm: Meeting, Old Moray House, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh. Speakers include: Dave Moxham (STUC), Des Loughney (Edinburgh Trades Council), Mike Williamson (Edinburgh University Student Association).

Organised by Right to Work: righttowork.org.uk.

Iran forum

Thursday April 7, 6pm: Meeting, G2 lecture hall, SOAS, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. *Socialist Worker* forum - 'Lessons of Egypt for Iran'. Speakers include: Ali Alizadeh (Iranian-Australian poet), Alex Callinicos and Egyptian speaker.

Organised by the SWP: www.swp.org.uk.

Our cuts - their celebration

Saturday April 16, 1pm: Meeting, Room A10, London South Bank University, London Road SE1. Two weeks before the royal wedding, a chance to debate the history of republicanism, socialism and its relevance for today.

Organised by Republican Socialist Convention.

Venezuela

Saturday April 16, 10am: National event, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. 'Defending the majority, not punishing the poorest' - how Venezuela is developing social inclusion and public services for all.

Speakers include: Henry Suarez (Venezuelan ambassador), Seamus Milne (journalist), Billy Hayes (CWU) and Hugo O'Shaughnessy (journalist and writer). Topics include: 'Venezuela's economy - protecting living standards during recession and future challenges' and 'Who is the Venezuelan opposition?'

Organised by the Venezuela Solidarity Campaign: info@venezuelasolidarity.co.uk.

CPGB wills

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

PERSPECTIVES

Debating Labour left and left Labourism

Alex John reports on the March 27 aggregate of CPGB members and supporters in London

The perspectives document produced by the Provisional Central Committee at the beginning of the year was adopted unanimously last Sunday after the inclusion of a number of minor amendments. The document was the main business for the second successive aggregate.

Opening the discussion on behalf of the PCC, John Bridge remarked that, in the six weeks since the PCC document was proposed, the differences which had been expressed verbally on February 13, particularly on the question of Marxist work in the Labour Party, had not been presented in the shape of amendments or as an alternative perspectives document, nor elaborated in a *Weekly Worker* article. It was unfortunate, he said, that opponents of this part of the PCC document had decided not to attend the aggregate. This was a pity, because these differences within the organisation had clearly not been resolved. Indeed, they rumbled on in online discussions, albeit in an undeveloped and almost non-political form.

However, the meeting did discuss generally supportive amendments from comrade Farzad. In the section on 'Our organisation', the need to "guard against impatience, frustration and childish leftism" was complemented by her amendment: "as well as reformism and conformist class collaboration". As comrade Bridge commented,

the pull to the right "goes with the territory" of engagement with the Labour Party and electoral politics.

In the section on 'British politics', the document speculates on the "outside possibility" of the Blairites "breaking away from Labour and entering government alongside the Tories and coalition Lib Dems". Comrade Farzad had proposed to offset this with the following amendment: "There is also the possibility that as a result of Liberal Democrat members and 'personalities' joining the Labour Party, the party will move further to the right." However, the amendment was withdrawn after comrade Bridge and others argued successfully that it was "misconceived".

Comrade Farzad had argued that if the likes of Charles Kennedy abandoned the Lib Dems to join Labour, this could exert a rightward pull - but she thought this would affect Scotland more than Britain as a whole. Comrade James Turley raised the possibility of a different scenario: Ed Miliband might "track to the right" in order to "break off a bigger piece of the Lib Dems".

However, *Weekly Worker* editor Peter Manson argued that the rank and file deserting to Labour are coming from the left flank of the Lib Dems. Likewise, comrade Bridge said that most of the thousands of Lib Dem members joining Labour are "generally of a leftish, radical nature" and are

"certainly to the left of most Labour councillors". The class character of Labour as a bourgeois workers' party "remains open-ended", he said, because the right wing may yet break the trade union link, but unless that happens, the party's politics will remain "determined by the trade unions" in the last analysis. In the present period of austerity and attacks on the working class, he argued, "the working class will fight back" and "Labour will move to the left".

Perhaps reflecting the reluctance of some comrades to entertain the possibility that the Labour Party could be transformed from a bourgeois workers' party into a real party of the working class, comrade Farzad distinguished between "Labour Party Marxists" on the one hand, and "Labour lefts".

This view was countered by comrades Jim Gilbert and Stan Kelsey, who argued that being on the Labour left was not necessarily the same as being a left Labourite. Comrade Kelsey said that many left organisations, tendencies and individuals, within and without Labour, define themselves as Marxist, which is why our call for the unity of ostensible Marxists in a Marxist party was appropriate.

Comrade Kelsey said that communist work in the anti-cuts movement should include recruiting anti-cuts activists into the Labour Party. The CPGB's theses on Labour make clear that

there is no contradiction between transforming the Labour Party and reforging the Communist Party (see *Weekly Worker* October 21 2010). Transforming Labour is not a private task for selected political guerrillas, but a task for the whole class. When the revolutionary left does form a united Marxist party, it will have to tackle Labourism and the Labour Party, he said.

Comrade Farzad responded that, while it is fine to campaign for unaffiliated trade unions to affiliate to Labour, we should not attempt to persuade individuals to join. Since being in government in the 1920s, Labour has been a party of class collaboration and nationalism, and the Labour left has been social-imperialist, she said.

Today Labour says that coalition cuts are "too deep, too quick". But a Labour government will either appease finance capital or capital will leave the country, so "there is no middle road". Labour will come under pressure from a strong anti-cuts movement, she said, but encouraging individuals to join and intervene in the party will "encourage illusions" - Labour speakers invited to anti-cuts meetings "put forward capitalist solutions". If we argue in the anti-cuts movement that there is no Keynesian solution for capitalism, that the state will only give concessions if the system of capital is threatened, then we "cannot go to anti-cuts meetings and argue for

people to join the Labour Party".

John Bridge said he had been surprised at the "high-risk" austerity programme undertaken by the Tories, which seems "foolish" from their point of view. However, "we don't advocate Keynesianism", which does offer an alternative for capitalism, but not for the working class. Comrade Mike Macnair had written that a flight of capital was possible ('There is an alternative' *Weekly Worker* March 24), but where would it go? Until now, capital has been moving to the US and to the City of London.

Marxists should recruit to Labour on the basis of their politics, not to prop up Labourism, said comrade Bridge. The question for the anti-cuts movement is: 'What are we for?' Miliband and Keynesianism had to be opposed in the Labour Party too; at the same time there needs to be a fight for Marxist unity in a reformed CPGB.

In her amendment to the section on 'War and instability', comrade Farzad sought to ground the protests in Arab and Middle Eastern countries in the global economic downturn, as "the economic background had been missing" in the original document. Comrade John Bridge agreed, but sought also to emphasise the people's aspiration for democracy and not to reduce the protest movement to mere economics. After discussion, an amendment stressing both aspects was agreed ●

Organising for things to come

The amended perspectives document, as agreed by the aggregate

World politics

World politics will be coloured, driven and shaped by the ongoing crisis of capitalism, and for many years to come at that. This crisis is the deepest since the 1930s economically. The focus has shifted from subprime mortgages and banks to sovereign debt. However, the crisis is conjoined with:

1. The continued decline of capitalism as a system.
2. The visible decline of the US as the hegemon of the capitalist world.
3. An ongoing and ever worsening ecological crisis.

We should not be surprised that the decline of capitalism goes hand in hand with a decline of its hegemon and what appears as the absolute limits of capitalism as a system.

The US is attempting, and will further attempt, to offload its crisis onto other countries. It can do that for two main reasons:

1. The dollar remains the global reserve currency.
2. This is backed by unequalled military power and an elaborate system of military and political alliances.

Nevertheless, the US can no longer automatically impose its will on other countries. This can be seen in repeated US failures at G8 and G20 meetings.

It can also, albeit as a footnote, be seen in the nationalist, radical and reformist political developments in South America (once considered the US backyard).

There is no viable replacement to the US hegemon in waiting.

Japan has been mired in stagnation for well over a decade and possesses a population of around 125 million, compared to over 300 million in the US. Nor should we forget that strategically Japan remains an integral part of the US military-political system.

The European Union has a population of around 500 million - four times bigger than Japan - and a huge GDP. However, it exhibits extreme unevenness when it comes to economic development. The EU is, moreover, deeply divided politically. This is reflected in the euro crisis and the lack of an agreed long-term perspective. Eg, France and Germany want one thing; Britain another. The EU is not a state, but a confederation with an inbuilt tendency/possibility of shattering, shedding members, splitting down the middle or being united through a modern-day version of blood and iron. More than that, it too is an integral part of the US military-political system.

China and India: Talk about other

so-called emerging economic powers is much exaggerated. Current economic growth figures cannot be projected into the indefinite future. Nor should the present political unity of countries such as China and India be taken for granted. Leave aside US subversion: there is every reason to expect spontaneous regionalist and class revolts in such countries from peasants and workers.

Ideas

While the ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class, the structural crisis of capitalism is producing ever more shallowness and one fad giving way to another in rapid succession. The ruling class and its political elite tend to be ever more short-termist and irrational.

To the extent that substantial concessions can no longer be granted or offered to those below, chauvinism and xenophobia will be promoted by sections of the ruling class. Eg, David Cameron's British national identity speech.

Sadly, this is echoed on the left with demands for a withdrawal from the EU, calls for 'non-racist' immigration controls and the restoration of 'national sovereignty'. Organisationally expressed in the No2EU electoral bloc, which united

the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain and the Socialist Party in England and Wales.

War and instability

We should certainly expect the unexpected. New wars, especially proxy wars, should be ruled in, not out: eg, Korea, Venezuela and Iran (an Israeli attack). The continuation of North African/Middle Eastern revolutions would certainly mean more wars - both revolutionary and counterrevolutionary.

The anti-dictatorial protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Oman, Bahrain, Iran, etc express the aspirations of the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa for genuine democracy. These struggles are also related to the worsening economic situation in these countries. Foreign investment in third-world countries based on high rates of profit already relied on very high levels of unemployment and under-employment; however, the situation has worsened considerably as a result of the global downturn. The speculative nature of surplus capital flowing to 'emergent' economies has raised exchange rates, damaging exports from these countries. This,

together with market speculation on the rise in the price of food and raw materials, has made starvation a reality for millions of Arabs, Iranians, Turks, etc.

The forthcoming period promises acute instability. China, India, Russia, Brazil, etc are not immune from the economic crisis. War, capital withdrawal, imperial protectionism, a sudden outburst of class struggles would trigger the most profound turmoil.

Ongoing debt crises, such as in Ireland and Greece, could certainly spread to other euro zone countries and threaten the existence of the euro itself. That would force a Franco-German political response and provoke national conflict within the EU of the most acute kind.

Inevitably, in face of the ongoing crisis of capitalism there has been an upsurge of popular resistance. We have certainly seen the future in the protest general strikes in Greece, Spain, France, etc. There is a crying need for coordination across the EU. The EU, or so the evidence points to, is the world revolutionary centre of the 21st century.

Meanwhile, it is the working class which bears the main burden of the crisis everywhere: lower living standards, long hours, higher taxes,

cuts in wages and pensions, cuts in social services, education provision, unemployment, etc.

Hands Off the People of Iran

Hands Off the People of Iran is a principled solidarity campaign. Hopi was established at the joint initiative of CPGB and Iranian comrades. We took a particular responsibility when it comes to Iran. In part this is due to long-established personal relations, in part due to the particular importance of Iran in terms of global politics.

It is clear that an imperialist war is already being prepared for/conducted: eg, sanctions, Stuxnet, etc. It is also clear that the theocratic regime is extremely weak internally and relies in no small measure on the imperialist threat to maintain itself in power.

Articles in the *Weekly Worker* have exposed the sham anti-imperialism of Ahmadinejad and co, and stressed the need for a working class alternative in Iran. The true nature of the green movement was made clear from the first.

We need to continue to support the work of Hopi and look for every opportunity to draw other forces in to take their share of the work and spread its message: against imperialist intervention, against theocracy.

Socialism

The need for a socialist alternative has surely never been greater. Despite that the forces of the left are organisationally pathetically weak, often ideologically at sea or/and mired in the dead-endism of the sects. In part this is because of the virtual collapse of 'official communism' and social democracy - crucially as forces offering an alternative to capitalism.

Disappointingly, but not surprisingly, many of the remaining groups on the left seem determined to reinvent, or revive, either 'official communism' or social democracy (often in their most conservative, least ambitious forms).

Mass strikes, revolts and uprisings can be expected. Despite that, if there is no clear working class lead, no mass Marxist parties, other forces will fill the vacuum: eg, reactionary anti-capitalism. Meanwhile, without a correct programme being agreed and spread to the masses, all kinds of false starts, abject failures and costly diversions should be expected on the left. Social forums, movementism, halfway house parties, class-collaboration, left nationalisms, reformism which does not even claim to aim for socialism, etc.

Under these circumstances we must:

1. Keep arguing against illusions - peddled by many on the left - in reactionary anti-capitalisms. Not only Islamic anti-capitalism, of course, but Christian, nationalist, military, green, etc, anti-capitalisms too.
2. Keep arguing against Keynesian and neo-Keynesian illusions and instead make the case for a radical extension of democracy that in time breaks through into socialism and the rule of the working class.
3. Keep hammering home the *fact* that Marxism and Marxism alone is the only viable politics that can organise the working class into a party and into a future ruling class.
4. Keep pushing our idea of a EU Communist Party and an EU won by the working class.
5. Keep arguing for a pan-Arab revolution led by the working class.
6. With all the above in mind, our international contacts need widening. As things stand, we should expect that this will in the first place be more on the level of particular individuals rather than organisations. Eg, our regular correspondents in the US, France, Ireland and Turkey. With a little effort and application that list can be expanded.

7. Continue to provide intelligent and politically principled coverage of events and developments internationally. Given limited resources in terms of competent journalists, that will be a hopping exercise. Eg, from Zimbabwe to Greece, to Tunisia, etc.

British politics

British politics will be shaped to a considerable degree by the debt crisis and the savage cuts imposed by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government. There is, meanwhile, the distinct possibility that those cuts will trigger/contribute to a double-dip recession. Even without that, the ongoing instability of the world capitalist economy contains within it the distinct possibility of another steep downturn. Hence yet more attacks on our class.

The 'phoney war' over cuts came to an end with the student movement in late 2010. That movement will surely revive and reach new heights, as cuts bite and have more and more damaging effects. Eg, the closure of departments and courses, staff layoffs. Under these circumstances we need to argue for:

1. The student movement to be widened and deepened. The vanguard must mobilise the mass.
2. Student assemblies on every campus. Once that is achieved, elect recallable delegates to city-wide and national assemblies.
3. The student movement to be organised and educated. The existence and competition of the sects disorganise and miseducate. For a single Marxist organisation of students on a pro-partyist basis.
4. More resources to be put into building Communist Students. However modest, we must organise weekly seminars in at least one central London college location.

It is clear that the organised working class will enter the struggle in 2011. The TUC March 26 demonstration needs to be used as a springboard. Eg, occupations, protest strikes, etc. Cuts affect the entire working class and this requires a united working class response. Not just the unity of public sector workers.

We need to argue against illusions in general strikism and anarchistic stuntism. That, of course, is not to oppose protest general strikes or particular, well aimed stunts.

But there can be no substitute for mass communist consciousness. The working class can only come to power if it has been organised and

understands that it needs to come to power and how. It cannot be tricked into overthrowing capitalism and ushering in socialism.

While it is right to recognise that the Liberal Democrats constitute the weak link in the coalition government, it is vital not to dismiss the coalition government as weak and ready to be swept away with the first rush of mass protests.

The Lib Dems have been enslaved by the Tory Party. They will stand as coalition candidates at the next general election, face wipe-out or/and split. Nevertheless, a further realignment of British politics cannot be ruled out.

A twofold combination of being in opposition and the class struggle will push the Labour Party to the left. Given Blairism, New Labour, being in government for 13 years, etc, that is not saying much. But the tendency will be to the left. We can, with this or that proviso, predict that much. The signs, albeit tiny and incremental at the moment, and not in themselves of any great importance, are nevertheless there to see. Eg, the influx into the Labour Party, the increased membership of the Labour Representation Committee, the appointment of Ed Balls as shadow chancellor and the choking off of big capitalist finance. Against this must be set Ed Miliband's questioning of the trade union link. So the class character of the Labour Party still exhibits considerable instability.

Under such circumstances, and perhaps given another sharp economic downturn, there is the outside possibility of the Blairites - ie, the most openly pro-capitalist, anti-working class wing of the Labour Party - breaking away from Labour and entering government alongside the Tories and coalition Lib Dems.

Speculation aside, the Labour Party remains a bourgeois workers' party and therefore a vital site of struggle for Marxists. Those who dismiss Labour make an elementary mistake. Ditto those who counterpose fighting the coalition's cuts and fighting inside the Labour Party.

Marxists in the Labour Party need to be organised on the basis of Marxism. That means a perspective of winning the Labour Party - and the trade unions - to Marxism. Bans and proscriptions must be removed and the Labour Party transformed into a permanent united front of the working class. Towards that end the pro-capitalist right must be driven out and the trade unions thoroughly democratised.

With this perspective in mind Marxists in the Labour Party need to look for an opportunity, a cause, to organise around. Timing is everything in politics.

Towards that end we will encourage Labour Party Marxists to:

1. Report and analyse

developments in the Labour Party using the pages of the *Weekly Worker*.

2. Regularly caucus and exchange experiences and ideas.

3. Intervene and take initiatives in the Labour left and seek out allies.

4. Look to publishing on the internet.

In relationship to the wider Labour left, Marxists need to develop a friendly but critical relationship. They must patiently explain the shortcomings, problems and fallacies of reformism, left nationalism and alternative economic strategies, etc. Why this patient approach? Because the mass of class-conscious workers have such views in their minds.

Fighting to transform the Labour Party in no way contradicts the fight to organise the Marxist left into a single Communist Party and over time build that organisation into a mass party. Communists support the organisation of the working class at every conceivable level: ie, co-ops, trade unions, trades councils, workers' militias, educational associations, sporting clubs, temporary and permanent united fronts (eg, soviets).

Non-Labour left

The non-Labour left is hoping to grow substantially in the forthcoming period. However, the opportunities that undoubtedly exist are being squandered in narrow sect-building projects. The aim is to build the sect, not the confidence, power and self-activity of the working class.

Hence, there are at least three national anti-cuts campaigns. Right to Work and the National Shop Stewards Network exist so that the Socialist Workers Party and SPEW can recruit. There is no other reason for their existence. The Coalition of Resistance is better only because the Counterfire group around John Rees and Lindsey German cannot dominate it in the way the SWP and SPEW regimes can. We need to argue for a single anti-cuts campaign.

Paradoxical though it might seem, the conditions of capitalist crisis have *hardened* the sectarian divisions of the left. What goes for SPEW, SWP and the *Morning Star's* CPB goes for their smaller rivals and mimics: eg, Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Workers Power, Socialist Resistance, etc.

While there might well be new unity initiatives, at present they lack self-belief, perspective, principles, etc. Eg, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is thoroughly opportunist, tightly controlled from above, a mere lash-up, etc.

In local, regional and national elections we should in general prefer to support anti-cuts Labour Party members/candidates. However, we can give critical support to organisations such as Tusc, Respect, etc, because: (a) they will say they will oppose all cuts; and (b) say they would not implement them. That said, we should not expect anything much to come from such outfits: eg, they are quite capable of promoting middle class, localist candidates. Above all, none of them have a serious socialist or partyist perspective.

Unity of the left is vital. But in the short term the chances of unity, via an appeal to the tops - ie, to the leaderships of SPEW, SWP, etc - is likely to fall on stony ground. Therefore such appeals must be kept abstract, at the level of propaganda for the moment. The powder of unity needs to be kept dry.

Of course, we must keep arguing for the unity of Marxists as Marxists and seize any *real* opportunity that can be created or presents itself in order to bring forward that goal.

However, as a direct concomitant, we must argue against Labour Party mark twos and ruthlessly expose the inadequacies, illusions of grandeur and fundamentally mistaken premise of such misconceived projects.

The fact of the matter is that the Labour Party still exists and Marxists

must have a correct orientation to it and thus the mass of organised workers.

CPGB

Our organisation remains very small and we should not expect any dramatic change in that respect in the short term. That despite the period and the upturn in class struggles. Hence we need to guard against impatience, frustration and childish leftism, as well as reformism and conformist class-collaboration. Inevitable amongst those with a low level of theory and little understanding of Marxism. At all times we need a due sense of proportion.

Nevertheless, what our organisation does and says carries a weight far beyond its numbers. The *Weekly Worker* - not least through its web presence - is our main weapon and is in terms of its frequency, presentation, content and impact almost a weekly miracle.

Only four organisations have proved capable of producing a real - not a silly-print - weekly paper: SWP, SPEW, AWL (just recently) ... and the CPGB.

In 2011 our online presence will be considerably boosted by a new, much improved website. This will obviously require constant attention. Besides a loose team of workers that means an online editor. Needless to say, the vast bulk of web content will continue to be generated by the *Weekly Worker* ... and thus politically guided, chosen, cut, expanded and introduced by its editorial staff.

The attraction/strength of the *Weekly Worker* has widely been seen in reporting/analysing the politics of the left. That must be continued and where possible deepened. Our strategy is based on *going through* the existing left, not forgetting the Labour and trade union left. That requires openness and militant polemics.

We practise what we preach. In our tradition being open about differences is both a right and a *duty*. Those in our ranks who say they disagree with this or that aspect of our politics and strategy *internally* need to take that on board.

The *Weekly Worker* rightly looks far beyond mere reportage. The paper is informed by/advocates the most advanced programme on the left and champions/presents the most advanced theory. Obviously we shall be publishing the new *Draft programme* of the CPGB in 2011. That needs promoting and, to the extent we can, popularised.

We must continue to strive to develop theory and, alongside that, cultivate a deep sense of history. Obviously that takes time and effort, and that needs to be appreciated. In 2011 we shall publish second, expanded editions of *Fantastic reality* and *Revolutionary strategy*.

Besides theory being generated internally - ie, in the ranks of the CPGB's membership - the paper and its staff have quite rightly cultivated relations of friendship, cooperation and comradeship with those who might be called fellow-travellers or allies. It is of some considerable political importance that we publish articles by the likes of Chris Gray, Dave Douglass, Gerry Downing and Tony Greenstein. Though they are only individuals, their contributions - valuable in and of themselves - are also a pointer to the kind of mass CPGB we aspire to.

We have certainly gathered around the paper some of the best leftwing intellectuals: eg, Hillel Ticktin, Lars T Lih, Moshé Machover and Chris Knight. In their respective fields they are outstanding thinkers and we should continue to cherish their involvement with our project. Their contributions certainly add to the high quality of our weekly paper and annual school, the Communist University ●



Broadcasting the message

ANALYSIS

The long road to the Arab revolution

Moshé Machover addressed last weekend's CPGB aggregate on the defeat of the Libyan revolution, Al-Jazeera and the goal of Arab unity

It is very difficult to talk in a coherent way about a process which is unfolding and where things are changing all the time. What I would like to do is to initiate a discussion and explore some ideas about where the revolution is going, and what we should expect in both the short term and longer term.

But, given the contention on the left, I think we should start with Libya. There is a lot of confusion, and I think that this is partly for understandable reasons. I am not referring here to the 'confusion' of those who effectively cheer the imperialist intervention. Groups like the Alliance for Workers' Liberty are in my opinion simply social-imperialists.

I am actually talking about socialists - people I regard as comrades, such as Gilbert Achcar, who is *not* a social-imperialist and is very critical of western intervention and of this 'coalition of the willing' (and partly unwilling!) that is being sent to 'protect' the Libyan revolution.

There is a genuine problem, and it would be unfortunate to appear callous and uncaring about the fate of those in Benghazi who were penned in and faced the terrible prospect of being massacred. Given the despair they are in, I would not actually be too critical of them for calling on the so-called 'international community' for help.

We have to be clear that the 'international community' is itself an ideological construct, a term used in order to conflate the US-led global hierarchy of states on the one hand and global public opinion on the other. There is world public opinion - civil society - which has real humanitarian concerns, and then there is the so-called 'international community', which is the *nom de guerre* of the US and its followers.

Why Libya?

Why did they go for Libya and not other places? For me there are three main reasons. Firstly, there is the question of oil. Do not underestimate this factor. Of course, the *quantity* of oil Libya offers is next to nothing in comparison to Saudi Arabia, but it is its *quality* which makes them interested in it. It is just about the best oil you can find, particularly for aircraft fuel.

Secondly, they have been *asked* to intervene this time around, which is crucial in providing them with an ideological and political cover: nobody asked them in Egypt or in Yemen; nobody even asked them in Bahrain.

Thirdly, although Gaddafi's Libya ceased to be a 'rogue state' from around 2003, there is some truth in the claim that, from the standpoint of the imperialists, Gaddafi is still a rogue. Why? Well he is obviously a little bit crazy and very unreliable for them. So, although he is 'our friend' now (or was until very recently!), he was never somebody who could be fully trusted, as he is unstable in every possible manner - including mentally. How anybody can take him seriously after hearing him speak is simply beyond me.

The Saudis are also cautiously



Libya: Saving the revolution killed the revolution

in favour of intervention in Libya because they do not like Gaddafi either. They remember all his leanings towards Islamic Maoism, the *Little green book* and his own conception of *jamahiriya* (people's power). The Saudi regime is very traditionalist and as such they find all of this stuff very unsettling. Gaddafi has created his own ideology - even his own version of Islam! This has also been a factor in ensuring that he has very few allies in the Arab world more generally.

Anyway, I would like to comment on Achcar's remarks about Libya. Whilst he is wrong to lend support to the intervention, he has a few sensible things to say on the situation and I would recommend reading him.¹

But he omits some important things. It is my view that the Libyan revolution is already defeated. From the moment the Interim Transitional National Council felt it had to invite this intervention it became clear that it was unable to overthrow the regime. As Marx observed a long time ago, revolution is needed not only to overthrow the powers that be, but also to transform the people who are making it - the process of revolution is a transformative one which gives the masses confidence in their ability to change things and to be masters of their own fate. Once you call on other forces to intervene, all this is lost, and in this sense it is a defeat.

The second remark which I think I would add to Achcar's analysis is this. It may well be that inviting these forces into Libya is the lesser evil, compared to being slaughtered. But it is still an evil. Sometimes one must accept and put up with the lesser evil, but one must never *demand* it. The people who are not only demanding, but *cheering* the intervention are renegades to the revolutionary idea. If it is a lesser evil but it comes to pass anyway, then you have to protest against it, you have to denounce it.

I have made the analogy before, but imagine that there is a group of

people surrounded by the Ku Klux Klan and are about to be slaughtered. They then invite protection from the mafia. The mafia will, of course, give you protection - but will then install a protection racket if it can. The mafia that is the so-called 'international community' is not even sure if it can institute this protection racket anyway, but it will do its damndest.

Moreover, the no-fly (now no-drive?) zone is dangerous not only in its immediate effect on the outcome in Libya. It also sets a worrying precedent. Once you give these forces the legitimisation to act as the global policeman, then next time they will use it as they please - not for the lesser evil, but the greater one. Giving such forces legitimacy is in the worst interests of revolution both in the Arab world and beyond - it is in the best interests of counterrevolution, because that is how they are going to use it. It is not simply this situation on its own, in isolation, but what it implies for the future as well.

Also, when our rulers make war it is very bad for us - this is a point made by Marx. Think back to Thatcher and the Falklands war - her government was set to lose the general election.

I think the reason why there was less opposition to Libya than Iraq was because the latter was obviously going to be a land invasion. A 'no-fly zone' appears to be a much safer, less risky version of war, which is more like a computer game than anything else, so it is more popular - especially if you can justify it on 'humanitarian' grounds - without the risk of getting bogged down in a long and drawn-out war.

Not only is the left divided in its reaction, but so too are the imperialists. In each of the countries where people are free to express divergent opinions you see some maintaining that this move is not a good idea and that one can never know how it will end. It is certainly going to be a messy situation.

Whilst I have claimed that this

moment marks the defeat of the Libyan revolution, I have not said that it is the defeat of the Arab revolution. I certainly hope it is not! This is just one sector of it, but it is not accidental that this defeat happened in a country like Libya. The reasons are quite clear.

Libya is one of the largest countries in Africa, most of which is desert. But it has a very small population of around six or seven million people, most of whom are divided along tribal lines. This is important. Compare it, for example, to Iran. Both are oil-producing countries that receive a large revenue from oil. This has led some to characterise Iran as a kind of 'rentier state' that does not depend too much on tax revenues from its own people. This allows it to provide handouts and sweeteners. Yet its population is around 11 times that of Libya, so even with the inflow of royalties from oil it cannot bribe that many people. As we know, the economic situation in Iran is dire.

This is different in Libya, where the revenue (or some of it) is spread out amongst far fewer people and thus leads to phenomena like low unemployment, etc. Indeed, the fact that Gaddafi made peace with the imperialist order back in 2003-04 (who will forget that handshake with our very own Tony Blair?) actually increased his ability to use this enormous wealth, even after siphoning off much of it for himself and his family. After all, he is a kleptocrat - just like his colleagues, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Ben Ali in Tunisia, etc. We should also mention the Saudi royal family, who do not even have to *steal* to get their wealth because there formally the oil is actually *theirs* - there is no distinction between the public purse and the private purse of the king. (In Britain this identity was abolished in medieval times.)

But even after deducting all of this kleptocratic rent, there is enough left over for Gaddafi to bribe enough of the population, to hire mercenaries

and so on and thus try to prevent what happened in Egypt and Tunisia. Libya's social structure is also less developed, less advanced than in those neighbouring countries. I think you can also notice this in the composition of the opposition - it is much more dominated by people who were tribally opposed to Gaddafi's regime, and there is a much higher proportion of Islamists than in both Tunisia and Egypt.

It would be foolish to predict how exactly things will pan in out in Libya. There might be a situation where it is divided between east and west and there is a civil war of attrition lasting for some time. Or it could end one way or the other. But, to the extent that there was a popular uprising, I think the people have lost ownership of this process and thus the revolution is defeated.

Other hot spots

This is not so in other parts of the Arab world. There are still very positive dynamics in Syria, for example. Syria is the second most important Arab country after Egypt. If Egypt had, by virtue of its large population, been the leader of the Arab people up to the time when it made peace with the US and Israel, then Syria is now the claimant to this role.

In fact, I recently looked back at these I had co-written in the mid-1970s, and what we said back then was that the Syrian Ba'ath was making a bid for the leadership of the Arab world. Iraq, the other large Arab country, has never managed to stake a claim on this role. Saddam Hussein had a project to do so, but for various reasons he did not achieve this.

Events in Japan and Britain have squeezed the reporting of Yemen, but things are going forward there too. And very few people mention Bahrain, which is in a catastrophic situation. What some feared would happen in Libya is happening right now. There the regime - aided by forces it invited from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states - has actually invaded the hospitals. So if you are wounded on a demonstration and taken to hospital you are likely to be killed. We are seeing a massacre of unimaginable cruelty.

Bahrain is the source of the pearls of Arabia. Now these forces have demolished the symbolic pearl in Pearl Square, where enormous demonstrations took place. This is a huge insult to the people who occupied the square - some still risk their lives demonstrating there. Here there are signs of the revolutionary process receding, whilst Yemen and Syria are still going forward. This is no coincidence: it can be traced back to social structure.

Yemen is the product of a forced union of the north and south - two areas with a vastly different social composition. North Yemen is tribal and very backward in its economic and social development. South Yemen is mostly made up of the former British colony of Aden. Politically it was also very developed. For a time there was a self-styled socialist republic here, which was then overthrown by an

internal coup and external forces from other countries and from North Yemen. This localised would-be socialism had some very democratic ideas. In the heyday of socialist revolution in South Yemen it said and did a lot of things which went beyond Stalinism. There was a real struggle which took place there between Stalin-style communists and real communists. Of course, they were very limited as to what they could achieve and in the end they were defeated. But in terms of its political development, South Yemen was probably the most advanced country in the Arab world.²

Whilst it is now merged with the very different North Yemen, we can still see this influence of working class struggle and organisation today: we see a radical intelligentsia and the heritage of a well-organised workers' movement making its mark on the events unfolding there.

There were only a few countries in which there was a sizeable working class movement in the Arab world beyond South Yemen. The largest Communist Party, which was highly Stalinised, was in Iraq. But when the monarchy was overthrown in 1958 it was the only party to emerge intact from the underground. The coup to remove the monarchy was a military one, but on the civilian political scene the Communist Party almost had a monopoly. Of course, this was wasted because of its policies and so on. I am old enough to remember when Anastas Mikoyan came to 'advise' the Iraqi Communist Party following the fall of the monarchy in 1958-59. He actually told them not to rock the boat and to maintain the Soviet policy of 'peaceful co-existence' with the west - a revolutionary policy in Iraq would have undermined this and was thus to be avoided. This marked the beginning of the decline of the CP, and what remains now is really shameful. It is not even an anti-imperialist force, let alone a force for socialism.

The third country where there was a strong movement, albeit a Stalinist one, was Syria. Syria had a fairly sizeable Communist Party led by the Kurd, Khalid Bakdash. It is a very mixed country with quite a lot of Christians, Jews, Armenians and all sorts. Again because of its Stalinist policies the CP declined. But, once again, traditions have been retained which survive to this day.

Those like me who had been in a Stalinist Communist Party will perhaps understand what I am trying to describe. These parties were tools of Stalinist foreign policy. Nevertheless, they organised the working class and a lot of their members were true, genuine working class militants who learned a little bit of Marxism (of course, in a rather doctored version). But they were called on to read some of the classical writings and this did leave something behind, in spite of all the betrayals and so on. Wherever there were powerful CPs there is a tradition which lives on today. This is not true of Iraq, but that is partly because of other factors, such as the complete destruction of the country following the invasion. So there is a sense in which these organisations have left behind them a heritage which is still worthwhile.

Qatar is a genuine exception in all of this. It is a very rich place and its ruling family is playing a very clever game. There have been calls for demonstrations there too, but very few people have turned up. There is opposition, of course, as there is everywhere. But for the time being business is business - and part of the business of the Qatari ruling family is Al-Jazeera! They are actually profiting from the Arab revolution and - for the moment at least - they do not feel threatened by it. Whether they will succumb to it or not remains to be seen.

As for Al-Jazeera itself, it is

interesting to look at how in many ways it *presages* Arab unity. It is not a coincidence that what symbolises Arab unity is one of the most modern forms of communication. It is Arab unity in the form suited to the 21st century. It has Arab workers from all over the region.

It originally started as an offshoot of the BBC World Service, but the BBC turned out to be too conservative and restrictive, too bound up with American and British interests in the region. Al-Jazeera actually broadcasts much of what the Arab masses want. Let us not overstate this: the station is hardly the voice of Arab communism! Nonetheless, it is run by secular democrats whose coverage is not based on sound bites like the BBC World Service. On Al-Jazeera they actually have *discussions*, where people are allowed to develop their positions - not just those who support the Arab revolution, but also Israeli politicians and American conservatives, for example. This is very educational, making it in my opinion the most informative news service in the world (especially now that the BBC World Service is being cut).

Expectations

It would be foolish to prophesy. Things are still unfolding and numerous options are presenting themselves. But it would also be foolish to expect too much. I think it is unlikely that we will see even a progressive kind of bourgeois democratic regime emerge, or some kind of social democratic arrangement. These things do not come about with just one push. This revolutionary movement is only the first of a whole historical process, which is only in its infancy.

History is important. In 1848 there were revolutions throughout most of Europe, which on the face of things did not succeed: they did not actually overthrow all the reactionary regimes. Nevertheless, it did not come to nothing. It left a certain tradition and a certain heritage which was then taken forward in the next step.

Look at what happened in Portugal in 1974-75. The revolution took on a very leftwing and radical direction, but a lot of it was reversed. What we have in Portugal now is not that much different to what exists in many other European states. However, if you speak to people who took part in this revolution then you will notice that it lives on in their consciousness - it matters when you have experienced the overthrow of a dictatorial regime and lived through a period of people's power, etc. It forms the basis of the next step.

So even the most realistically optimistic scenario is not for all the old regimes to be overthrown and replaced by liberal, social democratic administrations. It will probably be far short of this. But the longer-term effects will be more profound. The world has changed already in many ways. First of all, from the point of view of the US-led imperialist order the Middle East is no longer something you can regard as a safe zone. The whole policy of the US in the region - the most strategically important in the world due to oil and the Suez Canal - was based on the fact that, whilst US policy-makers were very clearly aware of the discontent of the masses, they believed in the ability of the rulers to keep it under control and repress it.

There was actually a neoconservative project to introduce the imperialist version of democracy to the Middle East. The neocons (not George Bush, by the way, who simply provided patronage for the whole project) realised that the Saudi Arabian situation was no longer sustainable and were thinking very far ahead. They knew that there would eventually be some sort of revolt or uprising there, and thus came to the

conclusion that it would be better for them to instigate and control the impending transformation. This is certainly true. The whole project foundered because the first stage failed so miserably - Iraq proved not to be the beginning of a smooth transition to western democracy but a very bloody mess. The whole thing became discredited.

Conspiracy theory fans like the remnants of the Workers Revolutionary Party, who tend to uphold Gaddafi as some sort of 'anti-imperialist', actually infer from this that what is going on must be the product of neocon plans. But this is completely wrong. They were hatched precisely in order to *pre-empt* what is actually taking place - ie, instead of something driven by the initiative of the people, something they could instigate and manipulate themselves.

Indeed, this revolutionary wave was not without previous tremors - even in Libya. In 1995, for example, there was a local uprising in Benghazi - no coincidence, of course. It was drowned in blood. But there have been uprisings in every one of these countries - protests that the regimes were able to suppress. But that period is now over. Nothing is the same. This is also reflected in US lack of confidence in relation to the unfolding events. They are no longer sure if they can keep this region under control. With the exception of Syria, all of the countries gripped by revolution are allies of the United States and, at least implicitly, of Israel.

Although in the Egyptian and Tunisian protests you did not see many slogans such as 'Down with the United States' or 'Down with Israel', this was because the protests were dealing with the immediate task at hand - ie, overthrowing the regime. If you actually watch journalists talking to ordinary people, as Al-Jazeera did, then it becomes clear that they were not simply protesting about unemployment or the corruption of the various regimes, but about the fact that those like Mubarak are lackeys of imperialism, and the shameful conditions of the peace treaty with Israel imposed on them.

When you hear interviews with Syrians though, they assert that *one thing* they do not mind about the regime is the fact that it is opposed to the US and does not toe the Israeli line. It is hated because of repression and the state of the economy, but not for foreign policy. It is important to observe what people are saying, rather than just what is on their placards.

All-Arab

I would like also to point out that we are witnessing an all-Arab revolution. The *Weekly Worker* has been quite correct on this. Whilst I would rather call it an *all-Arab* revolution than a *pan-Arab* revolution, as the *Weekly Worker* does, this is simply a matter of terminology.

I am slightly puzzled by the fact that many from the Trotskyist tradition refuse to accept the idea of an Arab revolution. One good example of this is Stuart King of Permanent Revolution. Whenever I have spoken on Arab unity and he has been present he has raised a number of rather odd objections. On the one hand, he says, the Arab world is far too disparate and there are many national minorities (the Kurds, the Israelis and so on) and further nationalities which he invents, such as the Maronites (a religious denomination).

On the other hand, he then questions why we should be opting for Arab unity: why not opt for regional unity, which would include Turkey and Iran? Of course, in the long run we will have a united socialist world. But the affinity between England and Scotland, for example, is not the same as the affinity between England and Japan. You would not expect

unification to proceed at the same rate everywhere. In the long run - and this will take many generations - the world will, of course, be one and there will be no national frontiers. But this cannot happen all at once. To bring in Iran, with a different history, language and some record of estrangement from and conflict with the Arab world, strikes me as rather strange. Further, it is ridiculous to bring in Turkey, which was the imperial master of the Arab world, as a partner on the same level as - let us say - Hadhramaut and Oman.

Given that the Arab revolution is an idea associated with Michel Raptis (Pablo), perhaps this hostility to Arab unity can be traced back to an old Trotskyist sectarian quarrel which has outlived its meaningfulness. To me it makes no difference whether the idea came from Pablo. He may have got one hundred and one other things wrong, but he was right on this question. He knew the Arab world very well and this idea was enthusiastically picked up. I got it from a comrade of mine, who was my main mentor on Middle Eastern matters. I am referring to the Palestinian Arab Marxist, Jabra Nicola, who died in London in 1974. He was a Trotskyist. I was and am not. But I learnt a lot from him.

Anyway, quite clearly the revolutionary contagion in the Arab world is far more direct and immediate than, for example, the spreading of revolutionary sentiment across eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The Arab world is more like a single nation divided into sub-nationalities. If you want a rough analogy, then I would say it is like Italy, where there is the Italian nation, but within it there are the Sicilians, Tuscans, etc, who are akin to sub-nationalities. In fact, in the period of World War I, when there was the promise of uniting the Arab world, explicit comparisons were made with Italy. Many were arguing that the Arab world should be treated like Italy under Garibaldi and so on. The British actually mobilised support against Turkey using this very promise of Arab unity. Of course, this was later betrayed.

Even if you compare the Arab region with the Spanish-speaking part of Latin America, the historical and linguistic ties are much closer in the former. Indeed, many of the Latin American countries are historically not mainly Spanish - they have their own indigenous histories and cultures. Not so in the Arab world.

Today, one of the modern attributes of a nation is that it is a people who get their news from the same television station! In this respect, all the Arab world is one nation. Do not underestimate this! The rulers know this very well. Indeed, some of them have even blamed Al-Jazeera for the revolution, which is, of course, exaggerated. But it reveals a truth.

It matters a lot when people watch the same programmes and can communicate with each other in the same language - something which is increasingly done online, of course. And again, whilst we may not have seen placards addressing the question of Arab unity (beyond, for example, 'Solidarity with Tunisia' in Egypt and so on), when you actually talk to activists and hear them being interviewed then you notice a big change. The desire for and drive towards Arab unity was very much alive from the 1950s onwards, especially around the time of the Suez war. It lasted right through to the 1970s, but then it declined. And if you spoke to Arab comrades in the 1980s and 1990s then they would say that Arab unity was a lost cause, it was not going to happen, there was too much divergence, etc. But now if you speak to them it is clear that the idea is back on the agenda.

It is not simply the same language, culture and history which

is important. It is also an economic need. This should be a very important consideration, especially for Marxists. Currently divided up into one big state, a few medium-sized states and then a lot of mini-states, the Arab world as it actually is does not make sense economically. The distribution of the population and natural resources is very skewed and uneven. The riches of Libya and Saudi Arabia, for example, could finance the extensive development which is needed in a country like Egypt. A country like Syria has a lot of fertile land which is underused. The dispersal of all these human and natural resources means that it makes no sense to keep them apart. The first step could be something along the lines of the European Union - first and foremost an economic union - but without the reactionary agenda.

Unfortunately it would seem that the Arab bourgeoisie is incapable of actually leading this transformation. Achieving such a union requires the mobilisation of the working class, and indeed the *leadership* of the working class. The bourgeoisie has *tried* to do this - and not just the Egyptian and Syrian bourgeoisie. Even Gaddafi had a Mickey Mouse project for Arab unification.

I think that a 'Bismarck scenario' is unlikely in the Arab revolution. Uniting Germany in 'blood and iron' was made possible by the particular role which Prussia played in relation to the other German states. It was a highly militarised state - one of the biggest military powers in Europe. On the other hand, the other German states were smaller and much weaker militarily. In terms of the Arab world today, it is not simply that a Bismarck does not exist, but that there is no Arab Prussia. Egypt is by far the largest country in the Arab world. But I think that the scenario of Egypt invading Syria and so on is a remote one. Saladin, for example, *did* invade and unify a large part of the Arab world, but that was in the 12th century, not the 21st. I do not think it is realistic now.

The bourgeoisie, of course, could achieve Arab unity by its own means, but I think this is unlikely. Recent historical experience suggests why. The United Arab Republic, for example, was initiated by the Syrian bourgeoisie, not Nasser and the Egyptian bourgeoisie. They thought it would protect their interests and that it would be better to work together with others of their class interest in the Arab world. But, when it actually came about, the Syrian bourgeoisie was not so keen because it found it was being competitively undermined by the much larger and more powerful Egyptian bourgeoisie. They found it was too bad for business.

This is a dilemma for the various national capitals, which base themselves on snatching a bigger part of the market and so on. It looks very unlikely that the bourgeoisie will transcend its immediate interests in order to unite the Arab nation. To do this you need a class which is not held back by competitive, immediate material interests, but can think in a more international sense: ie, the working class.

Of course, that would require the working class to organise, and for this a whole historical period will be required. That is why I am saying that *in the short term* we should not expect too much. We need a period in which the working class can actually organise and create its own political leadership, which can then start a new revolution aimed at uniting the Arab world ●

Notes

1. For the interview, see www.zcommunications.org/libyan-developments-by-gilbert-achcar.
2. See F Halliday *Arabia without Sultans* London 1974.

DEBATE

You are useful idiots

The imperialist assault on Libya has rallied many on the liberal and socialist left in its defence. James Turley argues that this makes an anti-imperialist perspective even more urgently necessary

The Arab uprisings of the last few months have, on the whole, had the effect of wrong-footing imperialism in a most dramatic way. It is true that the US had embryonic contingency plans in the event that its favoured strongmen should fall; but it is equally true that these plans turned out to be woefully insufficient. The discomfort of the White House and its allies was plain for all to see.

That said, it was inevitable that the west would attempt to regain the initiative somehow - and, however much they may have been at sea when dealing with a great explosion of unrest in foreign climes, our governments have more than enough tricks up their sleeves in order to win acquiescence from their own populations.

The attack on Libya, then, was an expertly chosen opportunity to reassert imperialism's flagging political and moral authority in the region. As soon as it became clear that the rebellion centred on Benghazi was likely to fail - with the distinct possibility, at least, of being drowned in blood - the pieces all fell into place. Here was a country, ruled by a man who can only be described as slightly unbalanced, edging towards a massacre - and only a revised version of the 'coalition of the willing' could stop it.

This is not, then, a repeat of Iraq; the closest analogue in recent history is the Nato campaign against Serbia in 1999. That crisis was difficult for the left to negotiate as well; it is disappointing, but not surprising, to find many willing again to provide left cover for the imperialists in the Libyan case. After all, many of the Libyan rebels themselves ended up pleading for a no-fly zone - a key component of arguments in the aggressor countries for setting one up.

A disclaimer: though I will argue that this position is as wrong in Benghazi as it is in Birmingham, it is not as treacherous in the former, where people could look forward only to a bloody demise in the absence of some kind of *deus ex machina*. Those who disgracefully claim that this request for western assistance 'proves' that the whole rebellion was a CIA plot all along do themselves, and the Arab masses, no favours. One cannot confuse a desperate cry for help with a rationalised apologia.

Left apologists

Surveying the left forces in support - however mealy-mouthed - of the imperialist intervention, one meets some new faces and, as it were, some old friends. In the former camp, we can place Gilbert Achcar, the Lebanese-French academic who has made a name for himself as a vocal critic of imperialism. Achcar is a long-time supporter of the Mandelite Fourth International, and he was interviewed in that organisation's

periodical *International Viewpoint*, where he argued that, while anti-imperialists should be wary of their governments' intentions in Libya, they should stop short of opposing the imposition of a no-fly zone.

"There are not enough safeguards in the wording of [UN resolution 1973, which authorised the attack] to bar its use for imperialist purposes," Achcar says. All the same, "given the urgency of preventing the massacre that would have inevitably resulted from an assault on Benghazi by Gaddafi's forces, and the absence of any alternative means of achieving the protection goal, no-one can reasonably oppose it".¹

Achcar's interview provoked a storm of controversy - unsurprisingly, given that most of those familiar with and supportive of his work thus far will know him as a staunch anti-imperialist. He has since penned an extensive reply to his critics which goes into more detail on his position, but without dealing with its fundamental weaknesses. This time round, he starts by tantalising us with 'what if' scenarios from history - would it really have been so bad if the imperialists had gotten together to stop the Rwandan genocide? Was the United States and British war effort against Hitler - however many hideous crimes it involved - really deserving of automatic opposition? We will come to the fundamental problem with such arguments in due course - for now, it will suffice to note that exactly the same two examples are wheeled out by more run-of-the-mill 'cruise missile leftists' on every occasion, from Afghanistan to Iraq to ... Libya.

Achcar is keen to stress that there were very compelling reasons why the imperialists did not intervene in the Rwandan case, and indeed he is correct to do so. Fundamentally, however, this is besides the point for him - this time around, the stars are aligned; the machinations of imperialism for once match up with the needs of the masses.²

Given Achcar's record, which if anything has occasionally pushed him too far the other way into borderline third worldism (he is, after all, a Mandelite), we can perhaps call this position a 'wobble' rather than a lurch into full-blown social-imperialism. The same cannot be said of the Alliance for Workers Liberty, which began edging into this territory decades ago, and has barrelled into it at some pace since the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks.

The AWL supported (though it would prefer the meaningless term, 'refused to

oppose') the intervention into the Kosovo war, declined to call for troops out of Iraq at any point during that misadventure (though it finally got around to a 'troops out of Afghanistan' position a year or two ago, and therefore a mere eight years late), supported the deployment of US troops to Haiti in the wake of the earthquake last year ... the list goes on.

With that record, Libya was never going to be an exception for imperialism's useful idiots - and, sure enough, as the campaign for a no-fly zone built up a head of steam, its paper, *Solidarity*, published an article under the ham-fisted headline, "Yes to Libya", not "No to the USA".³ In substance, the position of this article is similar to Achcar's, beginning, as he does, with a reminder of imperialism's self-interested motivation: "Socialists should not give a blank cheque to US or British military intervention ... Their history and their nature mandates an attitude of complete distrust to the US and British military."

Proving that "complete distrust" is ever in short supply at AWL headquarters, however, the author ('Chris Reynolds', an old *nom de guerre* of AWL 'number two' Martin Thomas) asks: "But is it our job to try to stop the implementation of a no-fly zone, or the delivery of weapons to the anti-Gaddafi forces? Should we do as some on the left do, and hoist 'No imperialist intervention' to the top of our slogans about Libya, downgrading 'No to Gaddafi'?" No.⁴

Unlike Achcar, the AWL does not credit the likelihood of a more extended intervention in Libya to secure control of oil reserves; and, while Achcar trots out fantasy situations about Rwanda to bolster his case, Reynolds uses the frankly bizarre example of the no-fly zone over Iraqi Kurdistan as a model of imperialist massacre prevention.⁵ With a certain dreary inevitability, the group's patriarch, Sean Matgamna, has now put his two-penn'orth in - full of Matgamna signature moves, such as wilful misrepresentation of opponents, and long strings of increasingly unhinged rhetorical questions. The argument is basically the same as Reynolds', only this time the 'model intervention' is ... Kosovo.⁶

Fundamental errors

The convergence of Achcar and Matgamna on this question is striking, partly because of the deep differences between the two on every conceivable level. Their respective political records, as noted, diverge enormously - particularly on the question of Israel; but it should also be noted that they reach the same destination by very different theoretical routes.

Achcar's anti-imperialism, despite his Marxist heritage, tends towards liberal support for the underdog; there is oppression, and we should oppose it as much as a moral

reflex as anything else. Neither of his articles, barring an epigram from *Leftwing communism* on the second, look very much like they could not have been written by a left liberal. The AWL, meanwhile, is very proud of its overt workerism; a key component of its argumentation over Iraq was that it was easier for workers' organisations (principally trade unions) to gain a foothold under a US occupation than under the 'clerical fascist' regime that would replace it in the event of a forced withdrawal.

What these positions have in common is a tendency towards short-termism and localism. The critique of imperialism is not, in the first instance, about individual spectacular acts of state repression engendered by the US and its allies and clients. It is about a system which encompasses the globe and has such violence at its very core; and a system which has strategies that persist through time. Both Achcar and Matgamna argue on the basis that the fundamental question is whether there will be, if you will, a massacre in Benghazi next Tuesday afternoon. That is their fundamental error.

In reality - as Achcar, but not the AWL, concedes - imperialist intervention in Libya cannot be conceived as a one-off 'police action' to halt Gaddafi's advance. The basic military facts of the case do not support this interpretation - unless the imperialists get involved in a more substantial way than they already are, the only possible result is a protracted and bloody civil war which will make the hypothetical rout of the rebel stronghold look like a day out in Disneyland. Given Libya's social fabric - a large, sparsely populated country with a heavily tribalist tilt to politics - such a war would leave it looking like contemporary Afghanistan. Some kind of US-brokered 'peace' deal would put off this eventuality rather than prevent it.

But even this is too small a scale to consider the problem. The context, as noted, is the whole wave of Arab uprisings. The importance of Libyan oil should not be too drastically understated, but the primary motivation behind the intervention is to change the dynamic of the revolutionary wave in the Americans' favour. The no-fly zone (and let us not kid ourselves with the wording here - it is a generalised military assault on Gaddafi's forces) is the sharp end of a very dubious plan to neutralise a revolutionary wave that has targeted primarily allies of the imperialist countries (Gaddafi, until a few weeks ago, included).

That, in the end, is why the various counter-examples provided by the AWL are disingenuous. The Kurdistan no-fly zone is commended to us, as if it was not part and parcel of a sanctions regime that killed up to a million people. The intervention in Kosovo is presented, again, as a 'police action' to end Milosevic's ethnic cleansing, rather than the bloody campaign it was, integral to the larger project of ensuring the subservience of the former Stalinist world to US and west European interests. Imperialism does not do one-offs - the AWL does not seem able to grasp this at all. For all its appeals to the 'concrete' circumstances of this exact moment, its view is precisely *abstract* - the concrete must by definition be considered as part of the whole and in interrelationship with other phenomena, not plucked out of

nowhere and examined in isolation from the world.

Of course, this abstract presentation of the issue is not an innovation of the AWL (or Gilbert Achcar); it is simply borrowed from the way it has been presented in bourgeois politics and the media - a straight choice between an atrocity and a western intervention. For all its attempts to hedge its bets with talks of no "blank cheques" and "complete distrust", the AWL has already accepted the terms of debate wholesale. As soon as it did so, social-imperialist conclusions were inevitable. This is also the story with its other political errors on this front - Iraq, Kosovo, etc.

Our tasks

So the question is not whether, on the one hand, we turn a blind eye to the west or, on the other, consign the Libyan rebels to the tender mercies of Gaddafi's forces.

The rebellion has *already* failed to topple Gaddafi's state; should it succeed now, riding on the back of the great powers, then the democratic content that act would have had otherwise will be wholly subverted. When revolutions fail, reaction is very often bloody and horrific; but the Libyan dead are a few among many millions of martyrs to the democratic and revolutionary aspirations of the masses. They will not be the last. (Unfortunately, now that imperialism has gotten involved, there will be many more of them.)

As noted, Achcar begins his second intervention with a Lenin quotation, on Brest-Litovsk and the occasional necessity of compromises with imperialism. Quite so - but Achcar confuses compromise with capitulation. A compromise is something that is forced upon us, not something that we willingly embrace. Achcar's position amounts to cheerleading, albeit of the most guarded and cautious type.

In any case, it is too late to stop the west going into Libya. If the comrades are serious in their opposition to imperialist ambitions beyond altruistically preventing massacres, then they need to get on board *now* and help build a forthright opposition to the US, British and French actions *as a whole*. That is one lever we can get our hands on - undermining the ability of our own states to interfere in the Arab democratic upsurges. It is a much tougher sell than opposition to the war in Iraq, with the ruling class generally united behind the Libyan intervention - but that simply makes it all the more necessary, now of all times when we are practically alone, that the far left does not waver in its opposition to imperialism.

Winning the mass of workers to a defeatist position - or at least keeping the position alive in public discourse - would not only help prevent our rulers from doing more harm than they already have, but keep the way open for the Arab spring to claim more tyrants as victims ●

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Notes

1. <http://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article2038>.
2. www.zcommunications.org/libya-a-legitimate-and-necessary-debate-from-an-anti-imperialist-perspective-by-gilbert-achcar.
3. www.workersliberty.org/story/2011/03/09/yes-libya-not-no-usa.
4. www.workersliberty.org/story/2011/03/23/should-we-denounce-intervention-libya.



Gaddafi tank: destroyed thanks to imperialism

No defence of Benghazi

Gerry Downing of *Socialist Fight* believes the anti-Gaddafi rebellion is totally reactionary

Eddie Ford's article 'Imperialism out, down with the Gaddafi regime', makes a number of serious political errors and omissions (*Weekly Worker* March 24).

The most important ones are to fail to take into account: (1) Libya's history of struggle against colonialism and imperialism; (2) the tribal nature of its society; (3) the nature of the leadership of the Libyan rebels; (4) the role of the working class in the struggle; (5) the role of al-Qa'eda in Libya; and (6) to light-mindedly assume that this was just a continuation of the 'Arab revolution' or 'Arab spring' begun in Tunisia and then developed in Egypt and throughout the region. I will take these points in order.

1. In the course of the struggle against imperialism Libya suffered the genocide of up to 50% of its population by Italian colonialism in the 1920s and early 30s. Italian 'pacification' after the execution of Omar Mukhtar, a Senussi sheikh, in 1931 resulted in 30,000 Libyan troops fighting for Italy in World War II. Post-war saw the reinstallation of king Idris, the emir of Cyrenaica (capital Benghazi) under the Italians, who had fled to Egypt after Mussolini took power in Italy in 1922. He marshalled big numbers from Cyrenaica to fight for the Allies during the war.

Gaddafi deposed him in 1969 and nationalised the oil companies in 1970. He redistributed wealth to Libyans, so that it is still the most egalitarian country in Africa, with the highest GDP per capita. Gaddafi has adopted far more pro-imperialist policies since 2006, privatising and allowing the penetration of finance capital, which has resulted in 20% unemployment. He has always been a brutal dictator, justifiably so against pro-imperialist elements, who are often funded by the US, British and French intelligence secret services; unjustifiably against liberals and the working class. Strikes and trade unions are illegal and all opposition from the left is crushed.

2. Gaddafi has worked since 1969 to balance between the different tribes in Libya. The biggest tribe, the Warfallah, were reported to be backing the rebels, but now back Gaddafi. His own tribe, the Gaddafa, is allied with the far larger Megarha tribe. The Tarhuna tribe is supporting the regime. Of significance also is the religion of the eastern region. It is dominated by the Senussi, a Muslim political-religious order. King Idris was the grandson of the founder of this Senussi Muslim sufi order, to which Omar Mukhtar also belonged.

3. The rebel leaders are an alliance of former ministers in Gaddafi's regime; CIA-sponsored and -funded, pro-imperialist opportunists; monarchists; and al-Qa'eda Islamists. This could easily have been discovered by every leftist by simple Googling - these reactionaries have not hidden their politics from anyone apart from the most politically naive. To political idiots they stood for 'freedom, justice and democracy' - don't we all?

4. In Egypt and Tunisia the working class played and will play a significant, politically independent role. In the end Mubarak had to go when the strike wave intensified to such an extent that Obama instructed the military to order him to go - the sleeping giant was bestirring itself and might fully awake. So now it is necessary to secure the chains again by banning strikes in Egypt.



Black Africans picked out?

Matters were totally different in Libya. Stories of Gaddafi's black mercenaries hid the appalling slaughter of black workers carried out by our rebels. Again a simple Google would have revealed the lies behind the propaganda. According to the Somaliland Press on March 27, "In east Libya, an African hunt began, as towns and cities began to fall under the control of Libyan rebels, mobs and gangs. They started to detain, insult, rape and even execute black immigrants, students and refugees. In the past two weeks, more than 100 Africans from various Sub-Saharan states are believed to have been killed by Libyan rebels and their supporters" (<http://somalilandpress.com>).

And a comment on that article by 'farhanodow': "Libya insurgents shouldn't be supported because we see who they are and what they believe. They are pure racists who hate black Africans and yet they want our support. Most Arab people like Saudi Arabia treat Africans as sub-human, but the Libyan rebels are purely racist. They should go to hell, not get any assistance from African countries ... all black African should be against these racist rebels."

A Somalian bus driver friend tells me his cousin, an engineer in the oilfields, was murdered by the rebels, and the rest of the family - his wife and two children - are missing, also believed murdered. "Gaddafi is a bastard," he says, "but these people must be defeated. I have no hesitation supporting Gaddafi against them." This is a common African sentiment. Is it really necessary now to make the point that the working class could not possibly make a progressive contribution to this uprising in these circumstances?

5. There are many reports on the involvement of al-Qa'eda cells in Libya and there are numerous sources testifying to their attempts to assassinate Gaddafi. According to Martin Bright, home affairs editor of *The Observer*, "British intelligence paid large sums of money to an al-Qa'eda cell in Libya in a doomed attempt to assassinate colonel Gaddafi in 1996 ... The latest claims of MI6 involvement with Libya's fearsome Islamic Fighting Group, which is connected to one of bin Laden's trusted lieutenants, will be

embarrassing to the government, which described similar claims by renegade MI5 officer David Shayler as 'pure fantasy'.

"... the MI6 officers involved in the alleged plot were Richard Bartlett, who has previously only been known under the codename PT16 and had overall responsibility for the operation; and David Watson, codename PT16B. As Shayler's opposite number in MI6, Watson was responsible for running a Libyan agent, 'Tunworth', who was providing information from within the cell. According to Shayler, MI6 passed £100,000 to the al-Qaeda plotters" (November 10 2002).

Imperialism, in the shape of the CIA, is hedging its bets in Libya today. The Transitional National Council is losing credibility and the fundamentalists are gaining within the ranks of the rebels. According to Michel Chossudovsky, "the Central Intelligence Agency, using Pakistan's ISI as a go-between, played a key role in training the Mujahedin. In turn, the CIA-sponsored guerrilla training was integrated with the teachings of Islam. The madrasahs were set up by Wahabi fundamentalists financed out of Saudi Arabia." There were a substantial number of Libyan jihadists in Afghanistan in those years and when they returned to Libya as the Islamic Fighting Group they retained their CIA connections, as Shayler and *The Observer* have proved.

This is now being put to good use, as the following extract from *Stratfor*, the self-styled "global intelligence" website, tells us:

"Outside Benghazi's courthouse, these multiple Islamist groups have proved assiduous in asserting their presence. The Muslim Brothers, Libya's oldest political party, established by Egyptian émigrés fleeing Nasser's repression in the 1950s, appears to be the best organised. Hitherto an elitist group concentrated in Libyan academe, it is rapidly acquiring a grassroots reach through the mosques, a newly acquired forum the liberals lack. Scrapping their previous reformist agenda, the Brothers now preach revolution and an anti-Gaddafi jihad ... Within days, the academics outside the courthouse were outnumbered by would-be mujahedin staging prayers, *fi sabil Allah* (in the path of god), for

the fight against the colonel.

"We control the street and the fighting at the front," says Juma Muhammad, one of hundreds of former Abu Salim inmates helping to rally the crowds behind the Islamists. 'We're with the people; the Council is not.' In open-air prayers and graffiti, they repetitively denounce Gaddafi - not least because of his bushy curls - as an unbeliever, a Mossad agent and a Jew. Another Abu Salim inmate notes that two rebel fighters killed in the first battle for the oil port of Ra's Lanouf were Libyan veterans of the Afghan jihad, as is a 41-year-old rebel commander" ('Jihadist opportunities in Libya', February 24).

6. Now these are the political, social and religious orientations of the rebels which led every imperialist nation, every reactionary state in the Gulf and

the Arab League (22 nations, nine of the 11 who attended, with Syria and Algeria opposed) to support the rebels and the no-fly-zone war on Libya. Why were the forces of global reaction so politically acute as to identify their political allies immediately and give them every assistance from day one, whereas our 'leftists' thought there was a revolutionary soul contained within the reactionary shell (if they ever thought about it at all)? Like in Kronstadt in 1921 the logic of the rebels' stance, their history (revolts against Gaddafi in this region began in 1971), as well as religious and tribal differences, made them playthings for imperialist intervention. Such opposition as existed was quickly drowned out.

The WRP/*News Line* was wrong to say, "Victory to Gaddafi", but not nearly as wrong as Eddie Ford's "Down with the Gaddafi regime" slogan. At least they were on the right side of the class struggle internationally. Any principled revolutionist would have taken a united front stance with Gaddafi, not only against the imperialist open assault, but also against imperialism's internal agents. As for the humanitarian claptrap about Gaddafi shooting his own people and the "Victory to the Libyan people" slogan some have promoted, are the Libyan people who support Gaddafi non-people - 'guilty civilians' whose deaths are simply collateral damage? And should we not have known the vast amount of lying propaganda emanating from the rebels and the capitalist mass media was just that? It was not too difficult a task to Google the likes of Somaliland Press, for instance.

Defeat the forces of imperialism! No support for Mahmoud Jibril and the Interim Transitional National Council! Defeat imperialist intervention! No to an imperialist proxy regime! ●

Fighting fund

Supporting us

The big TUC demo really showed me what genuine support there is for our paper. Although we decided to give away our anti-cuts special to those at the march and rally who wanted a copy, several dozen people insisted on giving us (at least) £1 anyway.

From what I have been able to work out so far, £135 was donated in this way, including one £20 and three £10 notes. It could be I've underestimated the total in fact - donations may have got mixed in with sales money in one or two cases. Anyhow, it was good to meet a number of our online readers, who (usually!) told us how much they appreciated the *Weekly Worker*. We printed an extra 1,500 copies, by the way - they were all taken - and I am sure a proportion of those who read the paper for the first time will have been impressed and want more.

This week's donations to the fighting fund more than covered the extra printing costs. As well as the

contributions handed to us on the 26th, we received £143 in regular standing orders (thanks to DS, PM, JT, RC, CC, SB, RL and WD), plus two cheques in the post - £20 from PL and £10 added to JK's resubscription. Then there was the handsome £50 contribution from BD, who made use of our online PayPal facility. He was one of 12,357 internet readers last week.

The extra £358 that came in over the last seven days has taken our total to £1,332, with one more day to go. So we have exceeded our £1,250 monthly target by over £100. A welcome change!

If you are one of those newcomers who read us for the first time on the journey home from the demo, why not help get our April fund off to a good start? ●

Robbie Rix

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

LABOUR

Taking on redder hues?

Eddie Ford argues that Ed Miliband is shuffling to the left as the resistance to the Tory-Lib Dem cuts takes mass form



TUC march: workers' fightback

Labour is now just another bourgeois party like the Conservatives or the Liberal Democrats - or so some on the left have insisted, like the Socialist Party in England and Wales, and Workers Power. So when Tony Blair ditched clause four, or whenever the cut-off date is supposed to have been - take your pick - the Labour Party suddenly ceased being a bourgeois workers' party, the party of the trade union and labour bureaucracy under a pro-imperialist leadership, and therefore could no longer be a vital arena in which to fight for the politics of Marxism. Time to set up shop elsewhere.

Needless to say, those who have dismissed Labour in such a way are making a fundamental blunder - whether due to a genuine misreading of the situation or just downright self-serving sectarianism. Of course, it is unarguably the case that the Blairite project of prostituting itself before big business and a rogues' gallery of billionaires saw the party's bourgeois, pro-capitalist pole become suffocatingly dominant. That is, Blairism represented the most reactionary or sordid manifestation of *Labourism* in its already inglorious history.

However, it was always the case that not every section of the Labour Party was relaxed about people getting filthy rich (the New Labour credo) and that at some point there would be a counter-push in the direction of the working class pole. A revival, to one degree or another, of the left and its ideas within the Labour Party - even if, at least initially, this would not take Marxist or communist forms on any

substantive scale.

Well, the worldwide financial crisis - the credit crunch - and the near economic meltdown that resulted put a spike in the New Labour and neoliberal wheel: the masters of the universe and their free markets no longer looked so glamorous. Maybe capitalism does not have all the answers after all. Even the George Bush government was forced by events to ditch its instinctive *laissez-fairism* and adopt emergency measures that effectively nationalised large sections of the banking and insurance industry in order to stop the system going under - leading, of course, to Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez joking that Bush was now "more leftwing than me". Clearly then, the economic crisis that struck like a whirlwind, combined with the permanently ongoing environmental crisis, has acted to discredit Blairism and equivalent projects everywhere. Indeed, in general, more and more people are coming to the conclusion that there is a crying need for an alternative to the destructive merry-go-round of business-as-usual politics and seemingly inevitable economic cycles of boom-and-bust: it is not working. Not fit for human and environmental purpose. But *what* alternative exactly?

This mood of resistance to the politics of the past was on display at the TUC-organised 'March for the alternative' protest on March 26 - with hundreds of thousands turning up to demonstrate against the coalition government's vicious, anti-working class, austerity assault. They want *us* to pay for the gross failures of *their* system, a grievance exacerbated by

the fact that when in opposition the Tories bitterly resisted any measures that would encroach upon the sacred profit margins of the bankers and speculators - thus George Osborne vehemently, and cretinously, opposed the nationalisation of Northern Rock, etc. More to the point, and inevitably, the Labour Party - and the trade union bureaucracy as a whole - is being forced to the left, as it comes under pressure from those at the wrong end of the cuts, including its own rank and file. In other words, the reality and logic of class struggle - and just the mere fact of being in opposition, of course - dictates that the Labour Party leadership has to be *seen* opposing the Con-Dem government and its cuts. Hence Ed 'Red' Miliband's appearance and speech at the TUC's March 26 rally, trying to put a little bit of colour back into his doubtlessly unwanted and thoroughly undeserved moniker.

Addressing the huge crowd at Hyde Park, Miliband was at pains to associate Labour with worthy progressive causes from the past: the safely distant and anaesthetised past, naturally. "We come," he declared, "in the tradition of movements that have marched in peaceful but powerful protest for justice, fairness and political change" - going on to cite the "suffragettes who fought for votes for women and won", the "civil rights movement in America that fought against racism and won" and the "anti-apartheid movement that fought the horror of that system and won". And - you guessed it - so too can the Con-Dems' austerity drive be defeated - after all, "we are standing

on the shoulders" of all those who "struggled" against injustice. But "our struggle", he said hitting a Churchillian note, is to "fight to preserve, protect and defend the best of the services we cherish because they represent the best of the country we love" - such as the NHS, the welfare state, "homes fit for heroes", maternity services, children's centres, community centres, libraries, and so on.

In a direct rebuttal to David Cameron, Miliband asserted that it is precisely those assembled in Hyde Park in such large numbers who actually constitute the "big society" and the "mainstream" of Britain - "united against what your government is doing to our country". He ended on a carefully calculated rousing note by quoting Martin Luther King to the effect that the "arc of the moral universe is long and it bends towards justice", but "only if people bend it that way" - towards the politics of the future, which, of course, is embodied by the Labour Party under Ed Miliband.

The speech contained a sting in the tail though. During his righteous paean to resistance and struggle Miliband dutifully reminded his audience, as a possible future prime minister of UK plc, that there is a "need for difficult choices" and hence "some cuts" are required. Under a Labour government a more kindly axe would have fallen upon us, we presume - one that does not "sacrifice" quite so many libraries, youth centres, Citizens Advice Bureaus, sexual health clinics, etc. This was surely not the message that the majority of those listening wanted to hear. The logic of so many coming together was that the attacks on all of us - and therefore *all* cuts - had to be opposed, no matter who was wielding the axe.

Tentative

But, having said that, the rhetoric emanating from Miliband and the Labour leadership - vague and tentative as it is - signifies a move to the left, however small at the moment. And we can only expect this leftish-sounding talk to continue and indeed be stepped up in tone, as the anti-cuts movement goes into serious battle against the government - which it inevitably will.

Yes, obviously, Miliband and the other 'Brownite' heirs to the Labour throne backed the Blair project and hence, ultimately, represent the politics of capitalism within the Labour Party and the wider workers' movement. But it would be profoundly foolish, and self-defeating, for the left - both within and outside the Labour Party - to pretend that this shuffling to the left is not happening. The very fact that Ed Miliband turned up at all on March 26, becoming the first Labour leader to address a major demonstration for decades (or indeed to address any demonstration of any sort), only serves to indicate that possibilities are opening up for the left, if it is imaginative enough to put its bad old sectarian habits behind it. Let us unite to kill off Blairism/New Labourism for good.

Therefore, in that sense, the SWP is quite right to say, "it's great that he felt the need to attend" - and to point out that the "rank and file of the Labour Party were out in force too", counting "at least 68 Labour branch banners on the march".¹ It is also encouraging - and of some significance - that Miliband is due to address the Durham

miners' gala, the first Labour leader to do so for more than two decades. We do live in interesting times, it appears. As comrade Dave Osler, the left Labour blogger, waggishly remarked, "Short of openly coming out in favour of the *Transitional programme* and the decisions of first four congresses of the Communist International, little could be better calculated to piss off the residual Blair fan boys that still populate sections of the media and the back benches."² But, joking aside, the conscious and deliberate strategy of New Labour was to distance itself from anything that even vaguely resembled 'old' Labour - ie, the politics of social democracy - let alone trade union militancy and mass demonstrations. The horror, the horror.

It could be that the rules of the game might be changing - not something that has gone unobserved by the rightwing press, of course. Boris Johnson, the mayor of London (just showing how out of touch with reality he really is), even went so far as to accuse Miliband of being "quietly satisfied" with the clashes that occurred *after* the demonstration between an extremely small number of anarchistic activists and the police, who, it seems, were intent on talking up acts of violence or even provoking them.³ Anything to please the BBC.

What the Hyde Park march and demonstration showed is that the labour and trade union movement, despite being handicapped by a congenitally bureaucratic leadership, still has the ability to mobilise masses of people onto the streets - and that it remains a force to be reckoned with. But to become a *winning* force it must become a class for itself - something that requires, among other things, a protracted fight inside the Labour Party against the rightwing and nakedly pro-capitalist elements. The fight to transform Labour and the fight to create a mass Communist Party are not counterposed, but form part of the same struggle, which is to overcome both *Labourism* and left sectarianism in all their various guises.

The local elections are coming up in May, with the Liberal Democrats facing obliteration - and possible big gains for Labour. But, frankly, what sort of Labour candidates will get elected? In all likelihood, rightwing ones committed to cuts - only at a slower pace, *à la* Ed Miliband. Yet the mood within the rank and file is moving in the opposite direction - to the left and towards militancy. They could well be lumbered with a new layer of rightwing Labourite councillors who do not reflect the interests or politics of party members.

These activists, together with the hundreds of thousands like those who came to London on March 26, would be well advised to vote only for those Labour candidates who are anti-cuts. By which we mean, of course, those who will campaign and vote against *all* cuts in public services. Of course, at this early stage of the fightback, there will be very few of them - communists have no illusions on that score. But this is just the beginning of the war, not the end. ●

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Notes

1. *Socialist Worker* April 2.
2. www.davidosler.com/2011/03/red-ed-goes-to-durham.
3. *The Daily Telegraph* March 28.

INTERVIEW

Unity across the Arab world

The Revolutionary Socialists in Egypt are a group that adheres to the same tradition as our Socialist Workers Party. Peter Manson asked **Mohammad Hamama**, a prominent RS member, about the prospects for the working class movement in Egypt and beyond

How would you describe the current situation in Egypt?

This is an era of revolution. The toppling of Mubarak was just the start. We need to overthrow the regime, but Mubarak was just its head. There are a lot of mini-Mubaraks all over Egypt: in every sector, every apparatus and every institution. Government ministers and private sector bosses - they are all corrupt and they all make up the regime, the regime we want to topple.

But things are getting very tough. The idea that the revolution ended when Mubarak fell is really wrong. The revolution is only just starting. The army generals are serving their own interests and they will try to save whatever they can of the old order. The workers must take the lead now - this is their moment. The movement must spread all over Egypt. We need to turn every corner of the country into Tahrir Square. We need to topple every single Mubarak.

We need far more than political reforms. We need very radical social reforms relating to how wealth is distributed. The companies privatised over the last 30 years need to be nationalised again in order to undermine the generals.

How would you assess the strength of the revolutionary movement?

The radical revolutionary forces and the socialists are very few and this situation is not as good as we would have wished. The radical point of view is always opposed by counter-propaganda and today the line is being pushed that continued strikes will destroy stability and halt the wheels of production. Socialists have an important role, but, as I say, we are very few in number.

And we are fighting on different fronts. Countering the media, fighting the military and the remnants of Mubarak's regime, opposing the mistakes of the middle layer of activists.

What has been the role of the Revolutionary Socialists?

We have been active in the latest protests and strikes. Over the last month there have been a whole number of them and we have been attempting to spread the protest movement and supporting it as much as we can.

Another very important task is the building of independent workers' unions everywhere: to help workers organise themselves and take the struggle forward against the regime and against the capitalists.

We are also engaging with the Democratic Labour Party, the new party which has just been set up. It is not as radical as we had hoped, but its formation adds to the workers' political front.

So, to sum up our present work, we are engaged in a big number of strikes and protests, we are helping to build the trade unions everywhere, and we are helping the construction of the DLP.

How did this new party come to be formed?

The initiative was taken by Kamal Khalil, the prominent socialist activist. He is a veteran of the working class struggle from the 60s. He joined with a large number of workers' leaders to draft a programme and started to collect signatures in support of the formation of this new party. They have already held a conference in Cairo and they are holding meetings in all the large cities.



Workers must lead

They started with around 6,000 members. One of the main conditions they want to apply is that the majority should be workers - it certainly makes sense that a majority of the members of a workers' party should be workers. I estimate that the membership is something like 15,000 now.

Apart from Revolutionary Socialists, what other groups are there on the revolutionary left?

This is a tricky question actually. I believe there are none. There is Socialist Renewal, which was once a wing of Revolutionary Socialists, but split away. But I think their policies are not good. They want to build a 'shadow parliament' and have supported negotiations with the military over the last two months. I don't think they are engaged with the workers at all. If I found anyone more left than me I would join them, but I don't think there is anyone.

What shape is the Communist Party in?

The Egyptian Communist Party is very weak. They are not involved at all in any workers' protests, strikes and so on. They don't have any media voice or presence at any level. I don't believe they exist in any real sense.

How has the situation changed in relation to your ability to operate?

There are now great opportunities for us. After the removal of Mubarak and the former state security apparatus (perhaps temporarily) we are able to speak freely, distribute our papers and issue our statements online and elsewhere. These days we are not facing the difficulties we used to have in putting out our propaganda and talking to people. We can engage with the workers in their factories and so on.

But there is still harassment from the military. Some of our comrades have been arrested and detained - some have been tortured actually. Nevertheless, there are big possibilities to make something out of the situation, to build workers' unions, strengthen workers' organisation and so on. We need to take these opportunities before we lose them - I believe these freedoms will soon come under threat from the military.

What connection do you see between your struggle and the movement across the Arab world?

If we want to build a free movement we must learn to cooperate and connect with comrades and fellow socialists everywhere and especially across the Arab countries - Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, Algeria: we need to cooperate in order to build a strong labour movement in all these countries and achieve our radical demands for winning back workers' rights.

I am talking as a socialist, but there is another point of view: these countries are like our geopolitical arm. They are very important to us and I don't believe our revolution will be completed or we will achieve any kind of success until we have removed all the dictators and all the old regimes. So I strongly support the revolutions in all these countries. All of them share the same conditions. They are all ready for a revolution and face the same destiny. In fact we have a common destiny all over the world and any kind of success elsewhere is a success for us too.

Over the last 10 years socialists had not been able to mobilise and gain momentum for the workers' movement and struggle as we have done this year - initiating strikes and building individual trade unions. Of course, our initial inspiration came from the Tunisian revolution. The trigger was Mohammed Bouazizi, who set himself on fire - it was like a domino effect. And the workers have made up one of the most important components of these revolutions. Our comrades have done a good job in helping create the conditions for the revolution to start.

What about the specific Arab aspect? Should socialists call for the unification of the Arab nation, with the working class taking the lead?

Of course. I don't want the kind of unity that Nasser led 50 years ago, but if you are talking about the unity of the working class, of course I will go for that!

I am thinking of the example of Marx calling for the unification of the German nation in order to open up space for the working class.

Of course. This is our ultimate goal - linking up across borders and uniting workers all over these countries and all over the world. We want an organised, united working class all over the world, but unity of the working class across the Arab world can be the very first step.

But I don't believe we are ready for this right now. We have to wait for the different countries to reach the same stage of maturity in order to connect them in the manner you are talking about. We are facing big difficulties in uniting workers even here in Egypt. Some have a lot of experience and are very advanced in pursuing the class struggle, while other sectors are just starting.

What you are talking about is very good and we have to go for it, but we are in no rush. We have to study the situation very carefully and calculate our chances of success before we make such a move ●

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'. To the extent that the European Union becomes a state then that necessitates EU-wide trade unions and a Communist Party of the EU.

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

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

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally. All forms of nationalist socialism are reactionary and anti-working class.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote. They will resist using every means at their disposal. Communists favour using parliament and winning the biggest possible working class representation. But workers must be ready to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.

■ Communists fight for extreme democracy in all spheres of society. Democracy must be given a social content.

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

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

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

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

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

■ All who accept these principles are urged to join the Communist Party.

Become a Communist Party associate member

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weekly worker

Massive mobilisation against the cuts

Arm the movement with Marxist politics

James Turley reports on a good day in the fight to build resistance to the coalition's austerity

There can be nobody attending Saturday's mass demonstration against the cuts who left feeling despondent or pessimistic.

The official attendance estimate is in the region of 250,000, with *Socialist Worker* claiming "well over half a million" (April 2). My own impression is that *Socialist Worker* is closer to the mark - the streets were packed out from the Embankment to Hyde Park, and punctuality was necessarily uneven on a day when coaches were ludicrously required to park up miles away from the route. Many people were still arriving at the destination as late as 5pm and thousands did not even get to Hyde Park, having to make their way back to coaches out in Wembley. Nobody can deny that it was a genuinely mass demonstration, of a scale unseen since the heady days of the anti-war movement.

The mood was militant and loud, with many chants already road-tested on the student demonstrations ("Build a bonfire..."), along with some new ones, including an unashamedly foul-mouthed rap about health minister Andrew Lansley. Large trade union contingents were unsurprisingly in evidence, though mobilisation was uneven, and the 'usual suspects' of the organised left turned out in force. But above all, this was a protest that captured the public imagination, with great social diversity in evidence in its ranks. However hollowed-out the TUC is these days, it nevertheless managed for one day what Marxists hope will be a common phenomenon in the future - the mass being won to the cause of the organised working class.

This success, for the TUC and the class-collaborationist labour bureaucracy, is double-edged, and it showed in the run-up to the march. There was the idiotic decision to park coaches in Wembley and other peripheral locations - the police, it should be noted, have no right to unilaterally change parking arrangements in this manner (beyond closing streets entirely). Planned feeder marches were officially denied and opposed until the absolute last minute - organisers of an education feeder from the University of London Union, and others from south London and elsewhere, effectively called the TUC's bluff on this.

The TUC wanted things absolutely under control, and seems only at the 11th hour to have realised that this was impossible on a demo of this size. The desire for control is understandable - significant portions of the bureaucracy were very much won to the perspective that a major demonstration was necessary; at the same time, the last thing almost any union leader wants is to upset the

applecart too dramatically less than two months before Labour has the chance to score major victories in local elections.

It does not take an awful lot of political radicalisation to put people to the left of this utterly tame perspective; and the likes of Brendan Barber will be deeply unsettled by the rapturous reception for PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka, on fine rabble-rousing form at the Hyde Park rally; and the correspondingly lukewarm response to speakers who advocated the official Labour perspective of less cuts, later. The latter, of course, included Labour leader Ed Miliband, who treads his own fine line: between trying to take ownership of this movement, on the one hand; and seeming too indebted to the unions and thereby scaring the little Englander horses, on the other.

For the usual array of far-left forces, this was fertile soil indeed. As ever, it is a pity that the hundreds of thousands encountered not a single, substantial left organisation with a clear message, but a wide range of competing sects; yet there are clearly opportunities for our side to make an impact in the coming period.

The police

The behaviour of the police has been something of a bone of contention since the demonstration. I stress 'contention' - along the main march, the police presence was polite and perhaps passively supportive. We did not see any of the interference with no plausible justification, provocations and violence that has occurred on many student demonstrations recently. Partly, of course, this is a matter of the sheer turnout - it is a difficult matter

for 4,000-odd police to kettle hundreds of thousands of demonstrators; but there are other factors at work too. The police have been grumbling over the likely effect of cuts on their own ranks, and the TUC worked in close cooperation with them from the beginning.

The relatively benign police presence on the main march is the positive side of the latter fact; but it also reinforced the division between the main protest march and the minority of 'direct action'-oriented activists who were semi-detached from it. Readers will no doubt be aware that over 200 people were arrested on the day, with around 150 facing charges.

The largest part of both numbers comes from UK Uncut's occupation of Fortnum and Mason, the *haut-bourgeois* department store on Piccadilly, purveyors of *foie gras* and bottles of wine with four-figure price tags. Unlike many of the other aggravations of capitalist concerns, the F&M occupation was located squarely on the march route, and was thus an interesting snapshot of the relationship between the main demonstration and the other actions - thousands of people marching past with a revolving cast of excited youngsters crowded outside the store to soak up the atmosphere and hurl abuse at the cops.

The latter were swift and cunning in their response, arresting hundreds - after assuring protestors that they would be led to safety (police cells were probably not the safety the UK Uncut comrades had in mind). Even in this case, however, it does not seem we are looking at a particularly *brutal* police action. One of those arrested, writing in *The Guardian*, describes police officers almost apologetic

about the arrests, expressing guarded sympathy with the aims of the march and even advising those held on how they might defend themselves against subsequent legal action (March 29).

If that piece is to be believed, then there is an interesting dynamic at work, because such responses from the police rank and file have to be placed in the context of various statements from people higher up the police hierarchy to the effect that the minority were thugs, troublemakers and so forth (the same people who would also have hatched the plan to trick the largely non-violent UK Uncut people into mass arrest).

Unfortunately, in the future, it is the latter perspective that is likely to carry more weight; one relatively lightly policed demo certainly does not absolve us from the need to be highly vigilant around ranks of police officers. The forward intelligence teams, provocateurs and mounted thugs in uniform have not gone anywhere, even if they were relatively quiet on March 26.

Where next?

Like the February 15 2003 demonstration against the Iraq war, it is clear that the next period - however horrible it is likely to be for a great many people - also opens up opportunities. It was never seriously in doubt that the working class would move to defend its interests, as they came under increasingly vicious attacks.

There were three main perspectives in evidence - the rightist response of the TUC, which primarily focuses on getting Labour back into power, is transparently inadequate, given Labour's intention to carry out what

in practice amounts to the vast bulk of the coalition's cuts, should it be propelled back into government any time soon. Equal and opposite is the (ultra-) leftist response - that the problem is fundamentally with these tame, A-to-B demonstrations, whereas what is really needed is 'real' direct action to spark the docile masses into genuine revolt. This is a strategy that has failed repeatedly back since the days of Bakunin.

The bulk of the left on Saturday was pushing a third option - build for a general strike to bring down the government. Such demands adorned the propaganda of the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party in England and Wales, and many others. It is fine, as far as it goes - a one-day strike across the entire organised working class is, at the end of the day, another form of mass demonstration. The problem is - what do we do when the government falls? The 'natural' result is the TUC-friendly one: a Labour government, one of whose main aims will be to defuse all the anger raised by these struggles.

To avoid that outcome, we need a *political* alternative, not just a potentially useful, but necessarily limited tactic; and political answers to pose against the offerings of Ed Miliband no less than those of David Cameron. Unity of the existing Marxist groups would present the opportunity to vastly step up our influence in society, and put the fear of god into the bourgeoisie. Then, perhaps, we could look forward to defeating these cuts. March 26 was a good start - but there is much to be done ●

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