

# Profit debate: And yet it moves (down).

Esteban Ezequiel Maito.

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# weekly worker



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# LETTERS



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

## Spart caricature

Corey Ansel's letter (August 6) usefully reports a rare small political victory for independent working class politics in the USA - the election of Kshama Sawant to Seattle city council in October 2013. He rightly draws attention to the unavoidable limitations of communist participation in local government, especially as a minority. But the letter also regrettably displays the Oehlerite sectarianism (from Hugo Oehler, 1903-83), which is the dominant political feature of the US-based 'Spartacist' tradition. This poisonous Spartacist influence is reflected most transparently in the language at the end, referring to a "steeled Bolshevik party" and the Committee for a Workers' International's "appetites": both are language tics of James Robertson's cult group and its offshoots.

Comrade Ansel rightly points out that the CWI's website overblows the significance of the very limited victory on the \$15 minimum wage issue. But it should be recognised nonetheless that this *is* a victory, even if it is a very limited one. If a strike won only limited concessions, it would still have won concessions. Communists need to be able to distinguish limited victory from outright defeat, and comrade Ansel's comment effectively erases the difference.

He links the issue to the rather inglorious story of the CWI's predecessor, the Militant Tendency, and its period of leadership of a left-Labour coalition controlling Liverpool city council in the 1980s. He says that Militant "existed primarily as an appendage to the Labour Party and did not hesitate to boast about increasing the Labour vote". This is another example of Spartacist Oehlerism: the Militant Tendency was openly engaged in Trotskyist *entry* in the Labour Party (the issue on which Oehler broke with the Trotskyists). By impliedly asserting that entry is inherently unprincipled ("appendage"), comrade Ansel reduces the strength of his valid criticisms of Militant's completely illusory attempt to defeat the Labour leadership's decision to purge its leaders by going to the capitalist courts. Missing is the important criticism made of Militant's policy in Liverpool, as of the rest of the 'local government left', by other left groups at the time: that it failed to join hands with the miners' strike when it could have done so in 1984-85.

Missing, too, is Trotsky on participation in local government: *not* a policy of abstention, but: "The participation of the trade unions in the management of nationalised industry may be compared to the participation of socialists in the municipal governments, where the socialists sometimes win a majority and are compelled to direct an important municipal economy, while the bourgeoisie still has domination in the state and bourgeois property laws continue. Reformists in the municipality adapt themselves passively to the bourgeois regime. Revolutionists in this field do all they can in the interests of the workers and at the same time teach the workers at every step that municipality policy is powerless without conquest of state power" ('Nationalised industry and workers' management', 1938).

The last section of comrade Ansel's letter concerns the question of the police. Communists stand for: "The dissolution of the standing army [including the professional police force

- MM] and the formation of a popular militia under democratic control". But we also claim that, "As the class struggle intensifies, conditions are created for the workers to arm themselves and win over sections of the military forces of the capitalist state." So we do not exclude the possibility that sections of the police, any more than any other section of the capitalist state's armed forces, can possibly be won over - though, of course, we recognise that at present conditions are adverse for doing so. Hence, our immediate demands in this field include: "Rank-and-file personnel in the state's armed bodies must be protected from bullying, humiliating treatment and being used against the working class; There must be full trade union and democratic rights, including the right to form bodies such as soldiers' councils. The privileges of the officer caste must be abolished. Officers must be elected. Workers in uniform must become the allies of the masses in struggle" (CPGB *Draft programme*).

Comrade Sawant's talk of "consent-based policing, where the police are genuinely accountable to the people", is indeed unduly ambiguous. But comrade Ansel counterposes an ultra-leftist line. His use of Trotsky is a bad piece of citation-grazing in support of this line: the quotation is from the *History of the Russian Revolution* (chapter 7, 'Five days'), and it is not a programmatic proposal at all, but a *description* of the sentiments of the Petrograd crowd in the February revolution. As for the Bolsheviks, both in 1907 and in the witch-hunt after the July days in 1917, Lenin was assisted by Bolshevik sympathisers in the Finnish police. It is hardly likely that there would be such persons if the Spartacist caricature of Bolshevism on the question of the police, followed by comrade Ansel, was adopted.

**Mike Macnair**  
Oxford

## Daft and stupid

I won't accuse Peter Manson of misrepresenting my arguments about Scotland at the Lewisham Left Unity meeting (Letters, August 7), not least because it is difficult to remember the detail when you are a full participant in the debate rather than simply a reporter. Even though Peter's letter has the CPGB spin, it has the merit of putting the real issues on the table for further elaboration.

I began the meeting by expressing my outrage at the slaughter in Gaza and my solidarity with the Palestinian resistance. I would have begun with Palestine whatever the topic of the meeting. I did not start by comparing Scotland and Palestine. Rather, I then went on to say that Palestine, Ukraine and Scotland were all examples of the national question in contemporary politics. This is indisputable. I briefly mentioned differences and similarities. Palestine and Ukraine involved armed struggle and many deaths. This is not true for Scotland, thank goodness (but nobody should say things cannot change or 'it can't happen here').

I did say we should not label different kinds of nationalism as equally bad. I made a distinction between Israeli nationalism in struggle with Palestinian nationalism, and British nationalism in struggle with Scottish nationalism. On one side were state nationalisms with powerful military machines and on the other national democratic movements of nations or people without states.

At no point did I compare Palestinian and Scottish nationalism and say they were the same. Yet Peter says that I "began ... by comparing the Scottish independence movement with the Palestinian struggle against Zionist oppression". He says, "that really takes

the biscuit for absurdity". I have awarded Peter the biscuit for twisting an argument for nefarious purposes.

Time did not allow me to develop this point further. So let me add that Gaza is violently oppressed by Israel in alliance with and supported by British and American imperialism. How would Palestinians 'vote' on the break-up of Britain? I think the answer is obvious.

Of course, it is the accepted 'wisdom' on the English left that Scotland is not an 'oppressed' nation. It is such obvious common sense that nobody spends more than two seconds thinking about it. What we can say is that England is the dominant nation within the UK. Scotland is one of the smaller nations and it does not have a right to self-determination. Wales was conquered and Scotland was sold by its upper class. Neither constitutes a democratic or voluntary union.

My main point was that this was a battle between unionists ('no') and anti-unionists ('yes') with a bunch of fence-sitters wobbling in the middle. People will vote to keep Queen Anne's bloody Act of Union of 1707 or for its repeal. I described myself as an extreme anti-unionist. The 1707 Act of Union deserved the contempt, hostility and sheer hatred from every democrat, including working class democrats (or communists). Merchants and slave traders thought the act was brilliant in helping them to turn a profit in blood and treasure.

I am an English anti-unionist or an anti-unionist living in England. According to the CPGB, this makes me a Scottish nationalist. This takes the biscuit for absurdity. The CPGB seems determined to big up Scottish nationalism by labelling every anti-unionist a Scottish nationalist. This has gone to such lengths that Sarah McDonald has abandoned the class struggle for anti-nationalism.

The advanced part of the working class in England is democratic and anti-unionist, not Scottish nationalist. English anti-unionists are in alliance with Scottish anti-unionists, some of whom are nationalists, and others working class democrats, republicans and communists.

Peter claims that working class anti-unionists have "given up on the working class as an agent of change". The opposite is true. He thinks the working class is incapable of political action to smash the Act of Union. Instead he is spreading the idea that only the bourgeois nationalists can destroy it.

Of course, the working class in England is not yet ready to destroy the Act of Union and consign it to the dustbin of history. But, far from "giving up", the working class is more than capable of finishing off the Act of Union, providing it is not being misled by various left unionist dupes, fence-sitters and those who big up the nationalists.

Anti-unionists are not, as Peter suggests, just 'Scottish', but exist in England, Wales and Ireland. Peter says I "denied that the 'yes' campaign he [ie, me] supports had any connection to nationalism". This is daft. Of course the Scottish National Party is nationalist. I don't deny this and have never denied it. But it is plainly wrong to equate the national democratic movement in Scotland with the SNP.

It is obviously true the SNP is against the Act of Union. But Peter denies that workers in England can support the repeal of the 1707 Act of Union without being Scottish nationalists who support Robert the Bruce and William Wallace. He fails to understand that working class democrats oppose the Act of Union and these can be found in England, Ireland and Wales, not just Scotland.

Finally Peter says he "pointed out

that if a meteorite struck the City of London that might be very damaging for British capital, but it would hardly constitute a progressive advance". This is a daft argument, made more stupid by its apparent cleverness. The defeat of Cameron in the referendum will damage the Tory government. But, so goes the argument, if a meteorite came and struck Downing Street, blowing Cameron to kingdom come, would that not be the same? Well, one is a political defeat for the Tories, which finally destroyed the Act of Union. The other is a natural disaster, which does not!

**Steve Freeman**

LU Scottish Republic Yes tendency

## Pinhead

A very strange letter graced the *Weekly Worker* last week (August 7). Tony Greenstein is dancing on a pinhead, when he argues that it is perfectly possible for Jewish people to be anti-Semitic. I have to say that, as I understand anti-Semitism as a form of racism, no better or worse than any other kind, it means hatred of people of Jewish origin purely for reason of that ethnic origin. A completely indefensible attitude and sickeningly stupid.

If any Jewish person, for reasons of mental aberration, were to hold such a position, the logical thing for them to do would be to commit suicide. Indeed the example Tony gives, of some nutcase of that ilk in Israel, seems to have done the next best thing, and forsworn having children because of his supposedly tainted blood, or similar rubbish (maybe he did not have the bottle to kill himself outright!). The same considerations would go, hypothetically, for anyone of English origin who held such a bizarre view of his fellow nationals - logically he or she should do the same.

But I am interested in political phenomena, not things that, if anything, bear a strong resemblance to the frequent deranged high school massacres in the USA. And I would observe that the other example Tony gives - of a Jewish Nazi group that attacked pro-Palestinian protestors in Israel - bears out my case. There are indeed Jewish Nazis in Israel, but they think Hitler was wrong about the Jews. They are therefore not anti-Semitic - or at least only insofar as Arabs are Semitic, which is not the accepted definition. They want to do something along Hitlerite lines to the Arabs. And I would observe from recent events that they have friends in high places, both in Israel and in the western world, including the US Congress and over here as well.

Gilad Atzmon, whatever you think of his views in detail, is the very opposite of these things. He is a long-time, principled defender of the Palestinians - a fact that is very widely known. Nor does he deny the historical fact of the mass murder of Jews by the Nazis. Though he is part of a milieu of very angry and alienated Jewish people, many of whom, for perfectly understandable reasons, given the cynical, totalitarian use of the Nazi mass slaughter by Israeli supporters to justify the present decades-long carnage, do have doubts about aspects of this.

I predict that, as the state of Israel descends into the level of popular odium previously reserved for Nazi Germany - a process which just took a big step forward with the current foul, sadistic child-killing frenzy - there will likely be many more decent Jewish people who manifest such mistaken views and suspicions. If Tony wants to join with Israeli apologists in smearing such people as Nazis, then that's his political funeral.

In fact, just about the only group of people who have such doubts these days are such alienated Jews. I think

these are honourable people, whose hearts are 100% in the right place. What matters to me is where they stand on defence of the Palestinians, not on their suspicions about what happened decades before most people today were actually born, and which they therefore cannot have any first-hand knowledge of.

**Ian Donovan**  
email

## Safe italics

Paul Demarty notes with some dismay that half of those killed to date in Gaza are "women and children" ("Only an Arab revolution can liberate Palestine", August 7). This contrasts strongly with his stance on Northern Ireland ('Keeping disagreements hidden', May 15), whereby the abduction and murder of Jean McConville is interpreted as an aspect of "the inevitable bloodshed of a guerrilla war" and the outcry over her disappearance put down to feminist sentimentalism and special pleading.

I am pleased to see that comrade Demarty has undergone a swift political evolution over the last six weeks. I expect a thoughtful piece on safe spaces for women in due course. In the intervening *period*, could you please stop him from intuitively italicising *nouns* to emphasise any *thing* that he thinks might confuse the *advanced worker*?

Yours, in adjectival solidarity,

**James Denton**  
email

## NHS march

This summer will see a long-distance People's March for the NHS across England. The protest is being led by a group of mothers from Darlington, county Durham. Following in the footsteps of the famous Jarrow marchers, back in 1936, the group of 'Darlo mums' are organising a replica march in support of the national health service.

Marchers will leave Jarrow town hall on August 16 and arrive in Parliament Square, London, at 3.30pm on September 6, starting the last leg from Unite's Theobalds Road office at 2.30pm. The march will cover approximately 300 miles, taking in 23 towns and cities over three weeks. The message from the mums is a simple one - that the NHS is owned by and loved by us, and every effort will be made to stop it being sold off.

The reason for protesting is simple: we want to see a repeal of the Health and Social Care Act and we are aiming for four things: reverse the closure of NHS services; halt the privatisation of NHS care; return responsibility for delivering NHS services to the secretary of state for health; inform the public what is happening to the NHS and build support for it. The NHS was created to deliver free and equal healthcare for all, irrespective of wealth, and those principles are being steadily dismantled - which is why we should be prepared to fight for it.

Within just four months of launching the People's March, over 3,000 have registered to take part. We want you to join us in the march across England, whether you walk one mile or the whole journey. We also need support from people in the towns and cities that we will travel through and anyone that can offer transport, accommodation or any support, however big or small, will be a huge help to our crusade. Sign up and join the fight at <http://999callforhns.org.uk>.

This is our NHS. We made it, we pay for it, we use it and we love it. Will you fight for it?

**Rehana Azam and Joanna Adams**

People's March for the NHS

# GAZA

## Don't let it go to waste

The August 9 march and demonstration in solidarity with the people of Gaza and in opposition to the Israeli slaughter was undoubtedly a great success. According to the organisers - Stop the War Coalition, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Muslim Association of Britain and Campaign Against Nuclear Disarmament - "more than 150,000" people turned out, while for the BBC it was a more modest, yet still impressive, "tens of thousands".

Whatever the exact numbers, the angry determination and inspired confidence of those taking part was unmistakable. While there was a huge mixture of people, the majority were Muslim. But they were, by and large, Muslims of a very 'British' and 'secular' kind - clearly seeing themselves as part of a big mass movement alongside all the other contingents. An MAB speaker gestured to the sea of people before him in Hyde Park and declared: "Mr Cameron, these are the real British values!"

Like most other demonstrators, the Muslims could hardly be described as highly political, but they were certainly open to ideas. Just as many Muslims as non-Muslims took a copy of the *Weekly Worker*, for example - we distributed almost 300 on the day.

And there was no sign of anything resembling the anti-Semitism that sections of the media claimed to have seen on previous demonstrations - quite the opposite. Anti-Zionist Jews from organisations such as Jews for Justice for Palestinians were cheered enthusiastically by everyone. The organisers had warned in advance that any display of anti-Semitism would not be tolerated, but this was totally unnecessary from the point of view of the participants: it was clearly a pre-emptive move to combat further possible smears. And when one of the chairs from the platform asked, "Are we anti-Semitic?", the answer was a resounding, united "No!" - just as the follow-on question, "Are we anti-Zionist?", was greeted by a massive "Yes!"

But the most impressive noise I noted came when the Liberal Democrat, Baroness Jenny Tonge, called for "the mightiest, biggest cheer for the people of Gaza". It was not only deafening - it lasted for a good minute, as the thousands gave full vent to their emotions. "In our thousands, in our millions, we are all Palestinians!" was also a popular chant. One speaker did say that "We are all Hamas", but it was in the context of an occupied people having the right to defend themselves - if you are a terrorist for wanting to defend your homeland, then we are all terrorists.

And there was emotion of a different kind when Sue Bond, representing the Public and Commercial Services union, brought tears to the eyes of this reporter when she talked about two photographs that meant so much to her. The first was of her newly born granddaughter, and the second was of the Palestinian baby cut from the womb of his mother, who had just been killed by an Israeli air strike. This baby's grandmother had promised she would care for him in loving memory of her dead daughter, but it was not to be: another air strike cut off the electricity from the hospital and denied the baby its life support. Barely able to speak, comrade Bond asked: "How dare they call that self-defence?"

In connection to this question, it was fitting that the march set off from BBC headquarters in central London. The infuriating bias in the BBC's case, as with much of the media, comes in the form of a mock even-handedness; on the one side, Hamas is launching rockets into Israel and, on the other, Israel is 'retaliating',



**Huge and receptive turnout**

perhaps 'disproportionally'. This is such an absurd narrative that only the extremely naive actually believe it, yet the BBC, together with much of the media, persists with it.

So August 9 was highly positive. But it is important not to overstate our strength, as, for instance, Sarah Colborne of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign did, when she informed the rally that Baroness Warsi had resigned "because of your pressure". Similarly STWC declared in a post-demonstration circular: "The movement has already had a big impact. Not only has it helped to turn the tide of public opinion: it has also helped create a crisis in government about the British establishment's support for Israel" (August 11 2014).

As for the Socialist Workers Party, it claimed in *Party Notes*: "A new movement has been born." It went on: "This is not some momentary outburst of rage: it's a signal of a significant factor in politics that we have to continue to be at the centre of" (August 11 2014). Well, perhaps, but we know from similar large movements in the past that they can dissipate very quickly - think of STWC itself and the massive demonstration in February 2003 against the invasion of Iraq.

There is no doubt, however, that there are some demands that are eminently winnable. The government can be forced by the pressure from below to end the trade in arms with Israel. Protests in all the main capitalist powers could lead to imperialist politicians calling on Israel not only to stop the slaughter, but to end the blockade of Gaza and start dismantling settlements in the West Bank.

But, let me repeat, we should not fall into the trap of overestimating the power of the mass movement. Working class organisation - which, by definition, must be at the centre of any movement for lasting change - is in a parlous state. The balance of forces is manifestly against us. That is why it is just plain foolish to claim that things are going, and are bound to go, our way. Unbelievably there is an article on the STWC website by Paul Rogers entitled: 'Now we know: Israel withdrew its troops from Gaza because it had lost'.<sup>1</sup>

At the Hyde Park rally Owen Jones reminded the thousands that, just like Israel today, apartheid once seemed not just strong, but invincible. "Did it not fall?" he asked. Yes, Owen, but it was not only the South African liberation movement and our solidarity that brought it down: the contradictions had become insoluble and apartheid

just could not continue. The transition to a safe, controlled democracy was overseen by the imperialist powers.

Can we say the same about Israel's viability? According to Tariq Ali, Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu declared last week that he is not prepared to allow a "democratic Palestine". That means "there is only one solution," declared comrade Ali from the platform: "one state". That, of course, overlooks the question of agency. If Netanyahu cannot contemplate a "democratic Palestine" alongside Israel, what will be his attitude to a single 'secular, democratic' state (or whatever description comrade Ali now employs) to replace the Zionist entity? In the same vein, PSC chair Hugh Lanning stated: "Israel's got to be tried for its war crimes. Israel must pay for the rebuilding of Palestine, brick by brick."

Once again, we must ask, who will bring this about? Certainly not the leaders of the Arab world. As the MAB speaker mentioned above correctly pointed out, they are "not just silent: they are compliant" in the Gaza massacre. As far as I know, it was only the *Weekly Worker* that told the truth on this question: "Only an Arab revolution can liberate Palestine," read our front-page headline for the demonstration. In other words, there can be no solution either within the Israel/Palestine 'box' or with the current balance of forces in the Middle East. What is needed is an international movement under the leadership of the working class.

Yes, that seems far away, but we cannot avoid telling such truths. Unlike, for instance, Lindsey German, with her appeals to bourgeois legality: "Under international law an occupied people has the right to resist"; and her platitudes that no-one can disagree with: "We need to change our policy - for a world without war".

The STWC, then under the leadership of the SWP, was unable to play any role in the creation of an alternative, working class politics. The SWP not only kept its own professed Marxist politics off anti-Iraq war platforms: it closed down the Socialist Alliance, which had brought together all the main left groups, and replaced it with the Respect popular front.

The Palestine solidarity movement must not take a similar route ●

**Peter Manson**

peter.manson@weeklyworker.co.uk

### Notes

1. <http://stopwar.org.uk/news/now-we-know-israel-withdrew-its-troops-from-gaza-because-it-had-lost#.U-ppQMpg8rM>.

## ACTION

### CPGB podcasts

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

### London Communist Forum

**Sunday August 17 and 24:**

No forum - please come to Communist University.

**Sunday August 31, 5pm:** Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and *Capital* reading group. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. This meeting: Vol 1, appendix: 'Results of the immediate process of production' (continued).

Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk).

### Socialists and World War I

**Every day, 11am to 5pm (ends Sunday August 20):** Exhibition, SPGB head office, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4.

Organised by Socialist Party of Great Britain: [www.worldsocialism.org/spgb](http://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb).

### Free Palestine

**Thursday August 14, 6pm:** Interactive workshop for new activists, Bolivar Hall, 54-56 Grafton Way, London W1.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.palestinecampaign.org](http://www.palestinecampaign.org).

### Marikana not forgotten

**Saturday August 16, 2pm:** Remembrance for miners killed by South African state, South Africa House, Trafalgar Square, London WC2.

### People's March for the NHS

**Saturday August 16, 10am:** Launch rally for People's March for the NHS, Jarrow town hall car park, Grange Road, Jarrow NE32.

Organised by Northern TUC: [mowden@tuc.org.uk](mailto:mowden@tuc.org.uk).

### Deception in high places

**Saturday August 16, 1pm:** Book launch, Word Power, 43-45 West Nicolson Street, Edinburgh EH8. Nicholas Gilby discusses his new book *A history of bribery in Britain's arms trade* (part of Edinburgh Book Fringe 2014).

Organised by Word Power: [www.word-power.co.uk](http://www.word-power.co.uk).

### Hip hop against occupation

**Saturday August 30, 8pm:** Musical evening in support of Palestine, TChances Arts and Music Centre, 399 Tottenham High Road, London N17 (10 minutes from Seven Sisters station), £5.

Organised by London Palestine Action: [www.facebook.com/londonpalestineaction](http://www.facebook.com/londonpalestineaction).

### No to Nato

**Saturday August 30, 1pm:** Anti-imperialist protest, through central Newport. Assemble Civic Centre car park, Godfrey Road, for march to rally at Westgate Square.

**Sunday August 31, 10am:** Counter-demonstration, County Hall, Atlantic Wharf, Cardiff CF10. Speakers include: Boris Kagarlitsky, Jeremy Corbyn, Lindsey German.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

### Austerity wrecks lives

**Saturday September 6, 11am:** Rally, Castlefield Arena, Liverpool Road, Manchester M3.

Organised by Unison: [www.unisonnw.org/sat6sep](http://www.unisonnw.org/sat6sep).

### Remember Featherstone Massacre

**Saturday September 6, 2pm:** Guided commemorative walk, from Bradley Arms, Willow Lane, North Featherstone.

Organised by Wakefield Socialist History Group: [alanharperstewart@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:alanharperstewart@hotmail.co.uk).

### Right to Remain

**Saturday September 6, 12 noon to 5pm:** Annual conference on immigrant rights, Praxis Community Projects, Pott Street, Bethnal Green, London E2.

Organised by Right to Remain: [www.righttoremain.org.uk](http://www.righttoremain.org.uk).

### Keep striking together for a pay rise

**Sunday September 7, 2pm:** Rally and lobby of TUC congress, Jurys Inn Hotel, opposite Echo Arena conference centre, Keel Wharf, Liverpool L3. Speakers include Mark Serwotka.

Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: <http://shopstewards.net>.

### Diggers festival

**Saturday September 13, 11am to 9.30pm:** Annual celebration at the birthplace of Gerard Winstanley, The Wiend, Wigan WN1.

Organised by Wigan Diggers Festival: [www.wigandiggersfestival.org](http://www.wigandiggersfestival.org).

### War, peace and internationalism

**Saturday September 13, 2pm:** Rally, Brighthelm Centre, North Road, Brighton BN1. Speakers include Jeremy Corbyn MP.

Organised by the Labour Representation Committee: <http://l-r-c.org.uk>.

### No glory

**Saturday September 20, time tbc:** Peace History Lecture, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2. Speaker: John Westmoreland. Organised by No Glory: [www.noglory.org](http://www.noglory.org).

### CPGB wills

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

### Weekly Worker

This is the final issue of the *Weekly Worker* before our two-week August break. Issue 1024 will appear on Thursday September 4.

**DEBATE**

# And yet it moves (down)

Irrespective of the specific causes of the 2008-09 crisis, writes Esteban Ezequiel Maito, there is an undeniable tendency for the rate of profit to fall

In recent issues of the *Weekly Worker* a controversy between Arthur Bough<sup>1</sup>, on the one side, and Bruce Wallace and Steve Dobbs<sup>2</sup>, on the other, has developed over some interesting questions.

To begin with, let me say that Arthur Bough should at least take the trouble to read my articles and not draw conclusions about my position through a simple reading of a blog comment. I have written a paper that estimates - obviously in very rough way - the turnover speed of circulating capital in four countries (on the same methodological base). If Bough reads it, he would avoid falling into the unrealistic assumptions on fixed capital that he makes in his examples. He would also do well to take a look at my data series, which include annual rates of profit and surplus value.<sup>3</sup>

In another article, I have estimated the rate of profit on fixed capital in 14 countries, which currently account for 60% of the world economy.<sup>4</sup> That article contains my own estimates, including an earlier version for the United Kingdom, and those of other authors. The inclusion of a rate of profit on fixed capital for the Chinese economy since 1978 is the result of a series built up by other authors (and on the same basis as the other 13 studies). However, in this article I emphasised the relevance of the rate of profit in China mainly in the last two decades, when its conversion into a capitalist country became a fundamental fact from a systemic point of view. In case there is any doubt, I consider irrelevant and improbable the existence of a rate of profit in 1978 in China. To question that research over that specific aspect is at least superficial.

My work has never sought to arrive at a specific explanation for the crisis of 2008-09, nor develop a specific theory of crisis, but simply to check whether or not there is a long-term downward trend in the rate of profit and try to establish some elementary connections, including those related to the period of partial recovery in profitability that started in 1982. I understand that the results can be shocking to those who deny the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, even more when the debate itself has been practically focused on just one country, the United States, and that research tends to confirm the tendency in a highly representative group of countries.

So this article is not intended to explain the current crisis, but to contribute to the debate on the tendency of the rate of profit to fall and in particular in the case of the United Kingdom.

## Tendency of the rate of profit to fall

Capitalist production consists of a valorisation process (M-M') through the exploitation of the labour force (M-C...P...-C'-M'). The capital advanced in the form of money (M) is exchanged for commodities (C) - means of production, raw materials (constant capital or CC) and labour force (variable capital or VC). The secret of capitalist production is that the labour force is able to generate more than its reproduction value: namely a surplus value. For this reason, the capital advanced for the labour force is variable capital, while capital advanced for the means of production (machinery, infrastructure) and raw materials is constant capital.

Thus, the production process (P) occurs when the labour force, using the means of production, transforms inputs which are then realised in a mass of commodities of a greater value than the original money advanced (M').



**Not necessarily explaining current crisis**

The final product includes the value of constant capital consumed, plus an additional amount generated by the labour force, equal to variable capital (the reproduction value of the labour force) exchanged with the capitalist, and a surplus value. Thus capital transmutes from money-capital to commodity-capital, then productive-capital, finally returning to the form of commodity-capital and money-capital of a greater value. This last step is the one that involves the sale on the market (C'-M'): ie, the realisation of the profit and the completion of the valorisation process.

There is continual pressure for each capitalist to sell at a lower price than competitors and so raise market share. This implies a constantly increasing expenditure mainly on fixed capital - equipment and infrastructure - which enables the productivity of labour to rise, or labour time necessary to produce commodities to be reduced, thus reducing the individual value, including that of the cost of reproduction of the labour force. But to do this, there will be a relative rise in the value of constant capital compared to that of variable capital (for the reproduction of the labour force).

Capital's sole purpose is to increase the surplus value extracted from the labour force, but its only means of doing so is by increasing constant capital relative to variable capital, the latter being the only source of profits. So capital finds its own internal limit:

The means - unconditional development of the productive forces of society - comes continually into conflict with the limited purpose, the self-expansion of the existing capital.<sup>5</sup>

In Marx's terms, this downward trend in the rate of profit would occur regardless of a decline or stagnation in wages relative to profits: ie, constant or rising rate of surplus value (profits/variable capital):

This continual relative decrease of the variable capital *vis-à-vis* the constant, and consequently the total, capital is identical with the progressively higher organic composition of the social capital in its average. It is

likewise just another expression for the progressive development of the social productivity of labour, which is demonstrated precisely by the fact that the same number of labourers, in the same time - ie, with less labour - convert an ever-increasing quantity of raw and auxiliary materials into products, thanks to the growing application of machinery and fixed capital in general ... This mode of production produces a progressive relative decrease of the variable capital as compared to the constant capital, and consequently a continuously rising organic composition of the total capital. The immediate result of this is that the rate of surplus value, at the same, or even a rising, degree of labour exploitation, is represented by a continually falling general rate of profit.<sup>6</sup>

This does not deny the fact that the rate of profit may show periods of growth, but these exist precisely because the countervailing forces manage to reverse this downward pressure for a time. This gives Marx's law the character of a tendency:

We have thus seen in a general way that the same influences which produce a tendency in the general rate of profit to fall also call forth counter-effects, which hamper, retard and partly paralyse this fall. *The latter do not do away with the law, but impair its effect.* Otherwise, it would not be the fall of the general rate of profit, but rather its relative slowness, that would be incomprehensible. Thus, the law acts only as a tendency. And it is only under certain circumstances and only after long periods that its effects become strikingly pronounced.<sup>7</sup>

The tendency of the rate of profit to fall is an *inherent* aspect of the capitalist mode of production. It is the logical conclusion of the Marxian law of value, his explanation of technological change, competition and the formation of a general rate of profit (debunkers have usually applied lazy revisionism in these matters too). Marx himself states this obvious connection between his theory of value and the downward trend, which appears expressed in the value of any

particular commodity as the "economic cell of bourgeois society":

Since the development of the productiveness and the correspondingly higher composition of capital sets in motion an ever-increasing quantity of means of production through a constantly decreasing quantity of labour, every aliquot part of the total product - ie, every single commodity, or each particular lot of commodities in the total mass of products - absorbs less living labour, and also contains less materialised labour, both in the depreciation of the fixed capital applied and in the raw and auxiliary materials consumed. Hence every single commodity contains a smaller sum of labour materialised in means of production and of labour newly added during production. This causes the price of the individual commodity to fall. But the mass of profits contained in the individual commodities may nevertheless increase if the rate of the absolute or relative surplus value grows. The commodity contains less newly added labour, but its unpaid portion grows in relation to its paid portion. However, this is the case only within certain limits. With the absolute amount of living labour newly incorporated in individual commodities decreasing enormously as production develops, the absolute mass of unpaid labour contained in them will likewise decrease, however much it may have grown as compared to the paid portion.<sup>8</sup>

As can be seen, there is a huge (and non-casual) similarity in Marx's arguments about the value components in commodities and the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. Both refer to the same reality from two different angles. In both cases the increase in the rate of surplus value has clear limits in offsetting the relative increase in objectified labour (constant capital) in determining both the value of commodities and the rate of profit.

The connection between the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall and the law of value is such that, in

fact, the first is practically established in volume 1 of *Capital* - for instance in the 'General law of capitalist accumulation' (chapter 25):

The accumulation of capital, though originally appearing as its quantitative extension only, is effected, as we have seen, under a progressive qualitative change in its composition, under a constant increase of its constant, at the expense of its variable, constituent.<sup>9</sup>

It is the same principle - the very tendency of capital to further increase constant capital (fixed and circulating, but mostly fixed) compared to the variable - which establishes the downward trend in the rate of profit. Constantly Marx makes clear both the validity of the law and this foundation. In chapter 25 of volume 3 he writes:

As demonstrated in part 3 of this book, the rate of profit decreases in proportion to the mounting accumulation of capital and the correspondingly increasing productivity of social labour, which is expressed precisely in the relative and progressive decrease of the variable as compared to the constant portion of capital. To produce the same rate of profit after the constant capital set in motion by one labourer increases tenfold, the surplus labour-time would have to increase tenfold, and soon the total labour-time, and finally the entire 24 hours of a day, would not suffice, even if wholly appropriated by capital.<sup>10</sup>

## Turnover of circulating capital

The capitalist advances circulating capital, as inputs and wages, but recovers this capital, not in a year, but when the commodities containing such capital are sold. So that if the capitalist buys a ton of steel in January and in March sells it after its transformation into metal tubes, by April he has already recovered the amount paid for the steel in January. So in April's production he only reinvests the circulating capital advanced in January. Thus the value of the circulating capital is totally transferred to the final product after each production process and is recovered by the capitalist once those commodities are sold, to be newly released on production and valorised.

The annual wage bill thus relates to the amount of variable capital advanced, multiplied by the annual number of turnovers performed. Indeed, the capitalist does not advance the amount of the annual wage bill, but only the variable capital, so only the latter must be included in the annual rate of profit.

Since it is the labour force, using machinery, which transforms the inputs representing circulating constant capital, the turnover of variable capital is similar to that, although it can be speculated that it is somewhat lower, due to the time lag between purchase of inputs and their real availability (obviously variations and complexities in this regard in reality are huge). Fixed constant capital turnover takes several years, transferring to the product only a minor portion of its value in a year. In national accounts this transfer appears as the depreciation or consumption of fixed capital.

The picture that Bough sought to generate without any basis is that the increase in the turnover speed of circulating capital can keep the annual rate of profit high and even growing. But this can only be said if he ignores

the amount of fixed capital advanced relative to living labour - information actually present in many official national accounts (fixed capital series compared to gross domestic product or wage bill series).

As advanced capital, constant and variable circulating capital becomes of an increasingly negligible magnitude relative to fixed constant capital, due to the increase in turnover speed. So the rate of profit on fixed capital, given the continued impulse to technological change and mechanisation, is increasingly convergent and related to the annual rate of profit. The increase in turnover speed of circulating capital is a countervailing force, but its incidence and relevance is not what Bough suggests. Fixed capital in the Netherlands in 2005 was 93.3% and Japan 92.6% of the total capital advanced, while in 1965 their share was 86.5% and 66.7% respectively (in my estimates annual turnovers were approximately 12 in 2005 and 5 in 1965). This trend is always the same because the turnover speed will increase with the development of productive forces. Obviously from the point of view of distribution, the magnitude of variable capital still remains critical for the amount of surplus value.

### UK 1855-2009

Let us now turn to my estimate of the rate of profit in the UK since 1855 (see Fig 1). It would be very interesting to see if any debunker of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall has any different estimate that could enlighten us. But it appears to be a distinctive feature of the debunkers in general, and particularly Marxists debunkers, not to provide such data. Recently Thomas Piketty tried to do so, but merely exposed his own incredible misunderstanding of Marxian theory.<sup>11</sup>

I have based my estimate on the reproductive fixed capital series of the UK's Office for National Statistics and the distribution shares on Piketty's data applied to the ONS official series for gross domestic product.

RoP-F is the rate of profit on fixed capital at current prices (in concrete reality capitalists are governed by current market prices, so the rate of profit has to be estimated at current prices). RoP-FR is the rate of profit on fixed capital at constant prices: ie, deflated by the relative price of investment to output prices. In this case what we get is a rate in real terms, which shows the relative evolution of the volume of the profits to the volume of fixed capital.

The average rate of profit on fixed capital (RoP-F) in 1990-2009 was 79.2% lower than the average of 1855-74 (falling from 29.9% to 6.3%), while in the case of the real rate of return on fixed capital (RoP-FR), the averages were 39.8% in 1855-74 and 5.7% in 1990-2009, a 84.9% reduction. The difference in the rate of reduction (79.2% vs 84.9%) reflects the countervailing effect of the relative cheapening of constant capital expressed in the slower rate of all at current prices. This cheapening reduces not only the denominator of the rate of profit, but also expands the numerator by reducing the amount of the consumption of fixed capital, or depreciation, therefore increasing net profits.

However, advanced capital consists not only of fixed capital. So I have made the following approximation. Taking the amount of the wage bill for each year from Piketty's series, I imputed to the purchase of inputs, or intermediate consumption, a value that doubles the wage bill, according to the more or less stable intermediate consumption proportion to wages shown in other cases (eg, in the Netherlands and Japan). Finally, to account for the turnover speed of circulating capital, I imputed to the UK a turnover speed of 12 in the year 2008 and then extrapolated it backwards according to the variation of GDP per capita, with the turnover speed reaching 1.3 annual turnovers in 1855. The 12 turnovers imputation in 2008 was based on my work for the Netherlands and the

US - two economies highly related to the British, with 12.4 and 11.4 turnovers respectively in the same year.<sup>12</sup>

Thus variable capital (VC) is equal to the annual wage bill (W), divided by annual turnovers (N); and constant circulating capital (CCC) is equal to inputs or intermediate consumption (IC), divided by annual turnovers. Then we get a rate of profit on total advanced capital adjusted (RoP-N, or P/K+CCC+VC) or unadjusted by turnover (RoP1, or P/K+IC+W).

In the case of the rate of profit on total capital unadjusted (RoP1), the fall in the rate of profit was 77.5% (14.6% to 3.2%), while the adjusted rate (RoP-N) fell less, but was still down 67.2% (17.4% to 5.7%). Again, the difference

fall and the higher relative growth of constant capital compared to the labour force - the only source of surplus value. For simplicity, I present the rate of accumulation in real or volume terms (AC or growth rate of fixed capital relative to the fixed capital of the current year), at constant prices.

At current prices, this rate was clearly negative after the crisis of 1871-73 and in the interwar period - in both cases reflecting a sharp devaluation of capital. By contrast, in the 1970s its growth was even higher, reaching a maximum of 21.5% in 1975, given high inflation levels, and exceeding the peak reached in World War I.

But, beyond these peculiarities, the accumulation rate in real terms allows

constant capital and labour. When the latter increases at a higher rate compared to fixed capital, the rate of profit shows some restoration, and vice versa. And, since the increase of constant capital tends to be higher than that of the labour force over the long run, as Marx stated, the obvious consequence is the downward trend in the rate of profit. The development of the productive power of labour and accumulation also implies that a relative higher rate of accumulation is required for the same rate of increase in the labour force.

● The partial recovery of the rate of profit observed since 1982 has been further supported by an increase in the rate of surplus value and a huge cheapening of constant capital (relative price of investment). Thus the reduction of wages and consumption of fixed capital shares in output implied that the share of profits showed a steady increase, only comparable with that observed between 1855 and 1871. During this partial recovery there have been changes in the contributions of particular industries to the mass of profits and fixed capital of the total economy: eg, the decline in manufacturing and increased contribution from other less mature industries like telecommunication services.

● The accumulation rate tends to change over the short-term cycle following changes in the rate of profit over the short term. Once the rate of profit reaches a peak in a cycle and begins to decline, the rate of accumulation may keep growing or remain at high levels for some time. This may indicate that with a change in overall profitability capitalists increase investments under the pressure of competition, until the continuation in the fall in the rate of profit finally ends up affecting the accumulation rate. However, when profitability begins to increase after the slump, the accumulation rate takes time to reflect that increase, probably because in such situations there is still much idle capacity.

● The increase in the unemployment rate is strongly (inversely) related to the rate of profit achieved by capitalists. As shown in Fig 2, with a fall in the rate of profit, the relative overpopulation of labour (the industrial reserve army) increases. But this relation is mediated by the accumulation rate. As the rate of accumulation increases within each cycle, the unemployment rate is reduced. However, in the rising part of the cycle of the accumulation rate, and before reaching its peak, the pace of employment growth begins to fall, while the investment effort imposed by competition through mechanisation intensifies. Once the falling rate of profit is consolidated, the accumulation rate reacts by entering a downward phase, in which net job losses increase the unemployment rate, thus expanding the relative overpopulation as a countervailing force.

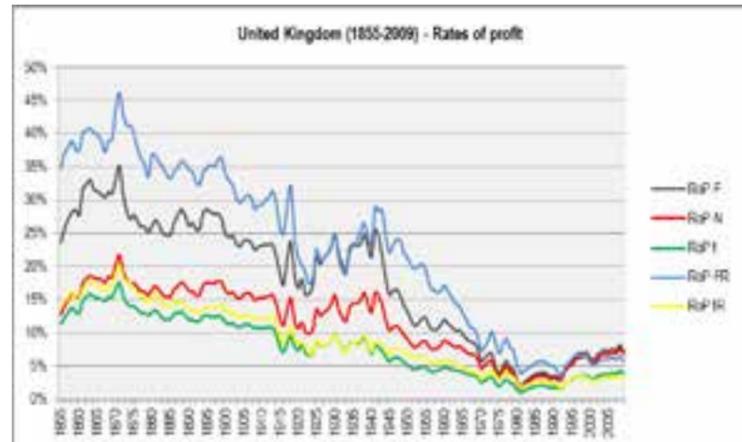


Fig 1

between the two falls (67.2% vs 77.5%) shows the countervailing effect (and only partially countervailing) of the increase in the turnover speed of circulating capital.

The 'current' rate of profit in capitalist reality, RoP-N, is expressing the two countervailing factors already mentioned (the cheapening of constant capital and the increase in turnover speed). RoP1R shows the rate of profit on capital advanced without turnover adjustment and at constant prices. Its average in 1855-74 was 16.9% and 3.0% in 1990-2009, showing a reduction of 86.8%, the largest fall in all the measures. So the two major countervailing forces explain the difference in the rate of decline between the two measures (67.2% vs 86.8%).

us to compare more clearly the relative evolution of the mass of fixed capital to the mass of the labour force.

Over this long period, 1855 to 2009, two opposing trends, mediated by the interwar period, have developed, expressing the Marxian determinations explained above. The rate of accumulation reached higher levels in the post-war period (average: 3.8% per year in 1946-2009) compared to the pre-World War I period (average: 2.0% per year in 1856-1913). During these same periods, the growth in the number of employees showed the reverse, with a higher relative growth in the first part (1.3% per year) compared to post-World War II decades (0.3%). During the interwar period, in which the rate of profit

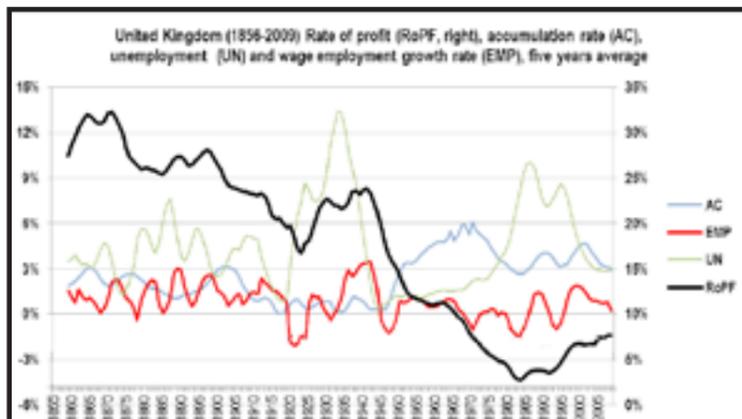


Fig 2

However, RoP-N still declined sharply by 67.2%.

With some differences, all the rates of profit moved in a similar way, showing a clear downward trend in the long run. The isolation of some of the countervailing factors allows us to appreciate that, without them, the reduction would have been even more acute.

Fig 1 shows also the convergence over the long term between the rate of profit adjusted by turnover (RoP-N) and the rate of profit on fixed capital (RoP-F) due to the relative reduction of circulating capital advanced. Since the turnover speed was lower historically, initially the rate of profit adjusted (RoP-N) was closer to the unadjusted rate (RoP1).

### Closer look

In the next diagram (Fig 2) we can see the relation between the development of the tendency of the rate of profit to

recovered significantly, the accumulation rate expanded at an average annual rate of 0.5% - less than the average increase of 0.9% of the workforce.

Additionally, the sharp devaluation of capital in the interwar period mentioned earlier led to an increase in the rate of profit. Violent devaluations during crises are both a product of the crises and one of the ways in which capital restores the conditions for overcoming them. The value of fixed capital at current prices fell from £8,638 million in 1920 to £4,625 million in 1934 (a devaluation of 46.4%, which was not recovered until 1943).

Obviously, I am just exposing in an abbreviated way something that requires much more space and the inclusion of other categories, such as the mass of profit (which does not always increase). However, we can identify some patterns from these series:

● The movement of the rate of profit tends to follow the relative growth of

growth in most economies, but over that particular period the rate of profit declined steadily, mainly due to the very basic reason that the share of investment in GDP increased more than GDP rose. Recent decades have shown a partial recovery of profitability in conjunction with lower GDP growth rates compared to post-war decades.

The tendency of the rate of profit to fall is just another expression of the increased accumulation and social productivity of labour under capitalist relations of production. As stated above, this tendency is an inherent aspect of the mode of production and, as reproduction in thought of its determinations, of Marxian political economy. Paul Mattick points out:

Although it first appears in the process of circulation, the real crisis cannot be understood as a problem of circulation or of realisation, but only as a disruption of the process of reproduction as a whole, which is constituted by production and circulation together. And, as the process of reproduction depends on the accumulation of capital, and therefore on the mass of surplus value that makes accumulation possible, it is within the sphere of production that the decisive factors (though not the only factors) of the passage from the possibility of crisis to an actual crisis are to be found ... The crisis characteristic of capital thus originates neither in production nor in circulation taken separately, but in the difficulties that arise from the tendency of the profit rate to fall inherent in accumulation and governed by the law of value.<sup>13</sup>

The tendency of the rate of profit to fall is derived from the contradictions that constitute the mode of production and the commodity itself as a product of social labour under its particular relations of production. Marxist scientific analysis, which differs from all the previous socialist political traditions and all previous forms of bourgeois economics, has clarified that it ultimately expresses something as obvious as it is elemental: capitalism is a historically bounded system. But Marxism says nothing about how or when its final limits will be reached.

Today, due to the increasing development of long-term statistics, we are able to make use of better tools that allow us to develop a more accurate analysis of the capitalist economy and its trends. This is one meeting between 'theory' and 'data' of which the debunkers have not taken note ●

**The author would like to thank Michael Roberts for his help and advice in proofing. For more data, see Esteban Maito's web page: [www.academia.edu/7941511/And\\_yet\\_it\\_moves\\_down\\_-\\_The\\_tendency\\_of\\_the\\_rate\\_of\\_profit\\_to\\_fall\\_in\\_United\\_Kingdom\\_1855-2009](http://www.academia.edu/7941511/And_yet_it_moves_down_-_The_tendency_of_the_rate_of_profit_to_fall_in_United_Kingdom_1855-2009)**

### Notes

1. 'False premises, false conclusions', June 19 2014; 'Not in awe of "experts"', July 17 2014.
2. 'Incomprehensible and erroneous', July 10 2014.
3. 'Distribution, turnover speed and profit rate in Chile, Japan, Netherlands and United States': <https://uba.academia.edu/EstebanMaito>.
4. 'The historical transience of capital': <https://uba.academia.edu/EstebanMaito>.
5. [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch15.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch15.htm).
6. [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch13.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch13.htm).
7. [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch14.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch14.htm).
8. [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch13.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch13.htm).
9. [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch25.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch25.htm).
10. [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch24.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch24.htm).
11. 'Piketty against Piketty': <https://uba.academia.edu/EstebanMaito>.
12. 'Distribution, turnover speed and profit rate in Chile, Japan, Netherlands and United States': <https://uba.academia.edu/EstebanMaito>.
13. [www.marxists.org/archive/mattick-paul/1974/crisis/ch02.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/mattick-paul/1974/crisis/ch02.htm).

### Concluding remarks

Traditionally, economic cycles have been detached analytically from any long-term trend, as a succession of rising and falling waves between one horizontal and straight line. However, there is a clear relation: long-term trends develop through a series of cycles. In this sense, any analysis of the cyclical crises must refer to the long-term trends of accumulation and profitability, without neglecting the particularities of every crisis that confer its specificity.

To affirm the existence of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall in no way implies the existence of a 'permanent crisis' or that the rate of profit falls always. That crises may be preceded by a period of growth in the rate of profit does not deny the validity of the tendency. Nor does any increase in output necessarily imply a growth in the rate of profit. The post-war decades showed high economic

## SCOTLAND

# More than a union of two crowns

Jack Conrad shows that Scottish national consciousness is complex. Historically there is an unmistakable British dimension

Officially the title of the British state is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Great Britain itself being the unity of two kingdoms and one principality (described as *Great Britain* not for reasons of imperial braggadocio, as left nationalists and other such types have it, but in order to distinguish it from Little Britain or Brittany: ie, the same as Great Russia and Ukraine or Little Russia, etc).

Yet the inhabitants of Britain are joined together by more than having a single hereditary monarch reigning over them. Besides a common state formation and a common territory, there is a common - though not necessarily uniform - historical experience, a common language, a common economy and, crucially, a common consciousness. In short, Britain is a nation-state made up of nations, or, to use an approved governmental formula, Britain is an arrangement of "countries within a country".<sup>1</sup> Obviously, a subject that needs to be urgently discussed because of the impending independence referendum in Scotland.

There are, of course, nationalists who call for a 'yes' vote because, whereas Britain is an "artificial construct", Scotland is deemed to be a "legitimate" nation. Therefore, if Scotland is to meet its "date with destiny", it must vote 'yes' for independence.<sup>2</sup> Yet anyone with access to a decent set of history books will find that nations are made and remade. That certainly applies to Scotland. As a kingdom it was bloodily, painfully and fitfully put together through military advances and feudal marriage-bed deals. There was nothing inevitable about the "making of Scotland". Conceivably there could just as easily have been a kingdom of Fortiu or/and a kingdom of Strathclyde. Anyway, both the Scottish and British nation unmistakably came into existence after the 1707 Act of Union. Only well into the 18th century did the bulk of the population begin to think of themselves as Scottish ... and British.

Scottish nationalists, almost by definition, loathe the idea of a British national identity. Yet denying its existence is akin to denying that Italy or Germany have a national identity because the Lega Nord and the Bayernpartei respectively strive for a separate Padania, a separate Bavaria. And the fact of the matter is that, good or bad, Britain and Britishness owes as much to Scottish as to English input. Eg, on the Scottish side John Mair, Adam Smith, David Hume, James Watt, Walter Scott, Kier Hardie, James Ramsay MacDonald, John Reith, John Buchan, Muriel Spark, Alec Douglas Home, Jimmy Reid, Tam Dalyell, Mick McGahey.

Ultimate proof about the existence of British national identity surely lies in a willingness to die for it. And in countless wars, crucially in 1914-18 and 1939-45, millions have put their lives on the line for king and country. That is as true of Scotland as it is for England and Wales. Eg, it is estimated that out of the 745,000 British military personnel killed in World War I 100,000 came from Scotland.<sup>3</sup> It should also be added that it was field marshal Douglas Haig, a Scot, who was, from 1915, in command of the British Expeditionary Force.

Britishness involves a *dual* national identity. That is how it spontaneously evolved and that is how it was built by monarchs, politicians, bureaucrats and intellectuals. In other words, Scottishness survives not in spite of



Highlandism: incorporated from above

history: rather because of history.

There never was a drive to abolish Scottish identity or subsume it under an overarching Englishness. Of course, that was not true of those speaking Celtic languages. There appears to have been a fitful campaign to Anglicise Wales and encourage migration from England in the late medieval period. However, certainly when it comes to Scotland, it is surely an elementary mistake to equate the kingdom of Scotland with those who spoke Gaelic. The populations of southern and eastern Scotland were ethnically and linguistically distinct (see p7: 'Celts and Sassenachs').

## God's language

Thanks to Protestantism and James I, people throughout his kingdom were able to diligently study the *Bible* and interpret even its more obscure passages for themselves - Protestantism being a literate religion, in which the human being and god speak directly with each other without mediation by priests. And the word of god was in English - their common language.

After the union of the crowns, Scots English (sometimes called Lallans) rapidly gave way to the standard English developed in London during the 17th and 18th centuries. A standardisation which perhaps found its highest expression in Samuel Johnson's celebrated 1775 dictionary. For Scottish nationalists this provides irrefutable proof of colonial oppression. We are told: "One of the greatest, if not the greatest, of the barriers to a nation's freedom is the devaluation and oppression of its culture. When a nation's language, or culture, has been sufficiently weakened, a slave alternative will invariably be imposed by the imperial power."<sup>4</sup>

However, at the risk of oversimplification, in 1707 Scotland had not one, but two, cultures; not one, but two, languages. The culture and language of the feudal highlands and the culture and language of the capitalist lowlands. Educated lowland Scots adopted standard English - naturally, spoken with a Scottish accent - "largely out of choice".<sup>5</sup> Obviously, it was a huge advantage to be readily understood by social equals, superiors and subordinates in England. And that is what the majority of them strove to achieve. Scots survived in song, poetry and the occasional literary flourish. The same process of assimilation happened elsewhere in the British Isles - Wales, Ireland and northern England included.

on their lapel.<sup>6</sup> When Tommy Sheridan married Gail Healy in 2000's "wedding of the year", that is exactly how the celebrity MSP presented himself to readers of *Scottish Socialist Voice*. A publication edited by his former puppet-master, Alan McCombes.

Having been decriminalised in 1782, highlandism was appropriated from on high. Walter Scott famously masterminded George IV's state visit to Edinburgh in August 1822. The Hanoverian king was sensationally paraded around, decked out in the apparel of the old enemy. Highland landowners - whom Scott insisted on calling 'chiefs' - were similarly attired. George IV was given the title of 'chief of chiefs'. As Hugh Trevor Roper barbed comments, Scott knew the whole thing was cod history.<sup>7</sup> A few lowland grandees sniffily objected. Writing in 1850, Lord Macaulay, a Scot, damned George IV's visit. To display his respect for Scotland, the king had disguised himself in what before the 1707 Act of Union had been "considered by nine Scotchmen out of 10 as the dress of a thief".<sup>8</sup>

By 1848, Victoria had acquired her Balmoral estate. She decorated it in full baronial style. It was a "riot of tartan".<sup>9</sup> The young queen claimed a special affinity with the Scots because of her Stuart ancestry. A mania of highland games, piping competitions, dances, songs and music followed. *Gàidhealtachd* was eagerly embraced by respectable society, but with its "linguistic teeth pulled".<sup>10</sup> Official Scottish society, especially the British royal family, still dresses the highlander whenever an appropriate opportunity presents.

## Religion

The 1603 union between England-Wales and Scotland was a regal arrangement brokered and agreed from above. Oliver Cromwell's republic began with a puritan revolution from below, but was completed by a military dictatorship, the crushing of Leveller democracy and the terroristic confiscation of Irish landed property. Nevertheless, be they subjects of the Stuart dynasts or citizens of the Commonwealth, the majority of inhabitants, including a majority in Scotland, were also united by a common religion - Protestantism (Catholicism being the defining other).

The historian, Linda Colley, argues that Protestantism provided the vital glue, which allowed the union of 1707 to stick.<sup>11</sup> The consciousness brought about by reformation and counterreformation and the eventual triumph of Protestantism throughout Britain had already allowed the 1603 union of the crowns. Without being a Protestant James VI would never have been acceptable. Someone else would have been found.

Not that Protestantism possesses some inherent dynamic towards convergence. Quite the reverse. Protestantism is more than prone to fissure and faction. Theological and other such disputes separating Presbyterianism and Anglicanism undoubtedly kept England and Scotland apart. Eg, the Bishops' Wars of 1639 and 1640 established the right of the church in Scotland to dispense with crown-appointed bishops. It wanted the faithful governed by a general assembly.

Nevertheless, precisely because of the Protestant ascendancy and the growth of capitalism, feudal aristocrats and clan lairds hankered after the old Scottish-French alliance. A factor behind the drive to woo or

bully Scotland into a full-blown union. After 1688 England's ruling classes feared that France would invade Scotland and restore the ousted Stuart dynasty. A French satellite and therefore the possibility of fighting a war on two fronts was considered unconscionable. Between 1702 and 1707 intense negotiations took place with Scottish ministers and officials ... and if bribes, offers of financial assistance and promises to grant access to the empire failed, then it is probable that muskets, bayonets and cannons would have been used. Needless to say, mutual interest won the day.

Protestantism undoubtedly gave a particular edge to international conflicts. Catholic Spain and Catholic France welcomed exiled Catholic dissidents from England and Scotland and in general encouraged counterrevolution. It was to make Ireland safe from Spain that the Ulster plantations were established. An Anglo-Scottish empire. Colonists came from England, but by a ratio of five to one from Scotland. Then, later, after the union, there was the exploitation of the Caribbean and North American colonies. This brought fabulous wealth to Edinburgh and Glasgow, and the chance for rapid advancement for Scottish churchmen, journalists, army officers and civil servants. The Scottish elite therefore had a very material interest in becoming British, in becoming joint oppressors. A key factor in making official Britishness.

The growth of the British empire is inseparable from the struggle for global hegemony. Catholic Spain had been effectively defeated by the mid-17th century, but the challenge of Catholic France remained. That is not to suggest for one moment that Britain fought the 1702-13 and 1754-63 global wars for reasons of religion. It did not. But doubtless religion coloured the rivalry.

Neil Davidson questions Colley's thesis that Protestantism provided the glue for British national identity. He insists the different Protestantisms were actually a source of *continuous* tension and non-identity. Presbyterianism, he writes, "acted as a divisive factor in Anglo-Scottish relations".<sup>12</sup> Presbyterianism being Scottish and middle class; Anglicanism being English, pro-establishment and upper class.

Amongst Scots themselves, Davidson also reckons, anti-Catholicism "was a source of division, rather than unity".<sup>13</sup> In 1778 upper class Scotland wanted to implement reform measures which would relax anti-Catholic oppression. Such legislation was passed for England and Ireland by the Westminster and Dublin parliaments. Catholics were granted the right to purchase land. They were also permitted to teach - provided they took the oath of allegiance and denied the temporal powers of the bishop of Rome.

Popular protest forced the abandonment of these modest measures in Scotland. Davidson thinks that with this he has clinched the argument. Those above, those most interested in the success of British identity and the union, were for Catholic emancipation. Those below, not least those under the influence of Calvinist dissidents, were mobilised against the Catholic demon.

Yet the same stratified pattern can be seen in England too. Anti-Catholicism cannot be so easily disposed of. Davidson more or less discounts the Gordon riots, whose immediate cause was the 1788 legislation. These riots saw the mob rampage throughout London and were the largest, most sustained civil disturbances in British

history. Not surprisingly they were plebeian in social composition and, besides Catholic churches, shops and businesses, they were also “directed against the crown, the state and the church hierarchy”.<sup>14</sup>

Colley explains these objections to Catholic emancipation through what amounts to a class analysis. The revival of crude anti-Catholic bigotry was triggered in large measure by the influx of worst-paid Irish labour into the big cities of Britain, including Glasgow, Paisley and Dundee. Unskilled, illiterate and young, these labourers undercut British manual workers. So the Gordon riots were a deflected form of the class struggle. Obviously a type of politics which retained its purchase well into the 19th century. Hostility towards Irish migrants allowed the Tories to secure a mass base for themselves after the widening of the franchise in 1867.

## A British-Scottish working class

Inevitably, like British national consciousness and culture, Scottishness has two contradictory poles, determined by the whole range of sectional interests and conflicts: crucially class. True, compared with what existed before and what existed elsewhere in Europe, dominant British-Scottish culture was initially on the cutting edge. As James Thomson, the Scottish writer of ‘Rule Britannia’, proudly announces, “Britons never, never, never shall be slaves”. Post-1688 the monarchy effectively abandoned absolutist ambitions. The balance of political power increasingly resided with parliament and the office of prime minister, not the crown and court. Britain was as a consequence viewed by enlightenment thinkers on the continental mainland as a beacon of liberty, a model to be emulated.

Yet, as a result of fighting counterrevolutionary wars against the American colonists and then the French republic, Britain never had its widely expected radical revolution. Instead reaction gained the upper hand. Historians tellingly describe the Duke of Wellington’s ministry as a ‘junta’. Reform of the House of Commons was successfully put off till 1832. When it finally came, the extension of the franchise was firmly restricted to the respectable classes. Chartism rose in angry response, but was rebuffed time and again. By 1850 both wings of Chartism had to all intents and purposes exhausted themselves. The 1867 extension of the franchise happened at a time of working class passivity. Workers duly voted for

their masters and in overwhelming numbers embraced imperialism and monarchism. Obviously there were breaks and exceptions. Nevertheless the dominant strand in British working class consciousness has been conservative. Labourism and routine trade unionism surely prove it.

Scottish left nationalists maintain on the basis of such evidence that Britishness existed only at the top of society. Aristocrats, the upper sections of the bourgeoisie, members of the officer corps, expatriate colonial officials intermarried and sent their sons to the same educational establishments. They alone met together regularly - in politics, in business, in London town houses, at country balls and other such social occasions. They alone operated at an all-Britain level.

Logically, for this school of thought, it follows that those below, especially in Scotland, had an ambiguous attitude towards Britishness; the subordinate classes were apparently the main bearers of Scottishness. More, it is claimed - for example, by Peter Berresford Ellis and James D Young - that Scottishness implies opposition to Britishness, and therefore to the union with England and Wales, and in turn an almost innate desire for independence.

Yet, as we have already shown, there was no Scottish nation or Scottish common national consciousness prior to the 1707 union. When it did emerge, by incorporating highlandism, Scottishness was not against Britishness, but an integral part of it. Robert Burns and other such radicals in Scotland had a dual national consciousness. So did the conservative, Walter Scott.

Crucially, the majority of people in Scotland, as manifested through their organisations, mass actions and political demands, were not committed to a nationalist project for independence. As for the radicals, they fought for reform or even the overthrow of the existing British state. This was true also for the nascent working class movement in Scotland during the brief burst of revolutionary militancy following the Napoleonic wars.

While the industrial revolution took place simultaneously throughout Britain, it must be stressed that changes in Scotland were much more marked and hence traumatic. Scotland went from self-sufficient peasant agriculture to capitalist industrialism within a time span of 30 to 40 years. In England this social transformation took several centuries.

The horrors and degradation of life in the dark, airless factories and cramped slums of urban Scotland propelled the nascent working class against the aristocratic-capitalist regime. In 1820 the Committee of

Organisation for Forming a Provisional Government issued an appeal for an insurrectionary general strike across the whole western central belt. The results were “dramatic”.<sup>15</sup> Around 60,000 struck in the Clyde valley alone - a large proportion of the working class at that date. The aim of this movement was to topple the government on both sides of the border. An uprising was planned to occur “simultaneously” in Scotland and the north of England.<sup>16</sup>

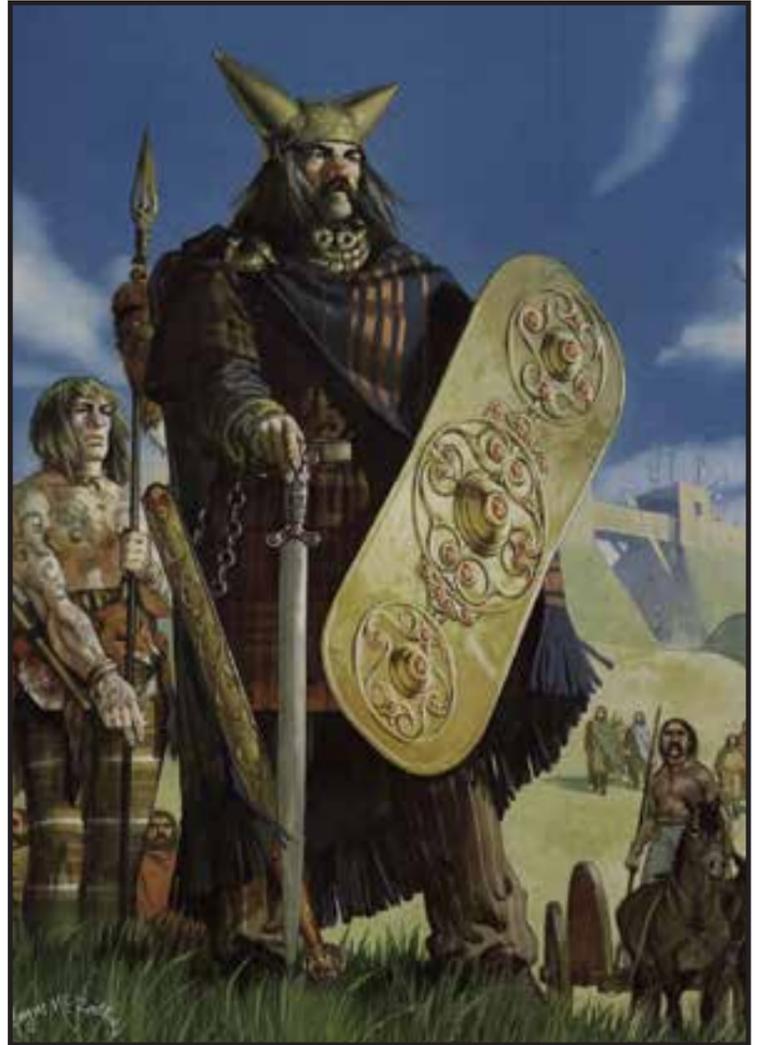
While some of the radical leaders thought Scotland had been reduced to the status of a conquered province, there was an overarching wish for a closer and fully democratic union. Eg, the oath of the United Scotsman called upon members to swear that they would persevere in endeavouring “to form a brotherhood of affection amongst Britons of every description” to “obtain an equal, full and adequate representation of all the people of Great Britain”.<sup>17</sup> The secret societies of 1815 employed a similar formulation: “I ... do voluntarily swear that I will persevere in my endeavours to form a brotherhood of affection amongst Britons of every description who are considered worthy of confidence; and that I will persevere in my endeavours to obtain for all the people of Great Britain and Ireland not disqualified by crimes or insanity the elective franchise at the age of 21, with free and equal representation and annual parliaments.”<sup>18</sup>

Such programmatic material owes little or nothing to the ideology of narrow nationalism. True, the slogans and banners of radical Scotland invoked the names of William Wallace and Robert Bruce. ‘Scots wha hae’ was frequently sung. However, they also claimed the *Magna Charta* and other references to the imagined history of English resistance to the Norman yoke. The same thing happened in England - ‘Scots wha hae’ was an anthem of liberty in England right down to the Chartist days. Above all, in terms of its immediate aims radical politics was all-British in scope and ambition. Peterloo was an injury to all. The demand for ‘universal suffrage and annual parliaments’ would save “this country” - ie, Britain - from “military despotism”.<sup>19</sup> Etc, etc.

The general strike of 1820 announced that workers in Scotland had joined those in Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Newcastle, Sheffield and Cardiff in forming a united working class that was British. Hence the notion that Britishness is purely reactionary is as false as it is self-serving. The masses have played an unmistakable role in making another Britain. Needless to say, while never dominant, Owenism, Chartism, militant trade unionism, CPGB communism were pan-British phenomena ●

## Notes

1. <http://web.archive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/> <http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page823> (January 10 2003).
2. Alex Salmond speaking to the SNP’s 79th annual conference. See [www.snp.org/blog/post/2013/oct/salmond-opens-snp-annual-conference](http://www.snp.org/blog/post/2013/oct/salmond-opens-snp-annual-conference).
3. [www.education.scotland.nhs.uk/scotlandshistory/20thand21stcenturies/worldwarone](http://www.education.scotland.nhs.uk/scotlandshistory/20thand21stcenturies/worldwarone).
4. E McGinty *An Phoblacht* June 19 1997.
5. R McCrum, W Cran and R MacNeil *The story of English* London 1992, p151.
6. See [www.webwedding.co.uk/articles/scotland/traditionaldress.htm](http://www.webwedding.co.uk/articles/scotland/traditionaldress.htm).
7. See H Trevor-Roper, ‘The invention of tradition: the highland tradition of Scotland’ in E Hobsbawm and T Ranger (eds) *The invention of tradition* Cambridge 1983.
8. *Ibid* p31.
9. M Lynch *Scotland: a new history* London 1992, p335.
10. *Ibid*.
11. See L Colley *Britons: forging the nation 1707-1837* London 1994.
12. N Davidson *The origins of Scottish nationhood* London 2000, p87.
13. *Ibid* p88.
14. I Hayward and J Steed (eds) *The Gordon riots* Cambridge 2012, p87.
15. N Davidson *The origins of Scottish nationhood* London 2000, p187.
16. *Ibid* p188.
17. Quoted in *ibid* p189.
18. *Ibid* pp189-90.
19. N Davidson *The origins of Scottish nationhood* London 2000, p190.



Standard version Celt

# Celts and Sassenachs

According to the standard version of history, Julius Caesar met a uniformly Celtic population when his fleet landed in 55 BCE. Throughout the Roman province of Britannia - which famously stopped short at Hadrian’s Wall - people allegedly spoke various dialects of Brythonic (a Celtic language).

The Celts are pictured as but one of many waves of conquerors. A claim that originates with the French Egyptologist, Gaston Maspero. His book, *The struggle of nations* (1896), had entire populations - men, women and children - migrating thousands of miles from their traditional homelands before finally settling down. Each culturally distinct artefact unearthed by archaeologists being interpreted as evidence of a new people. The Celts are supposed to have arrived from the European mainland around 300 BCE and are commonly known by their ‘tribal’ names: eg, the Icenii, Brigantes, Belgae, Dumnonii, Votadini.

Obviously, when it comes to the British Isles, the story hinges on the Anglo-Saxons in the 5th and 6th centuries. We are told that they swept away what remained of disintegrating Romano-British society. Celtic natives bravely fought back. But they were subjected to a prolonged war that amounted to genocide. A few survivors headed off to Brittany. However, most retreated to highland redoubts.

After a brief hiatus, the Normans are assimilated into Anglo-Saxon culture. They help make the modern English language. But - and this is the point - the monarchs of England continue the Anglo-Saxon conquests by taking first Wales and then Ireland.

The reason this matters, apart from getting history right, is that Scottish nationalists treat the expansion of the Anglo-Saxons,

the feudal wars of Edward Plantagenet, the 1707 Act of Union and the September 18 referendum as chapters in an uninterrupted history of anti-Sassenach resistance (‘Sassenach’ being an 18th century Scottish term that derived from ‘Sasunnoch’, the Gaelic for ‘Saxon’).

However, Stephen Oppenheimer, a leading Oxford University expert on the use of DNA to trace migrations, argues that the pre-Roman population was not uniform (*The origins of the British* London 2007). More than that, it is highly unlikely that Anglo-Saxon invaders replaced the Celts. Indeed his research shows that the Anglo-Saxons of the 5th and 6th centuries contributed only a tiny fraction to the English gene pool.

In other words, theirs was not a people movement. Rather, the Anglo-Saxons were a warrior elite. Oppenheimer finds an *unbroken* line of descent from the end of the last ice age for three-quarters of the English. They came from northern Germany, Denmark and Frisia in the late Upper Palaeolithic via Doggerland, and it was these migrants who spoke the earliest forms of English.

What of the Celts? Oppenheimer’s data reveals that, far from having a central European homeland, Welsh, Cornish, Irish and Scottish Celts originate in the Basque country. They made their way along the Atlantic coast before arriving in Britain some 10,000 years ago. As to their language, this appears to have been introduced by later migrations during the Neolithic.

Oppenheimer finds a distinct genetic line dividing the southern and eastern British from the west British. So it is not surprising that in the 8th century a majority people in the Scottish lowlands were reportedly speaking a variety of English ●

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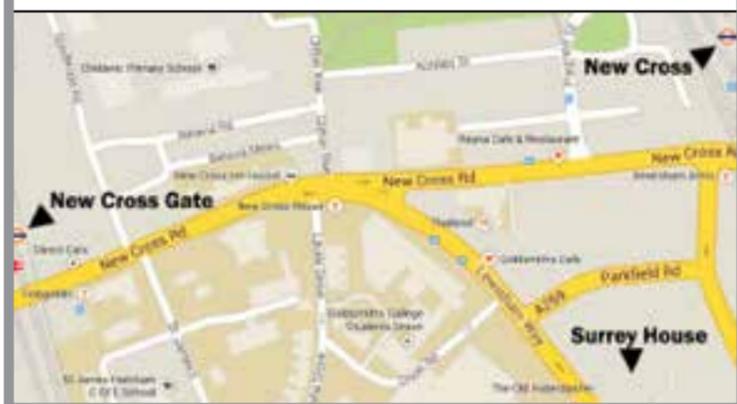
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**MORNING STAR**

# Nothing to see here

A journalist's angry resignation has been followed immediately by the departure of its editor and company secretary. Paul Demarty doesn't believe in coincidences

**N**ews reaches us of odd goings-on at the headquarters of the *Morning Star*, Britain's "daily paper of the left".

The *Star*, formerly the paper of the 'official' Communist Party of Great Britain and now semi-detached from the Communist Party of Britain, a sleepy crew of semi-reformed tankies, is known primarily for its absolute avoidance of controversy. The editorial approach is more or less to act as an advertising sheet for trade union bureaucrats, which serves both as a political method for the desiccated life-long opportunists of the CPB, and also as cover for the occasional paeans to Stalino-capitalist China and the like.

Additional cover is provided by mouthpieces of the broader left and progressive milieu. John Rees writes sometimes to tout the People's Assembly, despite having a little too much of the whiff of Trotskyism about him for the CPB faithful. Colin Fox, convenor of the rump Scottish Socialist Party and a member of the 'yes' campaign's advisory board, writes occasional columns, against the grain of the CPB's and *Morning Star*'s unionist position.

Further down the food chain, there are the journalists themselves. They are journalists in the strong sense - paid writers on current affairs, not drawn overwhelmingly from the CPB's own ranks, but from the larger pond of the British left. It is perhaps surprising how doggedly they stick to this admirably catholic hiring policy, given how restive the assembled hacks can prove on occasion. The *Star*'s National Union of Journalists chapel has surely seen more industrial action than any other paper in the last 20 years; perhaps any other NUJ chapel, if one excludes the BBC.

## Final warning

So we consider the story of comrade Rory MacKinnon, who joined the paper in 2011, and has now left. "I was proud to represent a 'broad paper of the left'," he writes: "a paper that saw feminism, LGBTQ issues, racial politics and the like as integral to its coverage of class struggle."

What follows is comrade MacKinnon's version of the story.<sup>1</sup> He was bedding down in Scotland as a *Star* correspondent, when he heard troubling news from the Rail, Maritime and Transport union. This was, of course, the Steve Hedley affair - Hedley, the assistant general secretary, faced allegations of violent abuse from a former partner, which were investigated by the RMT and the police with no action being taken. His accuser went public, whereupon Hedley responded by accusing her of domestic violence.

In the more feminist sphere of the British left, the Hedley affair has taken on the character of a litmus test, despite its general murkiness, and organisations like the Socialist Party in England and Wales (of which Hedley was briefly a member, before resigning during this controversy) have faced hostile receptions for continuing to put him on their platforms. Hedley's ambition to replace the late Bob Crow as RMT general secretary keeps the issue in the sights of the left.

According to MacKinnon, his troubles at the *Star* began when he was dispatched to cover the RMT women's conference, some months after this scandal went public. In a session on "recruiting women organisers and



**Richard Bagley: 'family reasons'**

combating sexism in the workplace", he asked RMT official Alan Pottage "whether he thought the lack of formal investigation into the allegations against Hedley had affected women members' perceptions of the union". Pottage didn't bite; after the session was concluded, comrade MacKinnon found himself forcibly ejected from the conference by equalities officer Jessica Webb and Denis Connor of the union's executive.

Sniffing around in this milieu for a scoop might have won him friends at a paper with any editorial backbone, but MacKinnon was shocked (shocked!) to get more or less the same treatment from the *Star* hierarchy. Editor Richard Bagley suspended him for "gross misconduct", and warned him that public comment on the affair would "risk bringing the paper into disrepute" and reflect badly in subsequent disciplinary procedures.

When these came, Bagley and Tony Briscoe, People's Press Printing Society company secretary, wanted to leave him in no doubt as to the paper's mission: "The role of a *Morning Star* reporter is to progress the policies of the paper, which includes building good relationships with trade unions," said Briscoe. There is a difference between "inter-union" and "internal union" matters, chides Bagley (the latter, of course, are off limits). "The question feels more like something a *Daily Mail* reporter would ask than someone from the *Morning Star*," Briscoe grumbled - yes, Tony, like something an *actual journalist* would ask. In the end, MacKinnon was given a "final warning" and put on 12 months' probation.<sup>2</sup>

## 'Family reasons'

A couple of weeks ago, on July 26, comrade MacKinnon resigned, signalling his intention to go public on his reasons why - which he has now done on a feminist blog. To leave it at that, it would be a bit of a 'dog bites man' story - MacKinnon's testimony tells us what we already knew - the *Morning Star* is loath to interpose itself in the affairs of trade unions, who after all make significant financial contributions to the paper. Woe betide the naive journalist who takes it upon

him or herself to do otherwise!

The plot rapidly thickened, however - by the following Monday, both Bagley and Briscoe had stepped down from their posts. Bagley has resigned the editorship for "family reasons", while Briscoe has retired.

It is, of course, *possible* that this is merely a striking coincidence - that two men who expect a public beating over their treatment of a journalist *just happened* on the same day to decide to leave their posts. We consider it, on balance, unlikely. The two comrades - Bagley, certainly - were concerned that public reporting of MacKinnon's censure would damage the good name of the *Star*. When such things happen, in the bourgeois media at least, it is not the luckless staff writer who carries the can, but their superiors.

There is also the matter of the strike-happy journalists themselves. They successfully forced out one regime - the Mary Rosser-Mike Hicks team - in the late 1990s, after all. And, as noted, they are not necessarily a politically 'safe pair of hands' (I can think of at least one other comrade on their staff who has promoted anti-Hedley petitions and activities). A "broad paper of the left", alas, is less likely to have the stomach for an industrial dispute than, say, Rupert Murdoch, who stared down newsroom dissent at the closure of the *News of the World*.

Both Briscoe and Bagley, meanwhile, were in an awkward position. Briscoe had been PPPS company secretary for many years, which included the last serious pay dispute at the *Star*. And the position of editor is hardly a comfortable one at the best of times. A grimly amusing spat between Bagley and one comrade, Norman Hill, which erupted over the festive season, illustrates the problems inherent in the position.

Jesus is not the only messiah figure to have been born around the winter solstice - Joseph Stalin's birthday, too, falls in that slot. Comrade Hill - clearly something of an old-schooler - wanted to take out a half-page advert in the *Star* in Koba's honour. Comrade Bagley spiked it. Their correspondence was leaked to an ultra-Stalinist blog, and is quite a read - Bagley has to explain to an uncomprehending

Hill that throwing pictures of Stalin around is not the best way to build a "broad democratic alliance" against monopoly capital. A *Star* editor has to balance, on the one hand, the demands of CPB members - in embarrassingly large numbers, quite unreconstructed individuals - and, on the other, the paper's appeal to the 'broad left'. If Bagley is unable to keep the soft left happy, as in the MacKinnon debacle, why should the likes of comrade Hill, and hardliners higher up the CPB, put up with him?<sup>3</sup>

However, exactly *what* is going on is hard to divine, at least in part because the *Star* and the CPB are laughably non-transparent about the whole affair. Bagley and Briscoe got a bland, flatulent send-off on July 28. A "statement regarding Rory MacKinnon" manages that classic manoeuvre of dishonest bureaucrats to allegations without actually refuting them. The *Star* "completely and utterly rejects the allegations that Mr MacKinnon was disciplined for attempting to raise allegations of domestic abuse ... [He] was properly disciplined on charges of breaking the trust and confidence expected of him as a *Morning Star* reporter and of bringing the paper into disrepute."<sup>4</sup> The statement does not mention the tranche of formal communications, including minutes of meetings and written judgments, which MacKinnon has leaked, and which directly contradict the *Star* statement.

On one specific point, they respond directly: "The *Morning Star* wholly rejects Mr MacKinnon's offensive claims that 'the paper's senior staff have an explicit policy of suppressing such allegations'." This is deviously slippery: in the context of the *Star* statement, the phrase "such allegations" implicitly refers to allegations of domestic abuse; in MacKinnon's statement, the quoted phrase refers to allegations against the RMT for not holding a formal investigation. In any case, Bagley made it quite clear that the paper's "news priorities ... do not include reporting internal union rows or personal controversy", which presumably would cover both.

Where he is wrong is in a technical

detail - such policies are not, indeed, explicit: MacKinnon was expected to deduce them from the general nature of the *Star*'s coverage (in fairness to comrade Bagley, not exactly a tough job).

Indeed, they cannot be explicit - any more than the BBC can be honest about the laughable nature of its so-called 'impartiality'. To have down in writing 'We do not meddle in union affairs' would be to admit that the paper is an utterly compromised, prostituted rag.

Thus, also, the *Star* cannot really defend itself from MacKinnon. When Lenin returned to Russia on a sealed train, courtesy of the German high command and Alexander Parvus, he faced endless accusations of being an enemy agent. Indeed, presumably both the Germans and Parvus hoped he would, indeed, prove helpful to the German war effort! The Bolshevik response was to refute each and every allegation and excoriate the hypocrisy of those who put about such slanders for social-chauvinist purposes.<sup>5</sup>

In order to do the same here, however, the *Morning Star* would have to argue that the job of the left is to defer to trade union bureaucrats and assist in the concealment of dirty laundry. (The guilt or innocence of Hedley is immaterial here, simply because it does not enter into the *Star*'s calculation.) Such an admission would be a plain abrogation of the duty of a journalist, let alone a communist.

Wrapped up in this sad little story is the sorry state of the *Morning Star*. Its predecessor, the *Daily Worker*, was a pioneering publication in the history of British newspapers: quite apart from its political importance, it won awards for its journalism and production values. What award could the *Star* possibly win now?

That is ultimately a matter of *politics*. The refusal to dig into anything that might embarrass some left bureaucrat (or even the Chinese state!) makes the paper pretty dull. The lack of controversy, of any cutting edge, deforms also its journalists. It breeds, to borrow a phrase of Trotsky's, "short-beaked pigeons".<sup>6</sup> The *Star* selects for sycophancy and naivety: not exactly virtues of great journalism.

And, while mainstream bourgeois journalists are hopelessly uncritical within their blind spots, the *Star* rather takes the cake with its grovelling inanity, applied in its case to union machines and the remnant Stalinist regimes elsewhere. Yes, MacKinnon was asking a question more like the *Daily Mail* than the *Morning Star* - because the *Mail*, vile as it is, would have the courage to ask such an awkward question of the Tories just as much as the RMT.

Courage, alas, is not, and has never been, counted among the *Star*'s "news priorities" ●

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## Notes

1. <http://stavvers.wordpress.com/2014/08/08/guest-post-the-public-have-no-right-to-know-how-the-morning-star-threatened-to-sack-me-for-reporting-domestic-violence-allegations>.
2. Bagley's decision is here: <http://mediadarlings.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/hearing-decision.pdf>.
3. <http://redyouthuk.wordpress.com/2014/01/14/the-morning-star-and-the-single-divisive-individual>.
4. <http://morningstaronline.co.uk/a-e52c-Statement-regarding-Rory-MacKinnon#U-oCvHVdW01>.
5. A representative example is Lenin's 'Against the riot-mongers' - [www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/14b.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/14b.htm).
6. [www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/britain/wibg/ch04.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/britain/wibg/ch04.htm).

WWI

# Parvus's 'Fourth of August'

Sections of the left also adopted a German-defencist position during 1914-18

On August 4 1914 the Reichstag *Fraktion* of the Social Democratic Party of Germany famously voted for war credits for the kaiser's government. Opponents of the decision within the *Fraktion* went along with the decision for reasons of party discipline. The dominant narrative on the far left is that this was a political collapse of the 'centre', whose most prominent figure was Karl Kautsky, with its roots in the SPD's 'passive' policy before 1914; but that the party's 'left', previously advocates of an 'offensive' policy - most prominently Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht - redeemed the honour of German Marxism by anti-war agitation.

As Ben Lewis has explained in this paper, this story is incomplete.<sup>1</sup> An important section of leaders of the SPD's pre-war left also adopted a German-defencist policy in autumn 1914, and from 1915 organised round the journal *Die Glocke*, published by Alexander Parvus. Over the next few months we will be carrying a number of extracts from these authors' writings. Not because we support them, but because their arguments and errors are recognisably present in many modern far-left arguments about imperialism, war and Marxist policy. Perhaps seeing how the same arguments led to German-defencism in 1914-18 will help some of today's comrades overcome their own mistakes.

We begin with Parvus's own August 4 1914: his interview with the Constantinople (Istanbul) daily *Tasvir-i Efkâr* on that day (also the day of the

formal British declaration of war on Germany), translated by Esen Uslu.<sup>2</sup> In the interview, Parvus argues in a partially 'coded' way for Turkey (at this time the Ottoman empire) to take the opportunity provided by the war to break the chains of control by its British and French imperialist creditors: that is, to side with Germany.

Parvus, aka Alexander Helphand or Gelfand ('Elephant'), aka Izrail Lazarevitch (surname unknown) was born in 1867 in Berezino, Belarus, but brought up in Odessa, Ukraine.<sup>3</sup> In his teens he was a supporter of *Norodnaya Volya* and in 1886 spent some time in Zurich, where he was in contact with Georgi Plekhanov and the early Russian Marxist group, Emancipation of Labour. In 1887 he went to Basle to study political economy, obtaining a doctorate in 1891. He then moved to Germany, where he supported himself by writing for SPD periodicals.

He was a prominent writer of the left in the party: an early advocate of the mass strike tactic, an early critic of Eduard Bernstein's revisionism, whose sharp criticisms provoked a storm of protest and forced the party leadership to respond to Bernstein.<sup>4</sup> He was also an early writer against imperialism in his 1898 pamphlet *Marineforderungen, Kolonialpolitik und Arbeiterinteressen* (*Naval demands, colonialism and workers' interests*). His sharp renewal of the revisionism debate with *Opportunism in practice* (1901) led Kautsky to refuse further articles from Parvus in *Neue Zeit*, the SPD theoretical journal.

In 1901-06 Parvus was more involved



Alexander Parvus

in the Russian workers' movement, taking the side of the Mensheviks (after initial neutrality) in 1904 and writing in that year in the Menshevik *Iskra* on the likelihood that the Russo-Japanese war would lead to revolution. At this period he influenced Leon Trotsky and his 'permanent revolution' theory, and in 1905 he collaborated with Trotsky in

Petrograd, playing a leading role in the second Petrograd soviet in December-January 1905-06 before being arrested.

Back in Germany after escaping from exile in Siberia, Parvus encountered a renewed debate on imperialism in the SPD following the 1906 'Hottentot election', where the right, centre and liberal parties formed a bloc against the SPD around the defence of the German state's genocidal Herero war in what is now Namibia. The SPD had denounced the war and as a result of the bloc it lost Reichstag seats and saw its share of the vote reduced (though its total vote went up). The SPD right used this defeat to attack the SPD's anti-imperialism. Parvus responded with a major book on the topic, *Die Kolonialpolitik und der Zusammenbruch* (*Colonial policy and breakdown* [of capitalism]).<sup>5</sup> This combined savage attacks on German colonialism with a theoretical analysis of the roots of imperialism, influencing Rudolf Hilferding's *Finance capital* (1910) and thus, indirectly, Lenin's *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*, which relied on Hilferding.

In 1910 Parvus moved to Constantinople, initially as a journalist. He rapidly became involved with the 'Young Turk' nationalist movement, which had obtained power in the revolution of 1908. He wrote around 50 articles in Young Turk-affiliated periodicals, especially the pan-Turkist *Türk Yurdu*, mainly on economic issues, and a book on the Ottoman debt problem.<sup>6</sup> He seems in this work to have arrived at the conclusion that *finance imperialism*

led to what has more recently been called 'underdevelopment'; and, with the Anglo-French control of Ottoman finances, and the 'capitulations' (special privileges of Europeans in the Ottoman empire), he was brought face to face with the reality of *British imperialism* in a way which had not featured more than abstractly in his previous work.

This *Turkish anti-imperialist nationalism*, focused on *British and French imperialism*, seems to provide the context for Parvus's own 'Fourth of August': his turn from pre-war leftist anti-imperialism to German-defencism in the world war. After the interview, translated below, he wrote two pamphlets in Osmanli Turkish: *Umumi harb neticelerinden: Almanyaya galip gelirse* (*The outcome of the general war if Germany wins*), and *Umumi harb neticelerinden: İngiltere galip gelirse* (*The outcome of the general war if England wins*).<sup>7</sup> If Britain won, the Russians would take Constantinople and the Bosphorus, while Britain would take control of the Ottoman empire. If Germany won, the Franco-British debts would be cancelled, the Turks could expect to recover territory from the Russians and in north Africa from the French, while German investment would promote Turkish industrial development.<sup>8</sup>

He went on to write further articles justifying German-defencism, some of which we will publish later in this series. But August 4 was for Parvus, as for the SPD leadership, the decisive moment ●

Mike Macnair

## Financial measures during the war years

From *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, August 4 1914

The general war in Europe has caused a violent financial and economic crisis in our country, as it has done elsewhere. As this crisis could take other forms in the near future, we thought it would be useful to hear from an independent and expert voice on what line of action should be adopted by our government. So we approached a foreign economist renowned for his friendship with Turks, and asked for his ideas about the current and future state of our finances. As our interviewee is involved with financial affairs day to day and everybody who knows him attests to his expertise in his profession, we emphatically recommend that his ideas and observations, recorded below, should be taken into careful consideration. The interview went as follows:<sup>9</sup>

**Sir, what is your general opinion on the financial and economic position of Turkey in the face of current crises?**

First of all, the basis that should be accepted is that the extraordinary situation created by the European war requires Turkey to adopt extraordinary measures. Apart from that, I must say plainly that the problem of 'now or never' faces Turkey too. The hostilities in Europe have laid bare all manner of conflicts. Those nations that fail to win their demands will be the prey of others. The time for talk and reasoning has passed. Now action is needed! You should heed this well.

**Today the most important problem to consider, I believe, is how to reduce the devastation of the financial crisis as far as possible. What should we do in this regard?**

You are quite right ... As to the

measures adopted:

First of all, exporting gold money out of the country should be prohibited. As you know, the Ottoman state sends Europe 15 million Ottoman liras annually in debt repayment alone. Up to now, since gold is also imported from Europe, a balance has more or less been maintained. However, at present the transfer of gold from Europe is interrupted. Therefore, unless the export of gold is banned, the reserves of your country will be greatly reduced.

Sufficient amounts of bank or state bonds should be issued as a medium of circulation. Tiny Bulgaria had 90 million francs in banknotes in circulation even before the Balkan war, while notes in circulation from the Ottoman Bank are about 30 million francs, despite the fact that the commercial transactions of Turkey are five times greater than Bulgaria. When the importing of gold from abroad is interrupted and there is a general loss of confidence, the need for means of payment and the supply of a greater quantity of banknotes into the present medium of circulation becomes an urgent requirement. During a war every country issues a substantial amount of banknotes. If only Turkey fails to do so, that would very badly affect its financial and commercial position.

While the issue of banknotes as a medium of circulation is required, due diligence in the manner of that issue is also required. There are many practical questions, such as the total value of notes to be issued, the ratio between smaller and larger denomination notes, and the impact of these types of notes on the wealth distribution between people, etc, which only experts who are fully aware of financial matters could resolve after a thorough and detailed study of banking and money markets.

**What is your opinion about a moratorium [on debt payments]?**

A one-month-long moratorium is not sufficient. The term of such a moratorium as of today should be three months. In one month even the banks will not have been able to make their payments. Therefore, extending the moratorium is necessary. However, if the world of trade knows that it faces a term of three months, it will undoubtedly be able to perform its transactions relatively free of pressure. Besides, it should be explained that the moratorium also has the effect of deferring debts such as house and other rents, as well as other obligations.

**Sir, the status of foreigners in our country is also very well known to you. Would amending that status during this time of crisis have a positive effect on our financial affairs?**

Undoubtedly ... Facing a conflict endangering its existence, every state will feel it needs every individual and every penny. Therefore, Turkey should not consent to the tax-free status of those who have lived here and leached fortunes off its back. Taxes should also be imposed on foreigners.

**What about capitulations, sir?**

The era of capitulations has already passed. The relationship between contemporary states can only be based on agreements which take current commercial conditions, social life and world affairs into consideration. Medieval practices cannot be defended or maintained. If Turkey wishes to survive, it must open its own way into 20th century civilisation. Keep what I have said in mind ...

**Are there no other measures to be adopted?**

Of course there are, sir ...

It would be very beneficial if you replaced current custom duties with a method of 'tariff based on weight', which has been agreed in principle by several states. Especially if you implemented such a tariff in

accordance with the needs of war times, you would benefit substantially.

Then the government should take over the railways. In any case such a measure is a requirement born out of mobilisation, but, due to the necessity of transporting grain to Istanbul,<sup>10</sup> the said measure has the utmost economic importance.

France has already banned the export of grain and other foodstuffs. Undoubtedly other states will immediately adopt the same measures. Because of the mobilisation, steamboat and railway transport has been halted. Under such circumstances, Turkey should adopt measures to reduce grain prices by bringing in grain from Anatolia and indeed maintaining customs duty on all foodstuffs. Therefore, the railways should be under government control. The government should at once come to an agreement with the railway directors on the required measures to be adopted.

Such steps must be taken at once. The necessary measures are not limited to these, but they will lay the basis of the actual work to be carried out in order to prevent dangerous outcomes for Turkey arising from the European war.

This war is so horrendous that there is a risk of spontaneously seeking consolation in imagining that it will be short. But this is a daydream. Those who find themselves defeated will be forced to say goodbye to their political influence for a long time, or even permanently. The present struggle is not about a specific problem - each of the great powers fights for its own pride and political position. Therefore, no state will surrender to its rivals except as a very last resort - unless a European revolution halts the European war.

The measures being prepared have enormous significance - we are living in historic times. Therefore, I repeat: action is needed.

**You said that the measures adopted were not limited to**

**those you have mentioned. To which further measures could recourse be had?**

In my estimation, such measures are sufficient for a temporary period of time that cannot be determined. If required, you may consider looking at the 1881 decree of Muharrem regarding the Ottoman public debt administration.<sup>11</sup> Read article 20 of the decree - then you will understand where your interests and the interests of your creditors lie ●

## Notes

1. 'SPD left's dirty secret' *Weekly Worker* June 26 2014.
2. Comrade Uslu's English version is itself derived from a translation from Osmanli Turkish into modern Turkish of 'Required financial measures' *Tasvir-i Efkâr* August 4 1914, p3. The original translation is contained in Z Toprak *Türkiye'de Milli İktisat, 1908-1918* (*National economy in Turkey, 1908-1918*) Istanbul 2012, pp712-14, checked and where necessary corrected by historian Yaprak Zihnioglu, whose work is gratefully acknowledged.
3. Information about Parvus's life from ZAB Zeman and WB Scharlau *The Merchant of revolution* London 1965.
4. Partial translation in H and JM Tudor *Marxism and social democracy* Cambridge 1988, chapter 6.
5. Partial translation in RB Day and D Gaido *Discovering imperialism* Leiden 2012, chapters 21, 22. Ben Lewis has translated the rest of the book, but this translation as yet remains unpublished.
6. See P Dumont, 'Un économiste social-démocrate au service de la jeune Turquie' *Mémorial Omer Lütfi Barkan* Paris 1980, pp75-86, and M Asim Karaomerlioglu, 'Helphand-Parvus and his impact on Turkish intellectual life' *Middle Eastern Studies* No40 (2004) pp145-65.
7. Pdfs of the original texts are at <http://isamveri.org/pdf/frisaleosm/R167632.pdf>, and <http://isamveri.org/pdf/frisaleosm/RE13538.pdf>.
8. This summary from P Dumont, 'Un économiste social-démocrate au service de la jeune Turquie' *Mémorial Omer Lütfi Barkan* Paris 1980, p83.
9. This paragraph translated into modern Turkish by Yaprak Zihnioglu.
10. In the original, the word "*Dersaadet*" (Gate of Happiness) was used as a synecdoche for Constantinople, referring to the gates of the Sultan's palace.
11. Muharrem, or Muharram, was the first month of Hijri calendar. On the Ottoman debt administration see M Birdal *The political economy of Ottoman public debt* London 2010.

## ITALY

# Acquittal boosts reactionary drive

Plans for constitutional 'reform' represent a return to the notorious 'Plan for National Rebirth', argues Toby Abse

There had been a widespread hope that the decision of the Italian supreme court (Cassazione) to uphold Silvio Berlusconi's tax fraud conviction in August 2013 marked the beginning of the end of his political career. But this has now been completely destroyed by his acquittal in the 'Ruby case' by the Milan court of appeal on July 18, which overturned the seven-year prison sentence imposed by the judges in the original trial.

The convicted fraudster was eventually expelled from the Senate in November 2013, and has for the next few months - probably until February 2015 - to do four hours community service a week, spending his Friday mornings looking after Alzheimer's patients in an old-age home. However, the Italian media (apart from the anti-establishment *Il Fatto Quotidiano* and the "communist daily", *Il Manifesto*) and the bulk of Italian politicians now behave as if nothing has happened. Berlusconi has regained the status of leader of the opposition and appears on television - including the publicly owned RAI, not just his own channels - not in relation to his trials, some of which are still ongoing (including one over allegations that he paid a centre-left senator €3 million to change sides in 2008), but to express his opinions on constitutional and electoral reform.

Berlusconi's acquittal not only guarantees his own continued dominance over the centre-right of the Italian political spectrum - which had in the autumn of 2013 appeared to be seriously challenged by Angelino Alfano's breakaway Nuovo Centro Destra (NCD - New Centre Right), but also places him at the very centre of Italian politics as the favoured interlocutor of both prime minister Matteo Renzi and president Giorgio Napolitano, the two leading figures in the nominally centre-left Partito Democratico (PD), of which Renzi is secretary.<sup>1</sup> This trio is totally united in aiming to push through parliament by the end of this year changes in Italy's constitutional and electoral systems that will in practice knock the heart out of the 1948 constitution born of the resistance of 1943-45, which very deliberately created a large number of safeguards against the kind of personalised authoritarianism that had marked Mussolini's 20 years of dictatorship.<sup>2</sup>

The acquittal has vastly increased the speed of the thrust towards rapid constitutional revision that was implicit in Napolitano's unprecedented re-election to a second seven-year term as president last year and was made explicit in the agreement between Renzi and Berlusconi - the now famous Patto del Nazareno (Nazarene pact)<sup>3</sup> of January 18 2014<sup>4</sup> that paved the way for Renzi's treacherous coup against his predecessor as prime minister and fellow PD member, Enrico Letta. Whilst Renzi claims that the Patto del Nazareno was merely an agreement to support the proposed electoral reforms known as the 'Italicum' and to abolish the directly elected Senate in favour of a nominated chamber with reduced powers, the text has never been published and remains a secret.

It seems likely, however, that, just as the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of August 1939 was not just the non-aggression agreement it was initially presented as, so too the Patto del Nazareno covered far more than the already extremely retrogressive and anti-democratic constitutional and electoral changes that Renzi is willing to talk about. *Il Fatto Quotidiano*<sup>5</sup> has long claimed that the Patto included a provision for a justice 'reform' that would be aimed at weakening the



**Silvio Berlusconi: he's back**

power of investigating magistrates rather than organised crime and by late July it was claiming that the pact also contained a clause in which Renzi and Berlusconi had undertaken to present a jointly agreed candidate as Napolitano's successor, explicitly committing themselves to putting a veto on Romano Prodi, the one man on the centre-left whom Berlusconi both hates and fears.<sup>6</sup>

Berlusconi's acquittal has vastly increased the steamroller effect of the bid to reform the constitution, which has become a 'make or break' issue for Renzi, in large part because Italy's continuing economic stagnation makes it difficult for him to pose as the saviour of the economy or public finances - it is increasingly doubtful if the €80 monthly bonus that most income tax payers received just before the European elections, which some see as making a considerable contribution to Renzi's endless reiterated 40.8% score in those elections, can be sustained over the longer term.<sup>7</sup>

## Absurd

Before analysing the consequences for constitutional change of Berlusconi's acquittal, it is necessary to say something about the verdict itself. The acquittal was, of course, utterly absurd, since the defence did not produce a single new witness or a single new piece of evidence to contradict the facts established in the initial trial. This had lasted for several months, during which the three judges, all of whom were women (something to which commentators have attributed some significance, given the subject matter of the trial), heard testimony from dozens of witnesses, as well as seeing transcriptions of numerous interrogations and wiretaps.

The judges at the Milanese court of appeal - two men and a woman - accepted that Berlusconi as prime minister had made seven telephone calls in one night from an international summit in Paris, urging the deputy police chief of Milan to immediately release 'Ruby',<sup>8</sup> who was being held on a theft charge, into the care of Berlusconi's chosen representative, Nicole Minetti, on the pretext that Ruby was the niece of the then Egyptian dictator, Hosni Mubarak,<sup>9</sup> and that it was essential that Italy avoid a major diplomatic incident with the Egyptian government (Minetti was subsequently convicted of procuring prostitutes for the fraudster). However, the appeal court judges did not seem to regard this clear abuse of the office of prime minister as a criminal offence - presumably because the police officer was not explicitly threatened with dismissal and received no bribe.

Therefore the police officer's knowing breach of the standard procedures for the custody of juvenile delinquents held in police stations seems to have been treated as if it were a spontaneous whim rather than a response to overwhelming pressure.

Whilst the female magistrate responsible for the care of Milanese juvenile delinquents in police custody had protested in vain against the irregular course of action adopted in Ruby's case, it seems unrealistic to expect the same degree of courage from a career police officer bombarded by a succession of late-night telephone calls from a sitting prime minister.

In relation to the second offence of which Berlusconi had been convicted by the lower court - that concerning under-age prostitution - the appeal court judges did not seek to deny that Ruby was engaging in prostitution at the time of her detention in the Milan police station or that Berlusconi had paid her for sex; however, they denied that Berlusconi had committed any offence, since, at least according to the explanation offered to the media by Berlusconi's defence lawyer in the immediate aftermath of the verdict, they claimed that he genuinely believed Ruby to be 24 rather than 17 at the time. One presumes that their detailed reasoning will not comment on whether he also really believed Ruby to be Mubarak's niece or attempt to explain his frantic nocturnal phone calls to the Milanese police station as a statesman's concern about Italo-Egyptian relations rather than panic about the revelation of Ruby's age, of the kind that might be experienced by any client of an under-age prostitute concerned about criminal charges and massive media exposure.

One might also observe that even the most unworldly of judges might have been aware that Berlusconi had in latter years developed a penchant for under-age girls, as the massive scandal around his appearance at Noemi Letizia's 18th birthday party - the immediate trigger for the decision of Berlusconi's second wife, Veronica Lario, to publicly denounce her husband's behaviour and move towards an eventual divorce - amply demonstrated a year before the Ruby scandal broke. This previous incident might suggest that he was attracted to Ruby because of her age, not as a result of his ignorance of it.

## Steamroller effect

Berlusconi's acquittal has increased the steamroller effect of Napolitano's re-election and the Patto del Nazareno for two reasons.

Firstly, it strengthens the tycoon's own hand against any dissidents within

his own Forza Italia who might have contemplated either defecting to the NCD or, in the case of Raffaele Fitto and his southern Italian followers, attempting to democratise Forza Italia in the understandable belief that this would enable the party to survive the marginalisation, physical decline or possible death of its aging founder, who will be 78 at the end of September.

Before the acquittal Forza Italia seemed to be falling apart, as the more moderate elements were being pulled towards the NCD, whilst the more hawkish rightwingers were dubious about Berlusconi's deal with Renzi and the PD and felt more attraction to the xenophobic and racist populism of Matteo Salvini's Lega Nord and Ignazio La Russa's neo-fascist Fratelli d'Italia - both of which the NCD regards as beyond the pale, eager as it is to align itself with German chancellor Angela Merkel at the European level. Moreover, most of the longstanding Forza Italia politicians of whatever political current were increasingly at odds with the 'magic circle' surrounding the old man - especially his 29-year-old fiancée, Francesca Pascale, and her close friend, Maria Rosaria Rossi, who seemed to be in a position to shape his diary, with their control over access to him, and were even gaining influence over party policy and appointments, including for prospective candidacies for next year's regional elections. It is interesting that since his acquittal Berlusconi has become more inclined to assert himself against Pascale - although it is a matter of dispute whether this apparent crisis in their relationship is due to his renewed political vigour, now that the danger of a further criminal conviction no longer obsesses him, or to a belief that he does not need to use his 'engagement' to give himself a belated veneer of respectability, now that his association with Ruby is no longer likely to have legal consequences.

Secondly, Berlusconi's acquittal strengthens Renzi's hand against those in the ex-'official communist'-dominated PD who still show some vestiges of independence of judgement in relation to the constitution, the alliance with Berlusconi and the drift towards more blatant neoliberal economic and social policies, etc. Renzi's appalling arrogance and intolerance of any criticism seems to have destroyed *L'Unità* - perhaps the last link between the PD and the communist tradition. Renzi is being blamed, openly or implicitly, by many on the left for the closure on July 31 of the daily paper founded by Antonio Gramsci in 1924. *L'Unità* was the organ of the Partito Comunista Italiano until 1991, when it became associated with the PCI's successor, the Partito Democratico della Sinistra (PDS), then the Democratici di Sinistra (DS) and, to a lesser extent, the PD in the years since the PCI's dissolution. Whilst *L'Unità* became nominally independent of the post-communists in 2001 and the percentage of the paper's shares owned by the PD had become minuscule, it is hard to believe that a PD secretary/prime minister could not have persuaded some wealthy sympathisers to bail the paper out had he wanted to.<sup>10</sup>

Although it would be ridiculous to claim that the paper, which was always influenced by the prevailing wind in the PD, was consistently opposed to Renzi, it did give some space to articles by his critics, just as it had done in relation to articles written by critics of earlier PDS/DS/PD leaders in recent times after it adopted a

more pluralistic stance than the one which had characterised it down to 1991. Clearly for Renzi any degree of criticism was unacceptable and his own Christian Democratic background meant that he had no sentimental attachment to any symbol of the old communist tradition.<sup>11</sup>

Berlusconi's acquittal has also meant that Renzi has lost any inclination to negotiate over constitutional reform with any political force apart from Forza Italia and, to some extent, his junior coalition partners in Alfano's NCD. The on-off discussions that Renzi held with Beppe Grillo's Movimento Cinque Stelle (Five Star Movement - M5S) have clearly come to an abrupt halt. Whilst Grillo himself had never been very keen on any move away from M5S's original intransigent attitude towards the PD - an intransigence which wrecked the initial attempt by PD leader Pierluigi Bersani to form a minority government reliant on M5S external support in March-April 2013 - Grillo's close advisor, Gianroberto Casaleggio, seemed to see some merit in negotiation and the 28-year-old M5S deputy speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, Luigi Di Maio, appeared genuinely enthusiastic, perhaps because it boosted his standing *vis-à-vis* both the older leaders of M5S. Whilst any compromise would have been difficult and Grillo's attitude was, to say the least, always ambivalent, Berlusconi's acquittal meant that Renzi lost any desire to placate M5S, which then took the lead in the doomed attempt to obstruct his constitutional reform in the Senate in late July.

## Left crisis

The acquittal also seems to have been at the root of Renzi's increased hostility towards Nichi Vendola's Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà (SEL - Left Ecology and Freedom), although relations between the PD and SEL had deteriorated since February 2013, when they had formed an electoral coalition enabling SEL to gain parliamentary representation for the first time.

SEL's last congress had pushed Vendola leftwards and made it impossible for him not to participate in the radical left electoral cartel for the May 2014 European elections, *L'Altra Europa con Tsipras* ('Another Europe with Tsipras', named after Alexis Tsipras, the leader of the Greek Coalition of the Radical Left, Syriza). The success of the 'Lista Tsipras' in narrowly scraping through the 4% threshold and getting three MEPs elected gave the project some continuing credibility, which earlier electoral projects of a broadly similar nature - Sinistra Arcobaleno in 2008 and Rivoluzione Civile in 2013 - had been denied by their failure to cross electoral thresholds. But SEL itself did not get an MEP and this was the last straw for its right wing, which never approved of the decision to participate in the Lista Tsipras anyway. Within a few weeks about a third of SEL's deputies defected, a couple going directly to the PD, while the remainder, led by Gennaro Migliore, formed what looks like a temporary group of fellow travellers that will soon dissolve itself into the PD in any case.<sup>12</sup>

Faced with what appeared to be a hostile takeover bid by the PD, Vendola's line of working with the PD at local and regional level and refusing to indicate whether SEL's commitment to the Lista Tsipras had any significance in terms of national, as opposed to European, elections started to unravel. By tabling 7,000 amendments to Renzi's constitutional

# What we fight for

reform bill as part of a deliberate filibustering campaign, Vendola had put SEL on a collision course with the PD. It is quite likely that this was conceived as a negotiating tactic, to make the maximum use of SEL's seven senators to force concessions from the PD in the upper house, where the PD is relatively weaker than in the Chamber of Deputies. Whilst SEL was genuinely worried by the drift of Renzi's constitutional proposals, the party may have been more concerned by the effects of the Italicum, Renzi's new electoral law, with its thresholds deliberately designed to exclude smaller parties.

Regardless of SEL's motivation, in the difficult passage of the constitutional reform bill through the Senate, during which the PD responded to the opposition filibustering by pushing the speaker to use a guillotine on discussions as well as a hitherto obscure device known as the 'kangaroo', through which the defeat of one amendment automatically led to the defeat of dozens of others with very similar wording, SEL, not M5S, became Renzi's *bête noire* in the last week of July. Renzi, probably deliberately, attributed to SEL some of the more extreme verbal attacks on his constitutional proposals originating with M5S and told Vendola's party that he would not be blackmailed into any concessions to them and would not in future make any alliance with SEL for local or regional elections.

If Renzi continues to pursue this line (which does not seem to be going down well with PD regional representatives in Puglia, Calabria or Emilia Romagna), and dismisses the potential danger of handing key regions or municipalities over to the right (or possibly M5S) through divisions in the 'centre-left', SEL may be pushed back to something resembling its old position before the Rifondazione split of 2008-09 and the Lista Tsipras might actually become the nucleus of an Italian party approximating to Syriza in Greece. By early August SEL was pursuing more 'moderate' parliamentary tactics, which made it possible to get the constitutional reform bill through the Senate by Renzi's August 8 deadline<sup>13</sup> and there were hints that some concessions on the thresholds in the Italicum might be forthcoming.

## Anti-democratic

Regardless of any possible minor tweaks to conciliate SEL, the NCD or the Lega Nord,<sup>14</sup> the overall drift of the constitutional and electoral reform package is away from the parliamentary republic created by the 1948 constitution towards a set-up which gives much more power to the prime minister. This in effect includes the ability to choose the president of the republic, since the combination of the thresholds and majority premium<sup>15</sup> for the lower chamber and the much reduced size and nominated nature of the upper chamber<sup>16</sup> means that the electoral college that chooses the president will be far smaller and more homogenous. It would also mean that appointments to the Consulta (constitutional court) and supreme council of the magistracy would be much more strongly determined by the parliamentary majority elected on a list system that entrenched the victorious party leader's power of patronage.

It is worth pointing out that all this is being pushed through by the present parliament elected under a system (the Porcellum or 'Pig Law') that was ruled unconstitutional by the current Consulta in January 2014; whilst it may have been reasonable to allow this body to carry on with the ordinary business of administration until the next general election, it seems outrageous to let it usurp the function of a constituent assembly. Indeed, even if the current parliament had been elected under a more acceptable

system, it would have had no mandate for a massive constitutional 'reform' that was not put before the electorate in February 2013.

The existing constitution was drawn up by a constituent assembly elected on a very pure proportional representation system with virtually no threshold and containing many intellectuals and constitutional lawyers over a period of more than a year - not something pushed through in a couple of weeks without proper discussion and with numerous abuses of standard parliamentary procedures by a prime minister who, like some 19th century American 'know nothing' populist, makes no secret of his total contempt for "professoroni", as he dubs those constitutional experts who have criticised his back-of-an-envelope approach.<sup>17</sup>

Whilst Grillo's constant inflammatory rhetoric and tendency to 'cry wolf' at every moment since February 2013 means that much of the M5S critique of the changes is not taken seriously by most of the electorate, it is in fact true that the new constitution in large measure corresponds to the authoritarian 'Plan for National Rebirth' drawn up by Licio Gelli and the P2 Masonic Lodge about 30 years ago - and we should never forget that Berlusconi, despite his usual ludicrous denials, was a paid-up member of P2 ●

## Notes

1. In Italian politics the combination of the two offices of secretary (leader) of the dominant governing party and prime minister is by no means as automatic as in British politics, so Renzi's dual role gives him more power than previous centre-left premiers.
2. The constitution also verbally entrenches 'labour' (lavoro) as the foundation of the republic, a formulation which has always grated with the more hard-line elements amongst Italy's bourgeois elites. Whilst Renzi doubtless regards this phrase as an anachronistic relic of the influence of the defunct Partito Comunista Italiano, he seems to have no immediate plans to remove this phraseology, whose practical significance has long been minimal.
3. This is a reference to the location of the PD's national headquarters in Rome, not to any connection with Jesus of Nazareth or any of his followers.
4. Renzi has had three subsequent meetings with Berlusconi, all at Palazzo Chigi, the prime ministerial residence, which indicates that the Patto remains a central part of Renzi's political strategy.

5. This daily paper used to be close to Antonio Di Pietro's Italia dei Valori and could now be seen as offering rather critical support to Beppe Grillo's Movimento Cinque Stelle.
6. The hatred is because Prodi clearly beat him in two general elections -1996 and 2006 - a feat which no other centre-left leader ever managed. The fear is because Prodi would make no deals with him and is likely to support laws on the conflict of interests, media monopolies and so forth.
7. The former International Monetary Fund official put in charge of Renzi's "Spending Review" (another Anglicising affectation on Renzi's part, although his own references to it as "la Spending") demonstrate his total lack of linguistic competence) resigned in disgust at the end of July, claiming that the government's figures did not add up - money saved on some items was now simultaneously reallocated to two or more new purposes. Despite Renzi's rhetorical grandstanding on the European stage, it is quite obvious that Angela Merkel and her allies are unwilling to grant Italy or any other southern European country greater flexibility in balancing the national budget and European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi has recently emphasised that Italy is proceeding too slowly with the required "reforms", so Italy's autumn budget is likely to be much tougher than any politician in search of easy popularity would have wanted.
8. Although general unemployment has shrunk slightly, youth unemployment is still rising. The general picture is one of national decline. Italy's GNP has now returned to its 2000 level. The country is in its third recession since the international financial crisis of 2007-08. The most dramatic collapse in GNP occurred in 2008-09, but from mid-2011 Italy has been in recession almost continuously, with the exception of a quarter of very minimal (0.1%) growth in the last three months of 2013.
9. Fiat has completed its merger with Chrysler and intends to move its headquarters out of Italy, registering itself in London for tax purposes - showing predictable ingratitude towards an Italian state which has subsidised it for decades. Italy's national airline, Al Italia, is being taken over by the Abu Dhabi-based Etihad on very unfavourable terms for the Italian shareholders, not least the Italian Post Office.
10. The real name of the woman at the centre of this case is Karima El Mahroug, but she has become internationally famous under her stage name of Ruby Rubacuore (Ruby, the Heartstealer). She was 17 years old at the time of the events that led to the trials.
11. Ruby is actually of Moroccan origin, which self-evidently makes a mockery of this claim.
12. Renzi, like his hero, Tony Blair, seems to have a knack of attracting large donations from wealthy individuals, generally for his own campaigns, such as his PD leadership contests of 2012 and 2013.
13. Even Blair's previous Italian fan, the PD's founding leader, Walter Veltroni (who had started his political career in the PCI, joining the party at the age of 15, and later edited *L'Unità* from 1992 until 1996) had some vestigial attachment to the old party paper.
14. Migliore may have hoped that some anti-Renzi dissidents on the PD's left might join a group that was halfway between the PD and SEL, but this

appears the less likely scenario.

13. The opposition seemed to lose heart during the second week of discussions once the first two articles of the law - getting rid of elections and reducing the size of the senate - had been passed. Moreover, the different groups did not coordinate their tactics or stick to any consistent strategy - temporary walkouts alternated with noisy, disruptive heckling or in the case of M5S the wearing of gags. However, it is difficult to gauge whether there was any more effective method of filibustering once the speaker - a PD member, who originally had personal doubts about the changes - capitulated to pressure from his own party leadership and almost always interpreted the rules in a manner that favoured Renzi, even switching off the microphones in mid-sentence or refusing to allow senators to speak to their own amendments.
14. The Lega's main objection to the changes concerns the return to a much more centralised system of government, which markedly reduces the powers in the hands of the regions and goes directly contrary to the increased devolution they have always sought. Renzi's bill also abolishes provinces, the geographical and administrative units that stood between municipalities and regions, so its whole drift is towards centralisation.
15. According to *Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica* (August 7), at a meeting between Renzi and Berlusconi on August 6 it was agreed that the threshold for the majority premium would be raised from the 37% in the original version of the Italicum to 40%, with a run-off ballot between the two leading forces if no grouping reached this level. An interview in *La Repubblica* (August 8), with Berlusconi's close associate, Denis Verdini, who was present at the meeting, seemed to deny this agreement on the premium, but, given that Verdini, a long standing Florentine acquaintance of Renzi, is currently facing a multiplicity of charges about the collapse into bankruptcy of a bank of which he was the managing director, it would be foolish to rely on his word. No agreement was reached on raising thresholds, something favoured by all minor parties from NCD to SEL, and this will be discussed again at a further Renzi-Berlusconi meeting in September.
16. Under the proposed legislation, the new version of the Senate will have 100 members - 95 nominated by the regional councillors and five by the president of the republic. This is being demagogically presented as a cost-cutting measure - the nominated mayors and regional councillors will receive no parliamentary salary, since they are already paid for their regional or municipal roles. Critics pointed out that part-time senators would be less of a check on the executive than full-time ones, as well as pointing out that most of the major political corruption scandals of the last few years - in Lazio, Lombardy and the Veneto - have involved regional councillors. Given that the new senators, like their elected predecessors, would have parliamentary immunity, there was a danger that the most corrupt characters in danger of prosecution would be nominated to the senate by corrupt colleagues aiming to protect clientelistic networks.
17. Some leading academic and legal constitutional experts have signed a petition drafted by the editors of *Il Fatto Quotidiano* against Renzi's constitutional changes.

# Summer Offensive Final heave

Our annual week-long school, Communist University, looms large on the horizon, with the opening sessions of this year's event scheduled for the afternoon of Saturday August 16 (see details on p7).

CU is an event that takes a large amount of organising for a small group. Everything from the procurement of 'refreshments' to lubricate the evening discussions after the formal sessions; keeping the CU 'masses' fed and watered during the day itself; haggling with the venue's management for that extra bit of space in the garden to pitch our lunchtime gazebo; to the worries over disabled access and how to keep children and toddlers happy and quiet, while their parents put the world to rights - the party comrades directly responsible for this event have a lot of boxes to tick before we even reach the starting line.

One perennial problem, of course, is money. And that is really how the Summer Offensive fits together with Communist University. Like any serious political organisation, the Communist Party lives well beyond its means for most of the year. So when it comes along, the SO provides a massive boost to our shoe-string annual budget and just about moves us back into the black - or at least a shade of grey, so to

speak. That's a fact of life for our organisation and very important for us - but it's not really that uplifting a vision for the comrades who take part in this financial campaign.

However, CU itself is a far more inspiring product of our comrades' hard work and sacrifice. As SO money comes in, it goes out again to fund the venue (which we normally have to pay for well in advance), speakers' expenses, publicity, subsidies to low/unwaged participants, the accommodation for residential participants (which again is normally demanded in full, in advance) and the million and one incidentals that derail our plans and drain our coffers.

That said, if you take a look at the timetable - not to mention the range and quality of the speakers - you will see the central importance to the movement of the subjects addressed. The sessions are approached in a very serious way, with ample time to explore subjects and chairs briefed to actually *prioritise* audience contributions from comrades with serious differences/minority viewpoints. We are sure you'll agree it's money well spent.

But, returning to the SO, a big boost to the campaign came this week from the work of comrades who attended the big August 9 Gaza demonstration in London. On a

warm day, with a receptive and lively audience, our comrades raised over £1,300 in book, paper and badge sales - "hard work, but inspiring", as one comrade characterised the action.

Notable donations this week include a tremendous £600 from MM, plus £44 for the comrade's *Weekly Worker* sales over the past period. Then there was EW, who sent a cheque for £100 to the *Weekly Worker*, which, he says, offers a "consistently high standard of Marxist analysis". There was another £100 from PG, an ex-party member who remains sympathetic to our work, while DC also sent us the proverbial ton. Many thanks to these and other comrades, who have added a hefty £2,652 to our running total this week, taking us to a chipper £17,593. That leaves us pretty well placed, with a final heave, to achieve our £30k target by August 26, the last day of Communist University.

And, in particular, how about more of the comrades out there who read us online (7,249 hits last week) taking a leaf out of the book of the comrades mentioned above and adding some of their financial weight to that last shove? ●

Mark Fischer

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# weekly worker

## Russian separatists on the defensive

### Dynamic towards full-scale confrontation

Kiev's besieging of cities in eastern Ukraine has ominous parallels, says Eddie Ford

Gaza and Iraq may have been dominating the headlines, but the situation in Ukraine remains highly dangerous - if anything, the crisis appears to be escalating. In what has been dubbed the Donbass war, forces loyal to Kiev have in recent months recaptured a string of cities across eastern Ukraine - including Slavyansk on July 5 - and regained a 121-kilometre stretch of the border with Russia.

Mounting a grim war of attrition, Kiev is now besieging Luhansk and Donetsk - which both declared on June 24 that they had formally merged into the Federal State of Novorossiia (New Russia) as part of the "union of people's republics". More than 2,000 people have been killed in the fighting and both cities are now completely surrounded by Kievian forces. Extreme deprivation and even starvation beckons for the inhabitants.

The situation in Luhansk is particularly desperate. Almost 55,000 households have no electricity and 5,000 have no water. Now Horlivka, a city of some 250,000 people, is suffering the same fate. The Kiev government's armed forces have moved artillery and at least two dozen tanks to a high point on the hills, from where they fire on the city below. Horlivka city council reported on July 28 that 17 civilians, including three children, have so far been killed. Kiev has ludicrously claimed that the separatists fired upon residential areas themselves in order to "discredit" the Kievian army.

One important thing to realise with regards to the Kiev military is that it consist of two parts: the old army, essentially inherited from the Soviet Union, and the 'unofficial' or irregular battalions drawn from the likes of Right Sector - overtly fascist forces with a virulently anti-Russian agenda that takes inspiration from Nazi collaborators. Possibly unlike elements of the official Ukrainian army, these battalions (that loosely comprise the National Guard) will have absolutely no hesitation in raining down artillery fire upon rebellious eastern cities - as we are witnessing now. Inevitably, this will result in massive civilian casualties similar to Gaza. Apart from being ideologically motivated, the fascist brigades are actually better paid than soldiers in the regular army - doubtlessly helping to boost morale.

Another hugely important factor is that Kiev's military has received fairly generous western backing of one sort or another - and you are talking far more than night vision goggles or smart phones. For example, satellite-assisted technology that enables real-time tracking and monitoring of opposing forces.

Anyhow, as things stand now, 30,000 regular Kievian troops plus the irregulars are opposed by 10,000 relatively disciplined separatist fighters - no cake walk. The army took several weeks to surround and regain Slavyansk, losing several planes, helicopters and top generals in the process.

#### Starve them?

The current situation in Donbass of horrendously prolonged sieges can only remind you of World War II, and



Will they fight?

you can be certain that the Russian population - both in eastern Ukraine and in Russia itself - will know all about that. But fighting a deeply embedded opposition in a modern city is always an army's nightmare scenario. In 2003 the Americans were so daunted by the task of taking Baghdad that they studied how the Russians stormed Grozny.

So starve them out instead? If so, what about the Kremlin - is it supposed to do nothing whilst the populations of Luhansk or Donetsk die a slow death? Obviously, Russian president Vladimir Putin will be forced to act by the sheer weight of Russian public opinion and also by his general strategic opposition to creeping western expansion in what he regards as his backyard - ie, those former Soviet republics on Russia's western and southern borders (the 'near abroad').

In fact, it appears that Putin has acted. On the morning of August 12 a large convoy of 280 Russian trucks departed for eastern Ukraine and was expected to arrive within two days. The Russian foreign ministry said that after "crossing the border" the convoy would "proceed under the auspices" of the International Committee of the Red Cross. According to Russian state television - admittedly not always the most reliable source of information - the trucks contain 2,000 tonnes of aid, including grain, sugar, medicine, sleeping bags and power generators.

Kiev and its western backers reacted

with fury. Government spokespeople declared that Kiev would block the "unauthorised" convoy at the border. It spouted nonsense - all dutifully repeated, of course, by the likes of the BBC - about it being a "pretext" for Russian invasion: presumably the trucks are really stuffed full of AK-47s, RPGs and SAMs. Western governments loudly protested, maybe just a bit too much, that Moscow's "unauthorised" humanitarian intervention would "violate international law" - which tells you all you need to know about international law and who gets to write the rules. The grounds for this 'violation', apparently, is that on August 11 an international agreement was reached whereby all aid to the region would be approved and distributed by the ICRC. Andriy Lysenko, a spokesperson for Kiev's National Security and Defence Council, claimed the Russian aid consignment had not been certified by the Red Cross and therefore was "illegal". Russia, on the other hand, said a deal had been "agreed" with the Kievian side and that representatives from the ICRC, and also the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, would accompany the convoy. As for the Red Cross's version of events - at least on August 13 - though it was not yet formally involved in the Russian mission, it had agreed "in principle" to the operation, so long as it received "clarification" on some issues and "security guarantees" from all sides.

But, ratcheting up the tensions regardless, Nato's secretary general, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, stated that there was a "high probability" of Russian attack "under the guise of a humanitarian operation" - surely this was a descent into cold war-style paranoia. On August 12, French president Francois Hollande told Putin in a phone call that he had "grave concerns" about Russia's ongoing "unilateral" mission in Ukraine. Barack Obama and Angela Merkel issued a joint statement saying that Russia would face "additional consequences" if it went ahead with its convoy without explicit permission from the Kiev government.

What does the west want Kiev to do - block the convoy? Maybe, seeing how Arsen Avakov, Kiev's minister of internal affairs, posted a Facebook message on August 13 saying that "no Putin 'humanitarian convoy' will be allowed across the territory of Kharkiv, describing it as a "provocation by a cynical aggressor". Western hypocrisy is astounding. It is now intervening militarily in northern Iraq to supposedly prevent the 'genocide' of Yazidis, Christian and other minorities trapped on the mountains. But if they spoke Russian they would probably be allowed to starve - if not get fired upon by US fighter jets.

#### Miscalculation

We now have the horrific possibility that all sides in the Ukrainian

conflict could drift into a major conflagration in a manner not entirely unlike what happened in 1914 - almost sleepwalking into war. Even though it had been obvious to any intelligent person since at least the 1880s that a major European war was on the horizon, at the beginning of 1914 war did not seem imminent or even that likely. Yet one event led to another, as tends to happen, and the slaughter began.

Basically the US, Nato and the EU have been attempting to extend their sphere of influence far to the east. The EuroMaidan protest served wonderfully here and saw the removal of the elected president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich. Not surprisingly, however, the Kremlin responded by seizing Crimea and offering various forms of assistance to Russian separatist forces.

On June 27 the new president, Petro Poroshenko, signed a free trade agreement with European leaders, slashing import tariffs with the EU and committing the country to a sweeping programme of economic 'reforms'. Sergei Glazyev, one of Putin's top advisors, has remarked that the agreement will be "economic suicide" for Ukraine - certainly when it comes to eastern Ukraine he is right. Opening up the country to western competition will decimate the Soviet-era heavy industries of the Russian-speaking east, creating mass unemployment almost at a stroke. At the moment Russia is Ukraine's single largest export market - accounting for nearly a quarter of the country's international trade. Predictably, Moscow is taking steps to punish Kiev for its deal with the EU. Various items have been deemed "unsafe" and blocked from the Russian market, like chocolate, cheese and potatoes, for instance - and Moscow has also drastically raised the price Ukraine pays it for natural gas.

Clearly there is a danger of sleepwalking towards a major confrontation. John Kerry, the US secretary of state, has declared that everything will be considered except boots on the ground. Yet this is not exactly reassuring. In reality, once you start sending in 'advisers', you are more and more committed to the victory of your client, and, of course, the other side has a tendency to hit back, sometimes in unexpected ways - which in turn will compel the US administration to respond in some shape or form. And frighteningly, unlike 1914, we are, of course, dealing with nuclear-armed powers ●

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