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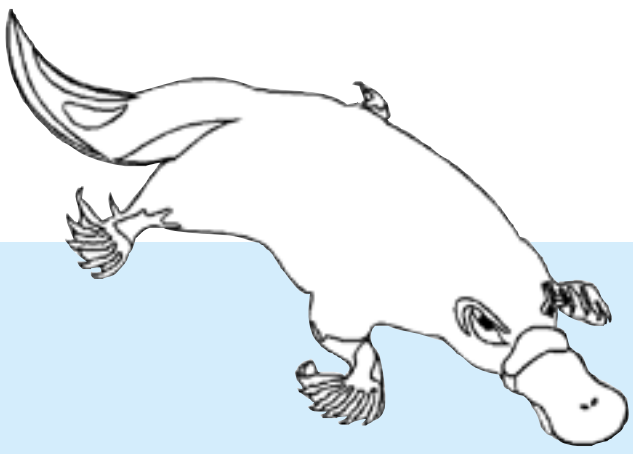

No need for a party? Mike Macnair reports from the US Platypus convention

- Labour makes gains
- Non-Labour left
- Lib Dem slump
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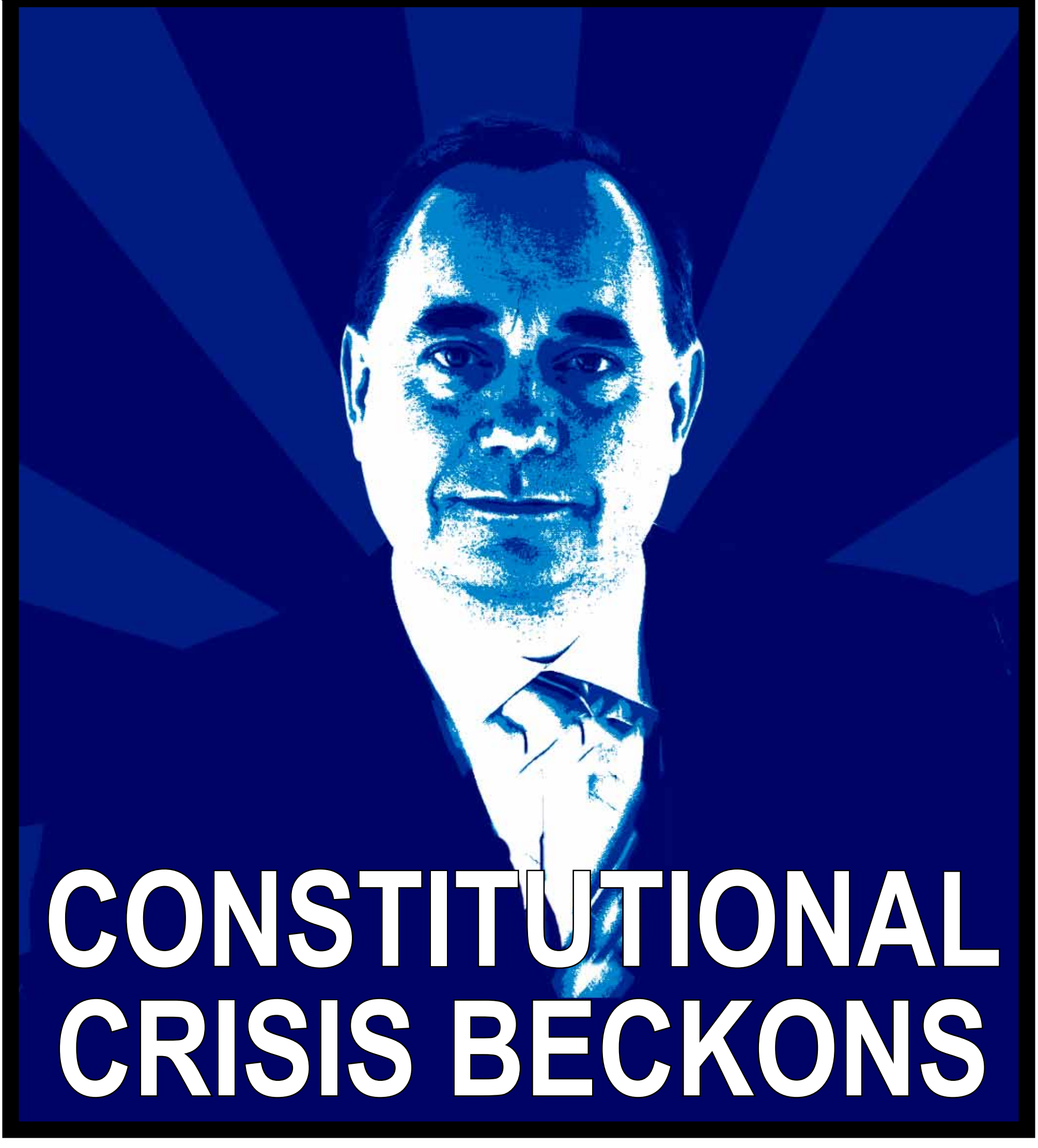


CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS BECKONS

US LEFT

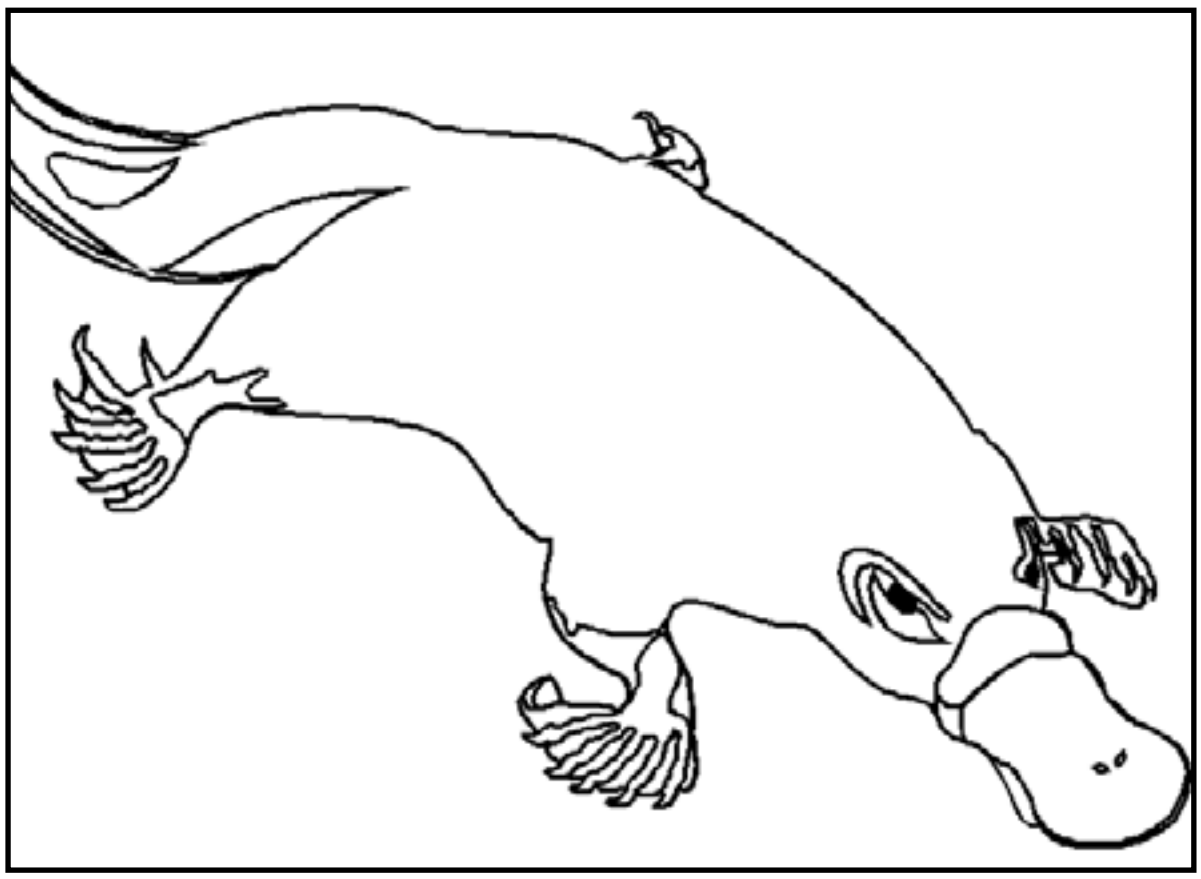
No need for party?

The US Platypus grouping does not have a political line because there is 'no possibility of revolutionary action'. **Mike Macnair** reports on its convention

I attended the third annual Platypus International Convention in Chicago over the weekend April 29-May 1. The Platypus Affiliated Society is a, mainly student, left group of an odd sort (as will appear further below). Its basic slogan is: 'The left is dead; long live the left'. Starting very small, it has recently expanded rapidly on US campuses and added chapters in Toronto and Frankfurt. Something over 50 people attended the convention.

The fact of Platypus's rapid growth on the US campuses, though still as yet to a fairly small size, tells us that in some way it occupies a gap on the US left, and also tells us something (limited) about the available terms of debate. The discussions raised some interesting issues (though I am not sure how productive most of them were). It is this that makes it worth reporting the convention. This article will be an only slightly critical report of the convention; a second will offer a critique of Platypus's project.

I was invited to give a workshop on the CPGB's perspectives, and to participate in the Saturday evening plenary on 'The legacy of Trotskyism'. I also attended some of the panel discussions and the opening and closing plenaries, on 'The politics of critical theory' and 'What is the Platypus critique?'



Strange combination

Critical theory

I got little from the opening plenary on 'The politics of critical theory' (on the Frankfurt School). The speakers were: Chris Cutrone of Platypus and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago; the philosopher of technology and student of Herbert Marcuse, Andrew Feenberg of Simon Fraser University; Richard Westerman of the University of Chicago; and Nicholas Brown of the University of Illinois Chicago, as respondent to the three papers.

The plenary took as its starting point the publication by *New Left Review* in 2010 of translated excerpts from a set of notes by Greta Adorno of a series of conversations in 1956 between Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer with a view to producing a modern redraft of the *Communist manifesto*. This project got nowhere, and (as Andrew Feenberg pointed out) the Adorno-Horkheimer conversations are frequently absurd.

Feenberg, who is a 'child of 68', remarked also on the extent to which, in the conversations, Adorno and Horkheimer displayed fear of falling into Marcuse's positions: these, he argued, had more connection to the real emancipatory possibilities of the post-war world than Adorno and Horkheimer's theoreticisms.

Chris Cutrone has posted his paper, 'Adorno's Leninism', on his provocatively (or perhaps merely pretentiously) titled blog *The Last Marxist*.[1] It argues that the project of the Frankfurt School derived from the interventions of György Lukács (*History and class consciousness*) and Karl Korsch (*Marxism and philosophy*) in the 1920s, and these in turn from the 'crisis of Marxism' represented by the revisionist debate in the German Social Democratic Party in the 1890s and 1900s and the betrayal of August 1914, and the idea of Leninism as representing a philosophical alternative. So far, so John Rees or David Renton.[2] Adorno, he argued, continued down to his death committed to a version of these ideas.

After the papers had been presented and Nicholas Brown had responded, there was a brief and not particularly controversial question and answer session.

Debating politics

Saturday morning saw two 50-minute sessions of parallel workshops under the title, 'Debating politics on the left today: differing perspectives'. In the first hour the choice was between the Maoist Revolutionary Communist Party of the USA (leader since 1975: Bob Avakian) and the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). I went to the latter.

DSA claims to be the largest left group in the US with around 10,000 members, though the paid circulation of their paper is lower, at around 5,700 (and the Communist Party USA claimed, as of 2002, 20,000 members). The presentation made clear that the group essentially consists of activists in the left of the Democratic Party engaged in a range of campaigns for liberal good causes, plus some support for trade unionists in dispute. Its image of an alternative society is Sweden or Finland. It is committed to popular-frontist 'coalitions' and has in its constitution rejected any electoral intervention. It is, in short, not even Lib-Lab: the late 19th century Lib-Labs at least agitated for working class representation within the Liberal Party.

In the second hour the choice was between CPGB and the Marxist-Humanists US (one of the splinters from the News and Letters Collective founded by Raya Dunayevskaya). I presented the CPGB workshop. I gave a very brief capsule history of the *Leninist* and of the CPGB since 1991 and explained the nature of our orientation to 'reforging a Communist Party' through unification of the Marxists as Marxists, and on democratic centralism as an alternative to bureaucratic centralism.

The question-and-answer session which followed was lively, and I was pressed by Platypusers with the ideas that the divisions among the left groups were, in fact, principled ones which would prohibit any unity; and that programme was less fundamental than understanding history or the movement of the class struggle. I think I was able in the short time available to answer these points reasonably clearly: *some* divisions on the left do have a principled basis, but many do not, and in any case the divisions in the early Comintern were as wide or wider; a clear, short formal party programme is essential to party democracy.

A representative of the International Bolshevik Tendency argued that our view of democratic centralism amounted to going back on the fundamental gain represented by the 1903 split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks: I pointed out that the Spartacist (and other far-left) dogmas around this split actually originated with Zinoviev's *History of the Bolshevik Party* as a factional instrument against Trotsky and were subsequently promoted as part of the Stalin school of falsification. This argument shocked him.

Panels

In the afternoon there were three sets of parallel panel sessions under the general title, 'Lessons from the history of Marxism', with (in theory) 15 minutes break between them.

In the first period the choice was between 'Marxism and the bourgeois revolutions' and 'Marxism and sexual liberation'. I have interests in both areas, but chose to go to the sexual liberation panel. It was evident from the panel blurb for 'Marxism and the bourgeois revolutions' that Platypus shares the common 'new left' error of imagining that bourgeois thought begins with the 18th century enlightenment, and that the bourgeois revolutions began with the French.[3]

It might be thought that Jonathan Israel's massive excavation of the links of this period with prior Dutch and English politics, religion and thinkers, in *Radical enlightenment* (2001) and *Enlightenment contested* (2006), would have disturbed this approach and led to a return to Marx's understanding of a much more prolonged historical process of transition to capitalism, including the first experiments in the Italian city-states and the Dutch and English revolutions (visible especially in the second half of *Capital* Vol 1).

But beginning with the French Revolution and late-enlightenment ideas is, in fact, a new left dogma. It is linked to the idea that the 'Hegelian' logic of the first part of volume 1 of Marx's *Capital* can be read without reference to the broader claims of historical materialism about the history before fully developed capitalism. This approach is foundational to Lukács, Korsch and the Frankfurt school, who play an important role in Platypus's thought.

Sexual liberation

The panel on 'Marxism and sexual liberation' featured four interesting papers. Pablo Ben critiqued the Reich/Marcuse conception that 'sexual liberation' would undermine the capitalist order. This idea informed the early gay men's movement, and later the arguments of Pat Califia and others in the lesbian sadomasochism movement and its more general 'sex-positive' offshoots. The critique combined the ideas of Adorno in relation to the regulative power of capitalist economic relations over all aspects of social life with the point - well understood by historians of the issue since the 1970s - that 'sexuality' as such (ie, the link of sexual choices to personal 'identities') emerges under capitalism. This was a well argued and provocative paper. But I am not yet convinced that the detail of the theoretical approach is superior to that which Jamie Gough and I argued in the mistitled *Gay liberation in the 80s* (1985).

Greg Gabrellas argued for an interpretation of Foucault as a critic of Reich starting out from French Maoism. This was again a useful paper, though with two missing elements. He did not flag up the extent to which Foucault's historical claims about madness and the penitentiary, as well as about the history of sexuality, have been falsified by historians. And, though he identified Foucault's tendency to marginalise class politics, he saw this as merely a product of the defeat of the left, rather than as an active intervention in favour of popular frontism. Hence he missed the extent to which the Anglo-American left academic and gay/lesbian movement *reception* of Foucault was closely tied to the defence of extreme forms of popular frontism by authors directly or indirectly linked to *Marxism Today*, for whom it was an instrument against the 'class-reductionist' ideas of Trotskyists.

Ashley Weger deployed the 'typical Platypus' combination of Adorno with elements of 1970s Spartacism to polemicise against the taboo/witch-hunt in relation to intergenerational sex, which she argued flowed from a fetishism of the 'innocence' of childhood and a refusal to recognise the sexual desires of youth. This paper was competently done and valuably provocative to current orthodoxies.

It nonetheless did not get as far as the British debate of the 1970s-80s on the same issue. This recognised that the other side of the coin (adult aspirations to intergenerational sex) *also* flows from fetishisms, of innocence and of powerlessness; and that statistically very much the larger part of intergenerational sex is father-daughter incest, which exploits family power relations for what is in substance *non-consensual* activity. Since an immediate transition to the 'higher stage' of communism is not to be expected, a revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state order will not result in the immediate disappearance of this problem. Accordingly any *immediate* (or 'transitional') programme point on the issue must take a form like that in the CPGB's *Draft programme*: "Abolish age-of-consent laws. We recognise the right of individuals to enter into the sexual relations they choose, provided this does not conflict with the rights of others. Alternative legislation to protect children from sexual abuse."

Jamie Keesling's paper on the sexual emancipation of women was the weakest of the four papers, moving from Juliet Mitchell to the modern debate among feminists about 'sexy dressing', to philosopher Harriet Baber's 1987 article, 'How bad is rape?' (which argues that compulsion to do routine labour is a more serious harm to the victim),[4] to 1970s radical feminism (whose arguments she did not grasp or attack in depth), to Moishe Postone's 2006, broadly Eustonite, 'History and helplessness',[5] to Adorno. While various points were interesting, this did not add up to a coherent whole.

Four papers in 90 minutes, followed by brief comments from each speaker on the other papers, led to a very compressed Q&A session. Chris Cutrone asked for and got brief responses from the speakers to a general question about the relations between Marxism and liberal political theory, Pablo Ben's being the most substantial response. A woman of British origin asked about the relation of issues of sexuality to ideas of gender and the division between public and private spheres (again an aspect of the debates of the 1970s-80s) and did not get a satisfactory response.

I have gone into this panel at length because it was intellectually one of the strongest in the convention. I would nonetheless assess that the speakers were operating at a lower *theoretical* level than that of the debates of the left in the British feminist and lesbian/gay movements in the 1970s-80s.

There are two reasons why that should be the case. The first is that in our 1970s-80s debates there was a real link between theoretical arguments and positive practical politics. Practical political choices force out the logical implications of theoretical positions in a way that theoretical critique on its own does not. The second is that the sub-Frankfurt School historical schema of the 'defeat of the left' stretching back to the 'crisis of Marxism' in the 1900s has a tendency to blind its adherents to the details of concrete history. By doing so, it permits schematic theory, which moves from arbitrarily chosen elements of the concrete to the abstract, but can never return to work up the concrete as a combination of abstractions.

Maoism and lefts

The second session offered a choice between a panel on 'Badiou and post-Maoism: Marxism and communism today' and one on 'Art, culture and politics: Marxist approaches', which offered consideration of the theories of art of Trotsky, Adorno and Walter Benjamin. I went to the panel on Alain Badiou, addressed to his *The communist hypothesis* (2010) and a debate which had already developed online between Chris Cutrone of Platypus and the Maoist or post-Maoist 'Kasama project'.[6] The panel was Chris Cutrone, Mike Ely and Joseph Ramsey of Kasama, and John Steele of Khukuri, all of whom defended Badiou; Mike Ely's paper is available on Kasama, John Steele's on Khukuri, and Cutrone's on his blog.[7]

The arguments of Badiou's defenders on this panel are intellectually and politically uninteresting. They seem to be merely a new version of the tendency of the ex-Maoist, ex-Eurocommunist, and academic left to episodic fashions, like the fashion for Roy Bhaskar's 'critical realism' which ran for some years in the 1990s.

Cutrone's argument judges, I think correctly, that Badiou's 'communism' is directly anti-Marxist.[8] Cutrone therefore equally correctly appeals to the Second International and its left as the high point of the movement against capitalism to date: it was this movement that *made possible* 1917. But he tends not to interpret the strength of the late 19th century movement in terms of Marx's and Engels' idea of capitalism creating its own gravedigger in the proletariat, and hence the key to the movement being the political self-organisation of the working class.

Instead, he poses the need for an emancipatory movement to start from the conquests of capitalism - which is, indeed, central to Marxism - in terms of the conquests of *liberalism*. The political logic of this intellectual move is the path followed by the Schachtmanites, by Adorno and Horkheimer, and more recently by the British Revolutionary Communist Party/*Spiked* and the Eustonites, towards the political right.

The final panel session offered a choice between 'Marxism and political philosophy' with the same late-enlightenment focus as the 'bourgeois revolutions' panel, here on 'The classical figures of bourgeois political thought: Rousseau, Kant, Hegel'; and 'The Marxism of the Second International radicals'. I attended the latter, featuring papers by Chris Cutrone, Greg Gabrellas, Ian Morrison and Marco Torres.

I may have missed something by arriving late, but I did not get much out of this panel beyond the stale new left orthodoxy about the sterility of the SPD majority which is, as I have already indicated, more clearly defended by British authors from the Cliffite tradition like Rees and Renton.

In Chris Cutrone's paper I was struck by three specific features. The first is that he claimed that Marx and Engels were suspicious of political parties.[9] This is plain nonsense and I have provided the evidence to the contrary in the second of my articles on electoral tactics: Marx and Engels argued from the 1840s to the 1890s in *support* of the working class forming itself into a political party.[10]

The second, and related, feature is the claim that political parties were a new phenomenon in the late 19th century and suspect to earlier 'classical liberals'. The latter part of this claim is true, but the former is simply false: if the Dutch Regent oligarchy did without formal parties, Whigs and Tories in Britain appeared in 1679-81, reappeared promptly in 1688-89, and continued to dominate political life until the Whigs were replaced by the Liberals in the mid-19th century. What was new in the late 19th century and with the SPD was *highly organised, mass-membership* political parties with democratic structures. This was a product of the political intervention of the proletariat as such and is reflected in the fact that in the US, where the proletariat has not succeeded in breaking into high politics, the Democrats and Republicans retain looser organisational forms.

The third feature was Cutrone's reliance for analysis of the SPD on Peter Nettl's 1965 article on the SPD as a 'political model'.[11] This is, to be blunt, unambiguously a work of cold war sociology, which seeks to force the conclusion that the only real choices available in politics are between reformist coalitionism and something derived from the 'actionism' of Georges Sorel and the ultra-left.[12] Its analysis of the SPD is apolitical-Weberian.

Nettl's story reaches its climacteric with the betrayal of August 1914. But missing, accordingly, are, first, the later emergence of the USPD as a mass opposition, and, second, the fact that the working class *did in fact* use the SPD and its Austrian equivalent, the SPÖ, as organising instruments in the overthrow of the Hohenzollern and Habsburg monarchies in 1918-19. Of course, the leaderships held back to national horizons and created 'democratic republics', which were in reality bourgeois parliamentary-constitutional regimes.[13] These circumstances fit better with a *political* account of the SPD's and the wartime and post-war Kautskyites' failure to serve the interests of the working class - because of their nationalism and false political ideas on the state - than with Nettl's Weberian sociological story of political impotence through 'isolationism'.

Platypus calls on us to recover the history of the left in order to understand and get beyond its present 'death'. But in its own attempts to do so, the standard of *historical work* is sloppy.

Trotskyism

The Saturday evening plenary on 'The legacy of Trotskyism' featured labour historian Bryan Palmer, of Trent University (Ontario, Canada); Jason Wright from the International Bolshevik Tendency; myself; and Richard Rubin from Platypus. The panel description contained the claim that, "As one Platypus writer has suggested, Trotsky is as out of place in the post-World War II world as Voltaire or Rousseau would have been in the world after the French Revolution. Trotsky, unlike Trotskyism, exemplifies the classical Marxism of the early 20th century, and that tradition certainly died with him."

Bryan Palmer is a Trotskyist, and (as far as can be seen from online sources) one coming from the background of the part of the US Socialist Workers Party and its international tendency that did not break with Trotskyism in the 1980s.[14] His speech made nods in the direction of Platypus's claims, but asserted positively that the crash of 2008 showed the relevance of Marxism today; that the defeats of the 20th century are the result of Stalinism; and that the ideas of Trotsky and Trotskyism - especially the idea that the crisis of humanity reduces to the crisis of revolutionary leadership - retain all their relevance. The problem was a *trahison des clercs*, in which the intellectuals sought new alternative ideas repudiating the basics of Marxism, as with postmodernism, rather than attempt to put Trotsky's ideas into practice.

Jason Wright gave the sort of speech that could be expected: revolutionary continuity runs through the Fourth International 1938-53, the International Committee 1953-61, the Revolutionary Tendency of the US SWP and, following it, the Spartacist League, from 1961 to the 1980s; and thereafter the IBT. The CPGB, he said in passing, breaks with the tradition of the pre-war socialist movement as well as that of Bolshevism by calling for votes for bourgeois candidates. I did not get an opportunity to reply to this at the meeting, but my recent three-part series on electoral principles and tactics can serve as a reply - to the extent that it is worth replying.

I criticised the formulations proposed in the panel description. In the first place 'Trotskyism' means an organised political movement formed on the basis of definite programmatic documents - those of the first four congresses of the Comintern, of the International Left Opposition and of the 1938 founding congress of the Fourth International. The Trotskyist movement has splintered into diverse fragments, but it is on its formally adopted positions that it is to be judged and criticised.

Secondly, 'classical Marxism' is an amalgam, like the 'counterrevolutionary bloc of rights and Trotskyites'. In the sense in which it used by Platypus, it derives from the new left's, and hence the British SWP's, attempt to paste together Marx, Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky, Lukács and Gramsci, in spite of their diverse and in some respects opposed political and theoretical positions.[15] To say that "Trotsky, unlike Trotskyism, exemplifies the classical Marxism of the early 20th century, and that tradition certainly died with him" is therefore an empty claim. What is needed to understand the past of Marxist theory is to understand the political and theoretical disputes of the Comintern in the light of the political and theoretical disputes of the Second International and of the pre-1917 RSDLP.

Within this framework, in the first place the idea of separating Trotsky from post-war Trotskyism is wrong. Secondly, it is necessary, in order to progress, to critique the actual programmatic positions of the first four congresses of the Comintern and of Trotskyism, as I have attempted in *Revolutionary strategy* (2008). The most fundamental point is the rejection of bureaucratic centralism. Thirdly, the failures of the Trotskyists are not all given by some Trotskyist (or 'Pabloite') original sin: there are lessons, albeit mostly negative, to be learned from the Trotskyists' attempts to build small groups into something larger and to intervene in live politics.

Richard Rubin argued that revolutionary continuity is impossible; there is a fundamental discontinuity in politics and the main task is to understand it. Trotskyism is merely a historical relic. Trotsky insisted on the *accidental* character of the tragedy of the 20th century; but the idea of an accidental epoch is inconsistent with historical materialism. We have to be Marxists because there is no better way of thinking, but Marxism may be inadequate; the failure of Trotskyism expresses the antecedent crisis of Marxism. Both Stalinism and fascism were products of the failure of the German revolution. This 'German question' poses the question how the strongest Marxist party in the world, the SPD, could betray its own revolution. Since the objective conditions for socialism had matured, the explanation had to be the power of bourgeois ideology; both Trotsky and the Frankfurt school grappled with this problem.

The outcome of World War II represented a victory for the enlightenment, but a defeat of revolutionary possibilities. In the 1950s-60s Trotskyists as well as Maoists were prone to illusions in third-world nationalisms. The 1968 period offered a 'Dionysian moment' of 'revolution through pure ecstasy'; the Trotskyists, except the Sparts, integrated themselves in the new left and lost the character of Trotskyism as a critique of the existing left. It was this aspect of Trotskyism as honest critique and fidelity to the October revolution that had to be redeemed.

The speakers were given an opportunity to respond to each other and this was followed by slightly longer than usual Q&A discussion. Four substantial issues were posed. In the first place it seemed to be the common view of the other panellists that the divisions of the Trotskyist left were in fact principled and unavoidable splits, a view which I rejected. Secondly, a questioner asked whether the evolution of some US ex-Trotskyists towards neo-conservatism reflected something about Trotskyism; on this there seemed to be general acceptance of a point I made, in response, that such an evolution is not found in Europe, while ex-Stalinists had also gone over to the right.

The third was whether defeats for your own imperialist power make revolution more likely, as Jason Wright argued - in my view falsely, except in the case of defeat in *inter-imperialist*, or great-power, war. Pablo Ben raised from the floor the classic case of the Argentinean left's shipwreck when it supported the military regime's aggression in the 1982 South Atlantic war. Richard Rubin argued that defeatism was a moral obligation, but not one from which revolution could be expected. This, I think, underrates the issue. Even if defeatism in our own country's unjust wars cannot usually be expected either to *cause* a defeat or to bring on revolution campaigning on a defeatist stance educates as wide layers of the working class as possible in the need for political independence from the local capitalist state, and thereby *prepares the political ground* for circumstances in which revolution is on the immediate agenda.

The fourth and most general question was whether revolution *is* on the agenda and if so in what sense, and whether a party is therefore called for. Bryan Palmer's and Jason Wright's answer to these questions was emphatically yes. Chris Cutrone's (from the floor) and Richard Rubin's was that the objective conditions were present, but the subjective conditions even for a party were not present. My own response was that proletarian revolution is on the *historical* agenda; that the weakness of proletarian organisation takes it off the short-term agenda; and that if Lenin's 'the ruling class cannot go on in the old way and the masses will not" was to be placed on the *immediate* agenda the result would therefore be disastrous. But the result is precisely that the party question, and the tasks of patiently rebuilding the workers' movement, *are* on the immediate agenda.

Platypus critique

The Sunday morning plenary on 'What is the Platypus critique?', with three Platypus speakers, was in one way the oddest and in another the most symptomatic of the sessions. Spencer Leonard opened by saying that Platypus was sometimes said to have a line which combined Spartacist Trotskyism with Adorno. This was incorrect: Platypus *does not have a political line*. Rather it recognises that there is no present possibility of revolutionary political action, because of the deep-going crisis of Marxism. Its goal is therefore to bring the left to a recognition of its own failure and to address the theoretical issues. To this end it aims to 'host the conversation'.

He was followed by Laurie Rojas, speaking to her organisational work for Platypus: this again focussed on the necessity (and difficulty) of addressing the left, but also emphasised the constant return of the *necessity* of the Platypus project. The final speaker was Ben Shepard, whose speech was interspersed by readings from Samuel Beckett, with Spencer Leonard attempting to take the other part - I take it using absurdism to indicate the present left's absurdity; I am sorry to say that I found this sufficiently distracting that I can say no more about the points he made.

The plenary started late and the Q&A session was brief. One self-described "newbie" said from the floor that she felt at the end of the weekend rather as if she had accidentally wandered into a postgraduate philosophy seminar. A more accurate description would be a *literary theory* seminar. The panel on political theory which I missed *might* have had the analytical or phenomenological rigour found in philosophy seminars. But most of the theoretical papers I heard had the 'neither quite rigorous philosophy nor quite rigorous history' quality of many literary theory papers ●

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Notes

1. http://chriscutrone.platypus1917.org.
2. J Rees *The algebra of revolution: the dialectic and the classical Marxist tradition* London 1998; D Renton *Classical Marxism: socialist theory and the Second International* Cheltenham 2002; and see my review of both books *Weekly Worker* September 11 2003.
3. For another example cf B Fine *Democracy and the rule of law* (1984; reprint Caldwell, NJ 2002).
4. *Hypatia* Vol 2, pp125-38.
5. *Public Culture* 18, pp93-110; also available at various places on the web.
6. http://kasamaproject.org.
7. Steele: www.khukuritheory.net/why-is-badiou-of-political-value; Cutrone: http://chriscutrone.platypus1917.org/?p=1144.
8. Andrew Coates has made somewhat similar points against Slavoj Žižek, with whom Badiou is linked, in this paper ('The leadership of "events"', March 3). Cf also James Turley's review of *Lenin reloaded* ('Hegel reloaded?', December 13 2007).
9. He based this on the far left's common but inaccurate exegesis of the statement in the *Communist manifesto* that "The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other working class parties" (in which, in fact, "the other working class parties" means *only* the Chartists and the related US National Reformers).
10. 'Principles to shape tactics' *Weekly Worker* April 21.
11. *Past and Present* No30, pp65-95; more on the same line in Nettl's two-volume biography of Rosa Luxemburg (1966).
12. Nettl seeks to distinguish Luxemburg from the anarchists on the grounds that her version of activism was based on the spontaneous movement of the working class masses, not arbitrary 'initiatives' of the revolutionaries. But this shows only that, if Nettl had read Sorel at all, he had not done so with any care.
13. More in my 'Leading workers by the nose' *Weekly Worker* September 13 2007.
14. This appears from the judgments of his review essay on Jan Willem Stutje's *Ernest Mandel* (2010) 55 *International Review of Social History* pp117-32.
15. There is an older usage belonging to the cold war academy, in which 'classical Marxism' was used to mean a (caricatural) version of Marxism before Lenin.

Paper of the Communist Party of Great Britain

weekly worker

Platypus: is it a sect? Is it an academic grouping? Is it a theoretical dead end?

- Kautsky's Marxism
- Iran's 12th imam
- Palestinian Nakba
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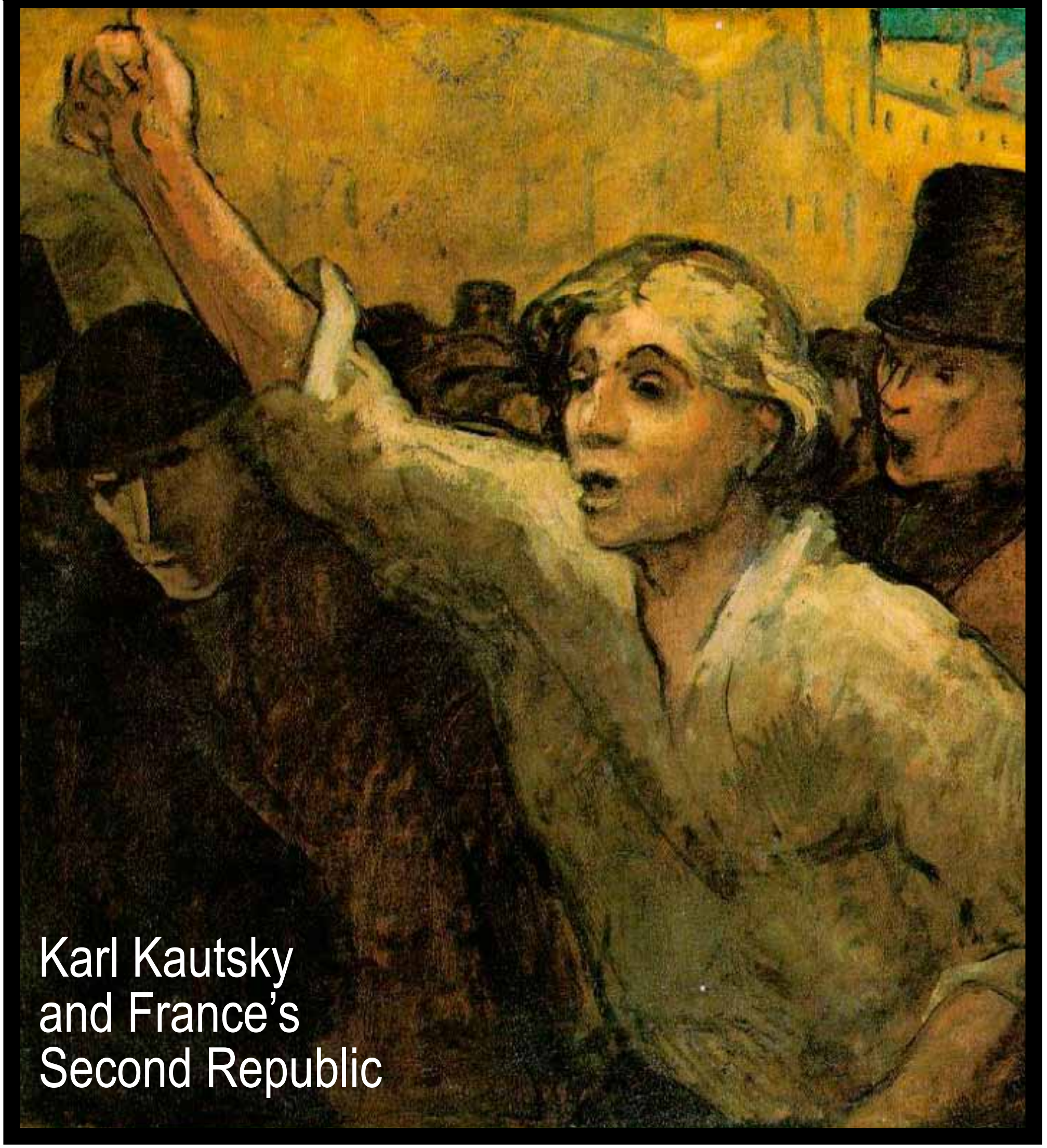

Karl Kautsky and France's Second Republic

LETTERS

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

Platypus

On behalf of Platypus, let me express how greatly we appreciate Mike Macnair's very thorough report on and critiques of the events at the recent Platypus convention in Chicago from April 29 to May 1, at which we were very happy and grateful to have his participation ('No need for party?', May 12).

However, I disagree with how Macnair characterises Peter Nettl's argument, which I referenced, specifically to show how Luxemburg's and Lenin's Marxist revolutionism offered an alternative to both opportunist reformism and (anarchistic or Sorelian) actionism. I think Macnair avoids (or I didn't present clearly enough) the issue I was raising about the inherent unavoidable authoritarianism of late 19th century mass (working class) parties that needed to be worked through by later Marxism (unlike circa 1848), and the problems of which Lenin and Luxemburg were aware, unlike the German Social Democratic Party centre (of Bebel and Kautsky) and later Stalinism (including Maoism).

Luxemburg's pamphlets, *Reform or revolution?* and *The mass strike*, hone their critiques of the SPD and broader Second International precisely on this score, as does, more broadly, Trotsky's *Results and prospects* (see especially the section on 'The prerequisites of socialism'). This concern, the problem of the *raison d'être* of the social democratic (and later communist) party, is less explicit, but nonetheless present as a key background issue in Lenin's *What is to be done?* and *The state and revolution*, as well as his *Leftwing communism* and *Imperialism* pamphlets. The Second International radicals recognised, after Marx and Engels, the modern state and its political parties as phenomena of Bonapartism - that is, the need for proletarian socialist revolution.

On 'the bourgeois revolution', the historiography offered by some members of Platypus by way of perspective does not treat the 1789-1815 Great French Revolution as the 'first', but rather the last of the great bourgeois revolutions, and somewhat late at that, explaining in part its pathologies; and in the Marxist view 1830 and 1848 were already 'proletarian'. The importance of the earlier Dutch and British experience is very much present in our minds as the original emergence of modern bourgeois society, such that bourgeois Britain was the bastion of reaction against the French revolution. So I think the perspective we tend to adopt in the Platypus approach to this history is not so 'new leftist'/post-1960s as Macnair suspects.

Our general perspective in Platypus is that, for Marx, proletarian socialism not only potentially 'negates', but also importantly potentially 'completes', the bourgeois revolution (at a global, world-historical scale), that the crisis of bourgeois society in capital is the need for socialism, but that socialism was not understood by Marx to be a final end-point: rather a potential new beginning for human history.

I look forward to the promised second part of Macnair's critique of Platypus as a project. However, I would caution that it is important to note the actual basis of our project - that is, our "hosting the critical conversation on the left" (about Marxism), that we don't think will take place without our project's specific focus. This, and not any purported 'Platypus positions' to be derived, for instance, from my or other Platypus members' writings, requires judgment and criticism. We've published the transcripts of most of our major public fora, so I think our project should be judged on the basis of whether these are productive. The convention that Macnair attended threatens to give a skewed perspective on our actual activities, which don't usually put forward Platypus members' takes so prominently or, in some instances, (nearly) exclusively as at our convention. There is a potentially important distinction between what we do as an organised project and the consensus of how we understand the need for our project - that is, our take on Marxism. As a project, we want to be judged on our practice rather than on our 'theory', whatever the latter's limitations.

Lastly, the title of my online collection of writings for Platypus, *The last Marxist*, is indeed meant to be provocative (what would it mean to make such a claim or have such an aspiration?), but with what I hope is recognisable humour, if not exactly tongue in cheek.

Chris Cutrone
email

Misconceptions

I wanted to clear up some misconceptions about the Democratic Socialists of America. I don't know who represented DSA at the Platypus convention, but apparently she or he didn't do a good job.

No, we don't have 10,000 members at present (the high point of the organisation was in the early 1990s, with around 11,000 paid-up members). We have, last I knew, around 6,000. Some members may think we have more, but they're misinformed.

Our image of an alternative society is not Sweden or Finland. We say that the immediate struggle in the United States is to force reforms into existence that make the US economy more 'Scandinavian', if you will, but that does not exhaust our vision. We're explicitly for workers' self-management and democratic planning and such. A number of members are taken with the model in David Schweickart's *After capitalism*, which I think is a well-written book, if too 'market socialist' for my taste. I think the work of Pat Devine provides a better vision - one of more comprehensive planning - and I've promoted it within the DSA.

This brings us to the Democratic Party question. I'll present the mainstream DSA position (one with which I've traditionally agreed, but am currently somewhat sceptical of).

The DSA is in and around the left wing of the Democratic Party mainly because (a) most of the people we want to work with and recruit are there, including rank-and-file unionists, and (b) the US has an electoral system which makes the formation of a mass left/labour party uniquely difficult. In a parliamentary system where the members of parliament select the prime minister as head of government - especially in countries with proportional representation - electing minor party legislators is much easier. But in a system like that of the US, where the president is elected separately by nationwide votes and members of Congress are elected in single-member districts, only two parties can survive.

You note the organisational looseness of the Democrats (and Republicans). In fact, today they are both quasi-state institutions - no longer political parties in the European parliamentary sense; they are legally regulated structures with fixed times and places, where anyone can register. Open to all, they have no ideological requirements for membership. To become a Republican or Democrat, you just register as such. In fact, these are not really parties at all, but coalitions of more or less compatible social forces, in which various groups contest for influence under a common banner. Of course, it is still difficult for any individual or group to succeed in this process without lots of money. But organised groups with clear programmatic ideas and a long-term commitment can become forces within either party. The mainstream of the DSA thinks that labour and the left should do precisely that within the Democrats - to become 'a party within a party'. The DSA supports left Democrats like Dennis Kucinich and John Conyers to that end. (I admit that this is not always spelled out explicitly within DSA literature, but that's the thinking.)

Is this popular frontist? It's not intended as such. It has nothing to do with old CPUSA arguments for supporting 'representatives of the progressive wing of the bourgeoisie' or what have you. The argument is that Democrats such as Kucinich and Conyers are *not* representatives of the capitalist class; that they are traditional social democratic-type workers' reps, because the Democratic Party is in fact basically a structureless line on the ballot which is open for (class) contestation.

Now all this may be wrong, but I'd say it's something better than "not even Lib-Lab".

Jason Schulman
New York

De rigueur

I thought Mike Macnair's article on the Platypus convention was very interesting. The only thing I would want to raise for the sake of clarity, as opposed to a dispute over politics, is his invocation of philosophical rigour.

While it is true that philosophical rigour is part of a ruthless critique of anything existing, Adorno in *Minima moralia* writes: "The injunction to practise intellectual honesty usually amounts to sabotage of thought." And he goes on to detail how the antithetical function of thought is undermined by this injunction.

Naturally, there is an issue with simply affirming or denouncing intellectual rigour: neither nonsense nor triviality will suffice as modes of thought today, nor could they ever, but I think that the issue Adorno raises of intellectual rigour falling into affirmation is a very real one. Indeed that is what has largely happened to analytic philosophy. Wittgenstein's literary executor was Anscombe: while a brilliant philosopher, her Catholicism was compatible with her philosophy because of its irrelevance.

The real question about philosophical rigour is not textual analysis, but philosophy as a method of thought about our world and our place in it. In that respect the advent of philosophical rigour has been only one side of a defeat, either in the form of obtuse French theory or positivism that, while intriguing and better than its modern followers, cannot say much about the questions we all face today.

As for Mike's account of the convention itself, while it is true that Richard Rubin did coin the excellent phrase, 'neo-Kautskyan', at Mike's presentation and most of the Platypodes were sympathetic to his critique of your project, it is not true that a lot of us thought the splits in the Trotskyists were principled. I regret that there was not a chance to push the sectarians in the room on the principled or unprincipled nature of their splits. I think this was a result of how well Mike presented the case for unity as a practical matter, and indeed 'Pythonism' in splits has been a deeply ingrained feature in the movement on this side of the Atlantic as well - a fact we all know well in Platypus. Afterwards I heard quite a bit of sympathy and agreement around Mike's position on the need for unity at this moment, although most also felt this would be insufficient for resurrecting the left.

Anyway, I am looking forward to the upcoming article on the Platypus project itself and following the CPGB with great interest.

Watson Ladd
Platypus Affiliated Society

Defeatist

I believe that Mike Macnair is wrong in his analysis of the position of the early Comintern and Trotsky in relation to the question of the 'anti-imperialist united front' and the tactics of communists in relation to the national and colonial question (Letters, May 12).

Besides the fact that the Comintern in its Fourth Congress theses explicitly talks about opposing pan-Islamism masquerading as anti-imperialism, Mike fails to take into account what Lenin had said in the debate around the theses, or indeed in previous discussions within the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party on the question. In those earlier discussions, for instance, Lenin talks about guarding against movements that were in effect acting as agents of external powers. But, more clearly, in his contribution at the Second Congress, he says: "… as communists we will only support the bourgeois freedom movements in the colonial countries if these movements are really revolutionary and if their representatives are not opposed to us training and organising the peasantry in a revolutionary way. If that is no good, then the communists there also have a duty to fight against the reformist bourgeoisie …" (www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/2nd-congress/ch04.htm).

Mike says that there are lots of examples in the 20th century where nationalist movements have simply turned into Stalinist regimes. That is true, but is that in itself proof that the tactic of supporting a non-imperialist state against an imperialist state in a war, where the latter is trying to subjugate the former, is falsified? No, of course not.

Simply applying the correct strategy is no guarantee of victory in anything. Given the extremely weak forces that revolutionary Marxists had at their disposal compared with the forces of reformism, Stalinism and imperialism, it would have been remarkable if simply having the correct strategy were sufficient to guarantee success. But it would be opportunistic in the extreme to conclude from that balance of class forces that we should abandon basic Marxist principles.

The main problem has been that in many of these struggles, the revolutionaries have not adopted the position of Lenin and the Comintern, as set out in the quote above, and have simply turned themselves into cheerleaders for the nationalist forces rather than setting themselves the task of building up a genuine revolutionary movement in the process of opposing imperialist aggression. Take Trotsky's position in relation to Mexico under Cardenas. Was Trotsky right to support the Cardenas regime in opposing British imperialism and nationalising British oil interests in Mexico? I find it hard to believe any revolutionary Marxist could answer no to that question. But Trotsky did not simply become a cheerleader for Cardenas in the way some today have done in relation to Chávez. He argued against Mexican revolutionaries submerging themselves in the Institutional Revolutionary Party, and argued instead for the need to build a Mexican workers' party.

I would suggest another concrete case where Mike might wish to consider the implications of what he is saying. That is France under German occupation. Is he saying that, if the Free French resistance movement had proposed some joint activity with the communist resistance, he would have opposed such a joint action? That seems to me to be ultra-left, third-periodist madness. Of course, in any such case, the revolutionaries have to go into such an arrangement with their eyes wide open, and believing that those with whom they are making this tactical alliance are likely to stab them in the back, but to refuse to agree to such action would undoubtedly condemn the revolutionaries in the eyes of the masses.

What Mike's argument really comes down to is the fact that we cannot apply this strategy because we are too small. But history shows that revolutionary organisations that refuse to defend basic principles are doomed never to become larger forces. But I would ask Mike then what the conclusion of his thesis is in relation to Libya? Presumably, if he is opposed to supporting Libya, as against British, US, French imperialism, etc, then he will not be unhappy to see imperialism install its own puppet regime in Tripoli.

I contend that the revolutionary Marxist position remains to oppose imperialist aggression and intentions, to support any truly revolutionary forces in Libya, and to propose joint action with other forces against imperialism, whilst continuing to ruthlessly expose the class nature of those forces, to expose their inability to wage an effective struggle against imperialism and, where necessary, as Lenin says above, "the communists there also have a duty to fight against the reformist bourgeoisie". For Marxists outside Libya, our duty is to support any genuine revolutionary forces - I am not at all convinced that the 'rebel' forces come under that heading - and to assist in whatever way we can the building of independent working class organisations.

We should attempt to assist in the building of links between workers in Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and other adjoining states. We should attempt to make contacts with genuine revolutionary socialist organisations in Libya and provide them with arms, finance and other practical support. I cannot for one moment imagine that, were I a revolutionary Marxist in Libya, adopting the defeatist position as Mike suggests, in the face of massive imperialist aggression, would be a credible position.

Arthur Bough
email

No mention

It's a wee bit disappointing that Anne Mc Shane totally leaves out the results of militant nationalist and republican candidates in the local election in the six occupied counties, only mentioning the Irish Republican Socialist Party in Belfast ('Governing parties consolidate', May 12). She doesn't mention the particularly strong votes of the IRSP in Strabane, Gerry Donnelly of the 32-County Sovereignty Movement in Derry or Éirígí in West Belfast and Fermanagh, where they got a councillor elected.

Are militant nationalists not worth mentioning in a communist paper? The platforms of these groups are in many points much more progressive than the petty bourgeois, anti-nationalist manifestos of tiny Trotskyite groups like the People Before Profit Alliance, the Socialist Party or the Socialist Workers Party.

Dieter Reinisch
Vienna

Dreary

Anne Mc Shane's article on the assembly and council elections in the Six Counties rightly notes the importance of the national question there and the failure of the SP and SWP to address it.

US LEFT

Theoretical dead end

The US Platypus group is in the borderlands of two types of left, argues **Mike Macnair** in the second of two articles

In last week's paper I reported on the third Platypus International Convention in Chicago, April 29-May 1.[1] The concluding plenary discussed the 'Platypus critique', where speakers from the group denied that it had "a line". This, and the convention as a whole, pose another question: the critique of the Platypus.

If it was really the case that the Platypus Affiliated Society had no political line or agenda, but merely aimed to 'host the conversation', then to critique it would be like offering a critique of large, vague academic 'learned societies' like the classicists' American Philological Association or the English Lit crowd's Modern Language Association.

Such a critique would only be worthwhile to the extent that the learned society in question *already* dominated the 'conversation' in question, and in doing so maintained an *implicit* line - like the idea of 'western civilisation', which had the effect of excluding work which did not comply from academic recognition. This situation certainly exists in the economists' learned societies (exclusionary dominance of neoclassical microeconomics), and *de facto* exists in several Eng Lit societies (exclusionary dominance of postmodernism).

For a small group like Platypus such a critique would be pointless. In reality, however, Platypus both does not, and does, have a political line and agenda.

It does not have a political line and agenda in the sense that it does not call for votes for anyone, or vote on a platform or political positions which it is to defend in common. The comrades claim that because of the death of the left this is *impossible* without the prior theoretical critique which might, at some unspecified date in the future, make political action possible.

It does, however, have a political line and agenda - even if this was only the statement on its website: "Hence, to free ourselves, we declare that the left is dead. Or, more precisely, that we are all that is left of it." This involves identification with "the left" or at least with its history; and a *negative* critique of the existing left. Other things apart, it would also be the classic claim of a sect.

Chris Cutrone

Imperialism

In fact, there is more, and it centres on the issue of imperialism. Platypus's claim that "the left is dead" is a claim motivated at the end of the day partly by the perception that the left has become so small as to be politically irrelevant, but also by the perception that the left has abandoned the project of general human emancipation.

The basis of this perception is expressed in a wide variety of articles on Platypus's website - some by Platypus members, others expressed by their choices about who to interview or review. Here the idea of 'Spartacism plus Adorno', considered as *critiques* rather than as positive policy, has explanatory value.

From Spartacism come hostility to 'statist feminism', which allies with the right on sexual purity issues, and to other reactionary-utopian politics like 'green' arguments for 'small is beautiful', anti-technology, anti-globalisation, ideas of the peasantry or indigenous peoples as 'showing the way', and Maoism. From the political culture of Spartacism come the 'in your face' provocations like "the left is dead ... we are all that is left of it". With much, though not all, of the political substance of this critique of the contemporary left CPGB comrades would agree, though we do not draw the sect conclusion.

From Adorno, and *not* from Spartacism, come defence of capitalist 'high culture' and hostility to riots for the sake of 'resistance' - and hostility to the 'anti-imperialism' which demands that the left *side with* whoever is the current target of US military operations, even if they are obvious tyrants like the Ba'athists or Libyan Jamahiriya or clericalist reactionaries like the Iranian regime.

This last, of course, has led to the interpretation that Platypus is *presently* Eustonite: people who favour the victory of the US imperialism's military operations over the alternative on the basis of the unattractive character of the targets. The case was sharply made by Louis Proyect in 2010. His conclusion is:

"What we are dealing with is a section of the academic left that has become profoundly disoriented and succumbed to the pressure of living inside the US, the world's largest and most dangerous hegemon in history. The purpose of this article is to put a skull-and-bones sign next to the poisoned well they drink from, so as to warn any young graduate student to not drink the water at the risk of political death."[2]

There are two issues involved: one of politics and one of theory. The theory issue means specifically the theory of the problem Richard Rubin asked us to address in the Trotsky plenary at the convention: the problem of the defeat of the German revolution of 1918-19 at the hands of the SPD leadership, or, more exactly, the limitation of the German revolution to the creation of a capitalist state and the actual participation of this state in counterrevolutionary military operations against the Russian Revolution.

Politics

The issue of politics is simple. Suppose a movement which seeks general human emancipation. *In fact* today as in 1900, albeit in different juridical forms, there is a hierarchy of countries. Countries higher up the global pecking order feel free to assist 'their' corporations to bribe officials in countries lower down the pecking order. If 'unacceptable' actions are taken by the governments of countries lower down, they feel free to intervene with covert support to minority and terrorist groups, and so on. And, when push comes to shove, they intervene with direct military force.

It should be clear that general human emancipation is inconsistent with the hierarchy of countries, and that a movement which claims to seek general human emancipation but gives political support to this hierarchy is engaged in political doublethink.

At the same time, *only* Lenin's theory of imperialism - that it represents the final stage of capitalism and World War I the opening of a terminal crisis or *Zusammenbruch* - gives support to the conclusion drawn by the Comintern and maintained by Trotsky, that communists in imperialist countries must not only oppose the imperialist actions of their own countries, but also *seek the victory of* the nationalist movement of the subordinated country, even if it is authoritarian or clerical-reactionary in character. Not even Bukharin's or Luxemburg's theories, which are closest to Lenin's, support this conclusion.

And, in fact, the evidence of 20th century history is unambiguously clear that both the *theory* of terminal crisis (Trotsky's 'death agony of capitalism') and the *political conclusion* drawn from it of alliance of the workers' movement with petty bourgeois nationalists in the 'anti-imperialist united front' are false - as false and as disproved as the theory of phlogiston.

These circumstances require advocates of general human emancipation in countries high up the pecking order to pursue a *two-sided* policy in relation to their own countries' coercive operations against countries lower down. On the one hand, it is necessary to *oppose* these operations clearly, unambiguously and as far as possible practically. On the other, it is also necessary to give political solidarity and what practical support can be given to emancipatory movements in the countries targeted - and therefore to avoid stupidly prettifying tyrants, local Bonapartes, clerical reactionaries, etc, merely because they may from time to time talk 'anti-imperialist' talk.

To err on either side of this line once or twice or even several times is merely to err. To develop a *consistent* position one side or another of this line is to become a political agent of the system of global hierarchy: ie, to oppose general human emancipation.

The 'anti-imperialist' left gives political support to people who are the US's enemies now but have been their allies in the past and may well be again in the future; in doing so it makes itself an enemy of the local workers' movement in the country in question, and more concretely aids the regimes against the exiles of the workers' movements.

Groups like the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and the Eustonites, by focusing their fire *only* on 'third world' tyrants without simultaneously up-front and explicitly opposing imperialist operations, become 'useful idiots' for the imperialist states - whose operations in the subordinated countries are as tyrannical as their opponents.

Richard Rubin in the Trotsky plenary said that defeatism is a moral obligation, but not one which could be expected to lead to revolution. What I have said so far is broadly consistent with this. This is because I have taken as the starting point *only* the Platypus claim that the left has died because it has abandoned the aim of general human emancipation, and supposed *only* that the movement is to fight for general human emancipation. It still follows that the movement cannot be true to itself *as a movement for general human emancipation* without its sections in the countries higher up the global hierarchy displaying explicit, upfront and active opposition to this hierarchy, and therefore to the blockade and war operations of their own countries.

Chris Cutrone is Platypus's (presumably elected) president. He writes, not infrequently, on Middle Eastern affairs in its journal, *Platypus Review*. His language in these articles is at best Delphic - obscure and capable of multiple interpretations. Cutrone is (as an academic) a pupil of Moishe Postone, and says openly that his politics are influenced by Postone. Postone unambiguously *is* a Eustonite or a left Zionist of a variety not dissimilar to the AWL. Some of Cutrone's analysis of Middle East politics shows signs, like the AWL's analysis, of being taken from the overseas outlets of Tel Aviv. Louis Proyect argues that Cutrone's language (and that of other Platypus writers) is, rather than Delphic, Aesopian: obscure, and contains code which actually signals private (here Eustonite or AWLish) commitments.

A number of Platypus supporters responded to Proyect's posting. They took the opportunity to assert their critique of the left. They insisted that *Platypus Review* is an open magazine and - as Spencer Leonard said in the closing plenary at the convention - that Platypus does not have a line. They said that they *do not support* 'humanitarian interventions' - which is the code also used by the AWL. But they did not take the opportunity to say upfront that they as a group or as individuals *oppose* these 'sanctions' and military actions - still less that they would campaign to stop them, even at the level of publishing anti-war or anti-sanctions material in *Platypus Review*.

Cutrone's address to the convention - on 'The anti-fascist v anti-imperialist "left": some genealogies and prospects' - *may* have signalled a change in direction. I do not know because I missed the speech and he has not (yet) put it up on his blog.

In the absence of a shift, the problem is that the *balance* of the *Platypus Review*'s coverage is AWLish. It is not strictly Eustonite, since it does not openly support 'wars for democracy'. But it uses the same sort of 'how can we condemn' evasions as AWL leader Sean Matgamna. If anything, it is to the right of the Matgamnaites, who do have practical commitments in the British workers' movement and a willingness to attempt to project a (defective) line for concrete support for independent working class politics in the Middle East.

Remember that I have not said anything more than that the absence of opposition to the global hierarchy of countries is as much an abandonment of the project of general human emancipation as is the 'anti-imperialism of idiots' that gives political support to local reaction and authoritarianism as offering in some way an alternative to the global hierarchy. I have not asserted Lenin's or any other theory of imperialism. It is merely that both Platypus's *claim* not to have a political line and its *claim* to represent a reassertion of the emancipatory project of Marxism are belied by the one-sided character of *Platypus Review*'s coverage of these issues.

It would, of course, be possible to maintain a pro-imperialist or neutral line if Platypus were willing to abandon the critique of the existing left as anti-emancipatory. All that would be needed would be to assert that the *immediate* general emancipation of humanity is impossible and that it is first necessary to pass through capitalism *via* imperialism. Platypus is a third of the way to this position, since it asserts that emancipation has to be built on the basis of the conquests of capitalism. Step two is to assert that the material or 'objective' conditions for socialist revolution had not matured as of 1917 (or 1938). This point has been clearly argued by Moshé Machover in 1999,[3] and, from within the 'Lukácsian' tradition to which Platypus adheres, by István Mészáros, in *Beyond capital* (1995). Platypus seems (from what Richard Rubin said in the Trotsky plenary) to reject it.

Step three would be to argue that objective conditions *have not yet* matured; that their maturing involves the complete global displacement of pre-capitalist social relations; and that this can only be accomplished through the agency of imperialism. This would then be substantially the theory of Bill Warren's *Imperialism, pioneer of capitalism* (1980). It would also be the theory of Bernstein in the Bernstein-Bax debate of 1896-97 and of the 'social-imperialists' in the 1900s.[4]

Whatever its merits (I should emphasise that I think that beyond the second step the merits are negligible: see my 2004 series on imperialism[5]), this approach would involve abandoning Platypus's critique of the existing left as 'dead' because it has abandoned the emancipatory project of Marxism. The reason would be that such a theory would *also* deny the possibility of immediate general emancipation: it would say that the next step is full global capitalism and global liberalism, to make a *future* general emancipation possible.

The 'anti-imperialist' line which supports the targets of US attacks does not deny that *future* general emancipation is desirable: rather, it says that the next step on this road is general global *Stalinism and Stalinoid nationalism*, to make a future general emancipation possible. The difference between two such approaches can be no more than one of theoretical, empirical and practical plausibility, not one of moral repudiation of one's own moral premises.

Theory

In the Trotsky plenary at the Platypus convention, as I reported in last week's article, Richard Rubin of Platypus argued that both fascism and Stalinism resulted from the defeat of the German revolution; and that this 'German question' posed the question of how the strongest Marxist party in the world, the SPD, could betray its own revolution. Since the objective conditions for socialism had matured, the explanation had to be the power of bourgeois ideology, and both Trotsky and the Frankfurt school had grappled with this problem.

This outline narrative has two huge gaps. The first is the basis of the 'crisis of Marxism'. The second is the explanation of the problem of the 1914 betrayal *actually offered* by Lenin, the Comintern and Trotsky, which is not the power of ideology, but the effects of imperialism.

Marxism is distinct from pre-

Marxist socialisms and communisms in a very simple way: that it asserts that communism is not a simple act of moral will, but reflects the objective interests of the proletariat in the class conflict inherent in capitalism, so that the proletariat as a class can be expected at the end of the day to become (in broad terms) communist. It is thus the role of the proletariat which produces the *result* that for Marxists capitalism is the necessary precursor of communism.

Mass working class support for forms of reformism and gradualism, or - as in England before 1900 or the USA today - for capitalist parties, is generally taken to be the basis of the 'crisis of Marxism'. This is because it calls into question the claim that the class struggle between capital and proletariat forms a material basis for communism. Communism then reverts to being an ethical imperative, to be approached through moral persuasion on a cross-class basis or through one or another form of voluntarist minority action - or rejected.

In 1917-19 and again in 1943-48 this 'crisis of Marxism' argument was utterly implausible.[6] But in the period of stability and prosperity in the 1890s-1900s, and the returned stability and prosperity of the 1950s-60s - and also in a sense *especially* since the fall of the USSR - it has again become attractive.[7]

I have argued in *Revolutionary strategy* (chapter 2) that there are both positive and negative empirical grounds for defending the Marxist conception today in spite of the overall negative evolution since the 1970s. Marc Mulholland in two articles published in *Critique* in 2009 and 2010 has offered much more elaborated theoretical reasons for supposing a proletarian will to collectivism.[8]

The actual explanation of the betrayal of August 1914 offered at the time independently by Lenin and Zinoviev, and by Trotsky, was the effects of imperialism on the working class of the imperialist countries and its organisations: that is, that a section of the class was 'bought off' by the spoils of imperialism.[9] Trotsky continued to defend this view down to his death.[10] Bukharin's *Imperialism and world economy* took a slightly different angle, seeing the working class movement as tied to the capitalists through concessions organised by the imperialist state.[11] Herman Gorter's *Imperialism, the World War and social democracy* (1914) had aspects of both the Bukharin view and Luxemburg's arguments (below).[12]

Now this view may be right or it may be wrong, but it is not just Maoism or 'New Left'-ism. It is the product precisely of some of the 'classical Marxists' or 'second International lefts', whose legacy Platypus says it is concerned to redeem in order to enable a 21st century left to be reborn. It demands a *precise* and serious critique, which cannot be undertaken just on the basis of the modern Maoist caricature of it and the Trotskyist imitators of Maoism.

I have argued elsewhere that the Lenin-Zinoviev and Trotsky version of this analysis in terms of imperialism buying off top sections of the working class is false, but the Bukharin version is broadly correct, and can be extended to understand the existence of reformism and dominance of nationalism in the modern 'third world'.[13]

One of the 'second International lefts', of course, did not adopt this line. It is Luxemburg, not Trotsky, who offered a really 'accidental' explanation of the political collapse of the SPD - and hence of the epoch - in terms of Kautsky's (alleged) theoretical gradualism and did not attempt to ground this characterisation in any material process of change.[14] In this Luxemburg, *as against* Lenin and Trotsky, is followed by Korsch in *Marxism and philosophy*.[15]

This line genuinely does imply that - as Richard Rubin argued - the failure of the German revolution has to be explained by the power of bourgeois ideology, or of alienation, reification and commodity fetishism. This sort of argument and not Lenin (except in an extremely dematerialised form) or Trotsky is the context of Lukács's *History and class consciousness*. The next step is that taken by the Frankfurt school people: to attempt to integrate alienation, reification and commodity fetishism with Freudian psychoanalysis. In other words, we arrive at the salience of the Frankfurt school for theory by *rejecting* the salience of imperialism in the explanation of the political collapse of the Second International.

But there is a theoretical as well as a political price to be paid for this choice. I have written on the political price or prices before: the explanation of reformism by the self-reproduction of capitalist order provides a theory which demands *both* an 'actionism', which is either ultra-left or opportunist or both, *and* the epistemological commitments that support the form of the small bureaucratic-centralist sect.[16] In the specific case of the Frankfurt school the upshot is just a politics of despair. But Platypus in a sense embraces both the politics of despair and the need for critique (*il faut cultiver son jardin théoretique*), so these points are secondary.

The theoretical price is the expulsion of history from theory. This may seem a paradoxical statement, since all the variants derived under Lukácsian and similar interpretations - including, for example, Postone - insist that theory must be historicised and that *transhistorical* claims about human nature, etc must be expelled from Marx (or foisted on Engels) to achieve a properly historicised theory. That means one which focuses *purely* on the critique of capitalist modernity.

To take this turn, however, is to prohibit actual comprehension. It is like asking for drug therapy or surgery to remove your long-term memory in the hope that it will get rid of 'distractions' from the present. In reality, no such focus on capitalist modernity is possible: 'the pre-modern' remains as a silent other, albeit in a mutilated form, against which 'capitalist modernity' is identified. In reality, our ability to identify change depends on recognising also continuities. So the expulsion of the longer-term history of which capitalism is *part* results in a loss of vision of change *within* capitalism.[17]

It turns out, indeed, that to defend this scheme of 'historicised' theory, it is necessary to falsify the very local history of the enlightenment, Marxism and the workers' movement (examples in last week's article). Even if the students who form Platypus's base do not have political but only theoretical aims, they will find that this scheme is a theoretical trap. What will be driven to fill the 'absence' of the 'transhistorical' is either some form of liberalism - or, as in Alasdair MacIntyre, Thomas Aquinas.[18]

Classifying the Platypus

Platypus takes its name from an anecdote about Engels:

"A story is told about Karl Marx's collaborator and friend, Friedrich Engels, who, in his youth, as a good Hegelian idealist, sure about the purposeful, rational evolution of nature and of the place of human reason in it, became indignant when reading about a platypus, which he supposed to be a fraud perpetrated by English taxidermists. For Engels, the platypus made no sense in natural history.

"Later, Engels saw a living platypus at a British zoo and was chagrined. Like Marx a good materialist, and a thinker receptive to Darwin's theory of evolution, which dethroned a human-centred view of nature, Engels came to respect that 'reason' in history, natural or otherwise, must not necessarily accord with present standards of human reason.

"This is a parable we find salutary to understanding the condition of the left today."[19]

The Engels story is an embroidered version of one Engels told about himself in a letter to Conrad Schmidt in 1895, for a purpose rather different to that which the group Platypus uses it. Schmidt had (as can be seen from Engels' letter) raised empirical objections to the idea of the general rate of profit in volume 3 of Marx's *Capital,* and therefore wished to "degrade the law of value to a fiction".

Engels' response is that direct empirical confirmation or disconfirmation of individual concepts is not to be expected. After other examples, Engels comes to that of concepts in biology and the platypus:

"From the moment we accept the theory of evolution all our concepts of organic life correspond only approximately to reality. Otherwise there would be no change: on the day when concepts and reality completely coincide in the organic world development comes to an end ... How, without bringing one or both concepts into conflict with reality are you going to get from the egg-laying reptile to the mammal, which gives birth to living young? And in reality we have in the monotremata a whole sub-class of egg-laying mammals: in 1843, I saw the eggs of the duck-bill in Manchester and with arrogant narrow-mindedness mocked at such stupidity - as if a mammal could lay eggs - and now it has been proved! So do not behave to the conceptions of value in the way I had later to beg the duck-bill's pardon for!"[20]

The merits or otherwise of Engels' arguments as a matter of philosophy are violently debatable.[21] But it should be clear that Engels' point is not, contrary to Platypus, "that 'reason' in history, natural or otherwise, must not necessarily accord with present standards of human reason", but a considerably narrower philosophical point: that concepts are necessarily in imperfect agreement with the perceptible world.

The 'conceptual difficulty' with the platypus, of course, is that it and other monotremes are animals somewhere in the borderlands between, or overlapping, the taxonomical classes of birds or reptiles, which lay eggs, and mammals, which give birth and suckle their young. It is, however, in modern times regarded, for reasons of evolutionary-history analysis, as a type of mammal.

In *this* sense, if not in the sense of an existent impossibility, the Platypus Affiliated Society is rightly named. It is a group somewhere in the borderlands between, or overlapping, two sorts of left.

The first is the political-activist left: groups from Labour leftwards in this country, from the left wing of the Democrats leftwards in the US. This left consists primarily of organised parties and groups, secondarily of 'independents' (or sects of one member) who participate in left, broad-front campaigns and other initiatives. It is linked, even if imperfectly, to the broader workers' movement (trade unions, cooperatives, mass workers' parties), and attempts to intervene in public politics in pursuit of definite short-term and long-term goals, usually expressed through a public press.

The second is the academic left: academics who would regard themselves as 'being of the left' *in relation to their academic work*. (This is not the same thing as working in a university, while being either a militant and political trade unionist or, outside of work, involved in the political-activist left.) This left consists primarily of individual academics, linked together by leftish academic journals, annual conferences and similar events. To the extent that it intervenes in public politics it does so by *individual* attempts to act as 'public intellectuals' through contributions to the capitalist media.

The Platypus Affiliated Society looks from one angle like an organisation of the political activist left; from another angle like a part of the academic left. At present, judging from its convention, it should probably be located, in spite of the ambiguities, on the academic side of the divide. Apart from the Saturday morning workshops on left groups, the format was that of an academic conference (papers, 'respondents', short Q&A sessions), not that of a political conference. The Frankfurt school commitments, the denial of the possibility of political action as such and the obscurely AWLish line on the 'war on terror' all give Platypus some degree of academic credibility.

It is therefore to be judged as a *theoretical* project, more than as a political project. My judgement is that, though the group is right that the 'anti-imperialist front' and the rest of the orthodoxy of the left is a dead end, Platypus's theoretical project is *also* a dead end *as theory* ●

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Notes

1. 'No need for party?', May 12.
2. http://louisproyect.wordpress.com/2010/04/25/q-what-is-a-platypus-a-an-american-eustonite.
3. M Machover, 'The 20th century in retrospect' *Workers' Liberty* No59, 1999; www.matzpen.org/index.asp?u=101&p=20th; Machover's email exchange with Dov Schoss, linked at the end of that page, is also useful on the issues involved.
4. Bernstein-Bax debate in H Tudor and JM Tudor (eds) *Marxism and social democracy: the revisionist debate 1896-98* (Cambridge 1998) chapter 2. Later social-imperialists: the targets of Kautsky's polemics in *Socialism and colonial policy* (1907): www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1907/colonial/index.htm.
5. The original series with critiques and a response: *Weekly Worker* July 29-September 23 2004.
6. 1919: A Read *The world on fire: 1919 and the battle with Bolshevism* London 2008, albeit from a rightwing perspective. Any general history will indicate the sheer extent of working class collectivism in 1943-48.
7. Postone's argument in *Time, labour and social domination* (Cambridge 1993) is at the end of the day a variant of it: "the working class is integral to capitalism *rather than* the embodiment of its negation" (emphasis added, p17). For Marx, as opposed to Postone, the working class was *both* integral to capitalism *and* the embodiment of its negation.
8. 'Marx, the proletariat and the "will to socialism"' (2009) 37 *Critique* pp319-43; '"Its patrimony, its unique wealth!" Labour-power, working class consciousness and crises' (2010) 38 *Critique* pp375-417. Comrade Mulholland is not a CPGB supporter and is, obviously, not responsible for any use I may make of his argument.
9. VI Lenin *Socialism and war* (1915) chapter 1: www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/s+w/ch01.htm#v21fl70h-299. *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism,* having been written with a view to the tsarist censorship, is less explicit. L Trotsky *War and the International* (1914) chapter 10: www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1914/war/part3.htm#ch10.
10. *Where is Britain going?* (1925) chapter 5: www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/britain/wibg/ch05.htm; *Their morals and ours* (1938): www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/morals/morals.htm.
11. www.marxists.org/archive/bukharin/works/1917/imperial/14.htm.
12. www.marxists.org/archive/gorter/1914/imperialism.htm.
13. *Revolutionary strategy* pp87-89; 'Labour Party blues' *Weekly Worker* July 23 2009.
14. Visible in the *Junius pamphlet* (1915): www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1915/junius/index.htm.
15. www.marxists.org/archive/korsch/1923/marxism-philosophy.htm. So too Pannekoek in 'Marxism as action' (1915): www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoe/1915/marxism-action.htm, though his 'The third international' (1917, www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoe/1917/thirdinter.htm) is closer to the Lenin and Zinoviev-Trotsky-Bukharin line.
16. *Weekly Worker* articles, 'Hegelian pitfalls', July 21 2003; 'Classical Marxism and grasping the dialectic', September 4 2003; 'Spontaneity and Marxist theory', September 6 2007; 'Against philosopher-kings', December 11 2008.
17. This is, incidentally, my reason for believing that the theory of sexuality Jamie Gough and I defended in outline in 1985 has more explanatory power than Pablo Ben's 'Frankfurt' version. Because our account begins with matters *prior to* capitalism and their *persistence within* capitalism, it also grasps more fully the transformations of sexualities *within* capitalist development over the last three centuries.
18. Cf my 'Sects and "new left" disillusionment' *Weekly Worker* April 15 2010.
19. http://platypus1917.org/about/what-is-a-platypus.
20. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1895/letters/95_03_12.htm.
21. Eg, Louis Althusser in *Reading 'Capital'* (online at http://readingcapital.blogspot.com/2007/02/marx-and-his-discoveries.html) gives the letter to Schmidt as an example of Engels' "empiricism" and departure from Marx; *contra* J Rees, 'Engels' Marxism' *International Socialism* 1994, No65: http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj65/rees.htm; cf also H Putnam *Mind, language and reality* (Cambridge 1979) chapter 11.

Fighting fund

A few coppers

Home secretary Theresa May is very understanding. She told delegates to the Police Federation annual conference on May 18 that she could see why they were "worried" about cuts. Some officers could see their pay drop by £4,000 a year, after all.

But the Conservatives are nothing if not even-handed - we are all in it together, you see, and so even the "finest police officers in the world" cannot be exempt from the suffering - which is so necessary for the good of the country. Perhaps this shows a degree of complacency, though. If they thought the mass of workers were about to rise up against the general austerity assault, the Con-Dems might think it a good idea to keep the police onside.

I don't suppose there are many *Weekly Worker* supporters among the police. And I would suspect most of our readers take home rather less than an officer's salary - a constable with a few years service will gross £40,000. On the other hand, many of our readers are driven by rather different imperatives than the average bobby. They are motivated by a political vision and are happy to support financially a paper that points to the kind of organisation we need in order to make it a reality.

Among them this week was MM, whose monthly standing order for £70 is always gratefully received - as is the £60 in total from other SO donors over the last seven days. Then there were those comrades who contributed online - thanks to JR (a brilliant £50), DV and PY (£20 each) and RP (£10). They were among 11,457 internet readers last week.

Thanks also to KC (£25), LG (£20) and LD, who added £10 to his subscription. All that comes to £285, which takes our fighting fund total for May to £716. But we are still quite a way off the £1,250 we need. Can you spare a few coppers - even if you're one yourself?

Robbie Rix

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

LETTERS

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

Voting tactics

It is a pity that comrade Chris Strafford, in defending the open letter calling for no vote to George Galloway on May 5, did not engage with the actual position of the CPGB of which he is a member.

He writes: "The worst of the attacks on the open letter is the hysterical claim that the 30 or so comrades who signed it are promoting a social-imperialist line … they are shamefully smeared as social-imperialists and accused of backing Alliance for Workers' Liberty-type political attacks on Galloway" (Letters, May 19). It would be shameful and even hysterical if it were true that the signatories had been attacked as social-imperialists. But who has done that? Certainly not the CPGB.

It is also a pity that comrade Strafford did not attend the May 8 CPGB members' aggregate, which debated and unanimously agreed a resolution on the open letter. Chris does not appear to have read this resolution, which, far from writing off the signatories as social-imperialists, recognises their motivation as that of "legitimate disgust at Galloway's support for and organised links to the tyrannical theocratic regime in Iran". However, "in focussing solely" on Galloway, the open letter did not clearly oppose "the operations of the imperialists" and therefore "risks associating" members of Hands Off the People of Iran and Communist Students who signed the letter "with the Eustonite/Alliance for Workers' Liberty camp". It was for this reason first and foremost that the open letter was a "political mistake" ('Aggregate resolution', May 12).

While the signatories were not motivated by social-imperialism, it is in fact the case that the open letter had all the appearances of an 'AWL-type political attack on Galloway'. It is *exactly* the style of the AWL to one-sidedly focus on the failings of a single left candidate and to claim that this made him uniquely unsupportable, while saying not a word about the failings of any other left candidate. No wonder the AWL reproduced the open letter on its website. The very fact that this occurred should have made comrade Strafford stop and think.

He implies that the *Weekly Worker*'s support for Galloway was not really "critical" - we failed to expose his "awful politics and links with the Iranian regime … for this election". In reality we did not actually give him - or any other left candidate - much support (in the way, say, that *The Socialist* campaigned week after week for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition). We published just two articles before the election explaining our attitude and in both we gave equal space to condemning Galloway's links to the Iran regime as to explaining why he should be supported nevertheless.

We did not place "extra conditions" on the Scottish Socialist Party and Socialist Labour Party by recommending a vote for Galloway's Coalition Against Cuts in Glasgow rather than them. We made it clear that all three met our conditions for support for working class anti-cuts candidates. Despite their obvious failings, the election of any of their lead candidates would have resulted in a small advance for the working class cause. All three would have provided some kind of working class voice against the cuts (as well as against imperialist wars, etc). But workers obviously could not vote for all of them, and only Galloway had any chance of being elected (and at least his campaign could be seen as part of the Britain-wide working class resistance rather than the Scottish separatism of the SSP). Elsewhere in Scotland there was no point in suggesting which of the three no-hope sectarian campaigns (SSP, SLP, Solidarity) were more worthy of working class votes than their rivals.

It is unfortunate that Chris Strafford accuses CPGB comrades like Jack Conrad of telling "a lie" for stating that Galloway's backing for the Iran regime is similar to the support for Stalinist regimes offered by 'official communists' or the Workers Revolutionary Party for Saddam Hussein's Iraq. In my view all have been truly nauseating and should equally be condemned, and it is rather uncomradely of Chris to accuse his fellow CPGBers of lying for disagreeing with him on this. Personally I think his assertion that "Galloway is a conscious cog in the machine of terror directed at the Iranian people" is an absurd exaggeration (you might just as well accuse Paul Mason of *Newsnight* of being a similar "cog in the machine of terror" of British imperialism). But I do not accuse comrade Strafford of lying for making it.

Finally, let me point out to comrade Strafford the nature of electoral tactics. This means that working class internationalists able to contest an election in Tehran would highlight different aspects of their programme than those contesting in Glasgow. In Tehran their main focus would be the repressive regime, I would suggest, while in Glasgow it would be the cuts, not to mention anti-imperialism. In Iran genuine communists would perhaps give critical support to any working class candidate who demanded the end of the regime, irrespective of serious failings and weaknesses, such as support for austerity measures, for instance.

Contradictory? No. When our class is weak we try to build support for our side by focussing on the key dividing lines, while refusing to be diverted by issues, however important, that are secondary at a given time or place.

Peter Manson
South London

Big lesson

Mike Macnair has pointed out that "there is very little in Marx's and Engels' writings on electoral *tactics*" ('Propaganda and agitation', April 28). He went on: "Engels says that Keir Hardie 'publicly declares that [Irish nationalist Charles Stewart] Parnell's experiment, which compelled Gladstone to give in, ought to be repeated at the next election and, where it is impossible to nominate a Labour candidate, one should vote for the Conservatives, in order to show the Liberals the power of the party. Now this is a policy which under definite circumstances I myself recommended to the English ...'"

This is a massive revelation - that Engels actually supported a vote for the Tories under certain circumstances! The biggest lesson to draw is that electoral strategy and tactics that are correct at one time may not be correct at another.

I was a member of the Militant Tendency, now the Socialist Party, from 1990 to 1998. I fully supported the Scottish turn, establishing Scottish Militant Labour, which was an extremely successful strategy leading to Tommy Sheridan getting elected from his prison cell (for defying the poll tax) to Glasgow city council in 1992. This led on to a few more electoral victories for SML, the establishment of the Scottish Socialist Alliance and the later formation of the SSP.

I left the Socialist Party when it failed to support the establishment of the SSP in 1998. The SSP was a very successful project, winning one seat (Sheridan's) in 1999 and six seats in 2003. Contrary to how it is expressed in the *Weekly Worker*, this was not a failure, despite the disintegration of the SSP after the Sheridan affair.

The best tactics to adopt now are very different - there is a need for a Scottish Revolutionary Socialist Party, as well a broad socialist party like the SSP and Solidarity. Revolutionary platforms of broad socialist parties, including Labour, would also be a massive step forward.

Steve Wallis
email

Fat chance

I learnt a great deal when I attended the Lambeth People's Assembly, organised by Lambeth Save Our Services on Saturday May 21. I heard inspiring contributions from campaigners and trade unionists fighting to retain local services and opposing privatisation and job losses, students learning that their courses will not be continuing the following year, librarians seeking to save reading groups, tenants fighting privatisation and disabled people campaigning to save transport services.

It was a privilege hearing from, Kingsley Abrams, who I understand is the only Labour councillor in London to oppose the cuts to services. For his pains, he has only just been re-admitted to the Labour group on the council. However, his stay is likely to be short-lived, as he pledged to oppose the further waves of cuts and closures planned.

Ted Knight, the former leader of Lambeth council in the 1980s, outlined that the Labour Party should not be meekly going along with the government's savage cuts, but should be working with campaigners and trade unionists and leading the fight to defend jobs and services. Fat chance!

A political campaign across London is needed and the Greater London assembly elections next year will give all those who oppose the cuts an opportunity to register a protest. The Labour Party have abandoned their history of defending the weak and those reliant on council services. This duty must now fall on others.

Lewisham People Before Profit are keen to talk with all those fighting the cuts to services and would like to explore contesting the GLA elections with others.

Nick Long
Nominating officer, Lewisham PBP

PCS conference

Despite Dave Vincent's effort in the *Weekly Worker* to lobby against the Public and Commercial Services union balloting for strike action on June 30 alongside other unions, only two out of over 900 delegates voted against the leadership's plans ('Don't rush - make sure we can win', May 12). Funnily enough, even comrade Vincent voted *for* the motion in the end - despite speaking against it and calling for more patience. Comrade Vincent had been persuaded by conference.

While voting for the motion, I - like many other PCS activists - would criticise the June 30 action from a very different angle: if we are serious about defeating the vicious plans of this Con-Dem government, we need to do much more than call one-day strikes. These are good enough as a 'vote of protest', but not much more than that. The government can easily ride out one-day strikes (even if another larger one follows, as planned, in October).

True, longer strikes might currently see a lower turnout. This has partly to do with the general low confidence and activity of the working class, but also a lack of confidence in the PCS leadership, which for the last 10 years has been run like a fiefdom by the Socialist Party.

Most members, whilst loyal to their union, don't actually believe that the leadership have a strategy to defeat the attacks (which will lead to hundreds of thousands of jobs being lost in the public sector, working conditions further undermined and pension provisions cut). As comrade Vincent reports, the turnout for the NEC elections was just over 10% - though many more members will turn out for strike action. The leadership seems almost paralysed by this low turnout . Because they fear they can't convince members of more militant action, they don't even try. Plus, over the 10 years they have been running the union, they have failed to build up a decent strike fund that could actually finance more long-term action.

In my opinion we need to become much more ambitious in this period. Instead of simply mobilising the whole PCS membership for one-day strikes every few months, it would be much better to organise more targeted and militant strike action alongside it.

For example, could you imagine the damage caused if workers in customs and excise went on indefinite strike? Or if tax collectors refused to work, starving the government of vital income? This would hit them where it hurts. Despite general secretary Mark Serwotka recently saying that "no tactics are off the agenda", this kind of action is unlikely to be called by the SP-dominated NEC.

Unfortunately, the emergency motion on Iran was not heard. The standing orders committee did not regard it as worthy of a conference motion and therefore 'D-marked' it as something that could be dealt with by correspondence. As a delegate I did get the opportunity to speak for the motion by challenging the decision by way of a reference back. But this was only supported by about 80 delegates and so the motion - which opposed all imperialist military action and sanctions, and called for support for the new campaign, 'Freedom for Jafar Panahi and all political prisoners' - did not get onto the main agenda.

Lee Rock
Sheffield

Fish nor fowl

I wish to respond to the characterisation of Platypus, politically, as having affinities with the anti-'anti-imperialist' left, such as the Alliance for Workers' Liberty *et al*. ('Theoretical dead end', May 19). However we have been influenced theoretically by aspects of Moishe Postone's work on Marx's critique of capital, we are not in political agreement.

Platypus, which has been motivated by the diagnosis that the 'left is dead', originated in the era of the anti-war movement of the Bush II years, and our project of "hosting the critical conversation on the left", that we didn't think would otherwise take place, was necessitated by the predictable failure of the anti-war movement, of which we thought its supposed 'anti-imperialism' was the Achilles' heel. We wanted a more effective anti-war and anti-imperialist politics.

In considering the problems of the 'left' today, we discern that they are two-sided, embodied by not only the 'anti-imperialist' left of the US International Socialist Organization *et al*, but also by the 'anti-fascist' left of Christopher Hitchens, Kanan Makiya *et al*. We consider not only Tariq Ali, but also Hitchens, to be important exemplars of today's 'dead left'. We consider the ISO-US *et al* to be sham anti-imperialist, or pseudo-left, just as we would consider Hitchens's claims to be anti-fascist in supporting US imperialism to be pseudo-left (pseudo-liberal).

We take seriously Fred Halliday's characterisation, reported in his interview with Danny Postel ('Who is responsible?' in *Salmagundi* No150-51, 2006, pp 221-240) of his political departure from *New Left Review* and Tariq Ali, as follows: "About 20 years ago I said to Tariq that god, allah, called the two of us to his presence and said to us, 'One of you is to go to the left, and one of you is to go to the right.' The problem is, He didn't tell us which was which, and maybe he didn't know himself. And Tariq laughed. He understood exactly what I was saying, and he didn't dispute it."

We interpret this to mean that both Halliday and Ali turned to the right, or that both are disintegrated (or decomposed) remnants of the death of the left and therefore worth critical consideration. And not only Halliday, but also the aforementioned Hitchens and Makiya, could legitimately claim that they didn't abandon the left so much as the left abandoned them.

The ideal conversation we in Platypus would like to have hosted, when we first launched our project, would have been a debate on the 'war on terror' between Tariq Ali, Alex Callinicos, Halliday, Hitchens and Makiya (with perhaps Slavoj Žižek thrown in for fun). In such a debate, we don't think anyone would have represented the left that the world needs today - hence the need for such a conversation. For we think that they are all wrong and, hence, all 'right'. As a project, Platypus is about exposing and putting forward a need: the present absence of a true left. We don't have answers, only questions.

On the issue of 'imperialism', I dispute the supposed distinction of a voluntaristic (or opportunist) versus structural-historical approach to the problem of, eg, Luxemburg versus Bukharin. I think that Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky found that the 'imperialist' phase of 'monopoly capital' and the changing 'organic composition of capital' (at a global scale) by the turn of the 20th century had been the product of the successes of the workers' movement in the core capitalist countries. They found this success to have advanced the crisis of capital. In other words, the social democratic workers' movement had itself brought about the crisis of capital, or 'imperialism' as capitalism's 'highest' or last stage (Lenin): that is, the eve of revolution. Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky thought that the socialist workers' movement was part of and not extrinsic to the history of capital. This meant, for Luxemburg, that the workers were responsible for the world war and thus historically obligated to bring about socialism and avert barbarism. This was not merely a moral injunction.

Moreover, what the Second International radicals meant by 'imperialism' was inter-imperialism, not core-periphery relations. The emphasis on the latter was the hallmark of the post-World War II new left and its derangement on the problem of global capital in history.

So it is not, for us, a matter of waiting for the world to become entirely liberalised or uniformly bourgeois in social relations before the struggle for socialism can commence (which would indeed be like Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* or *Endgame*), but rather recognition that the problem of 'imperialism' has been a symptom of capital's historical over-ripeness for revolution, at least since 1914-19, if not significantly long before.

When Platypus says that the 'left is dead', what we mean is that the rottenness of the world today is the

historical legacy and responsibility of the left (and the failure of Marxism). As a project, we are neither 'academic' nor 'activist' (neither fish nor fowl), but rather about provoking recognition (blocked by both academicism and activism) of this long overdue and festering task, which we think is found in historical Marxism, but buried under many layers of regressive obfuscation from which it needs to be disinterred.

We don't think that this task can be formulated straightforwardly politically, programmatically, but only indirectly, through pointed and acutely symptomatic conversation that can have a transformative effect ideologically. This will not involve Platypus developing some better theory ahead of better practice, but rather our doing something that will need to be accompanied, in a 'division of labour', by a reinvigorated workers' movement. We think the ideological work we are doing in hosting and pointedly curating the conversation can have an effect, however indirectly, on freeing up and potentially revalorising the idea of socialism and a Marxist approach that we think would be necessary - if for now at some distance from immediately practical questions - for such a workers' movement.

Christopher Cutrone
email

Lost grip

In place of a socialist understanding of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Tony Greenstein once again offers his Arabesque/Islamist narrative in accord with his published ambition to see the "destruction of the state of Israel" ('Re-enacting Nakba crimes', May 19).

In order to delegitimise and demonise Israel, the only democratic state in the Middle East, and support the idea of a unitary Palestinian state, Mr Greenstein uses analogous reasoning and decontextualises history, whilst at the same time arguing as if the Palestinians are the victims and the Jews the persecutors. Worse and morally repugnant are the simplistic parallels between Nazi-fascism and the Israeli state - false and morally suspect. Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu and minister Ehard Barak, we are told, "have been responsible for the murder of thousands of Palestinians", in a comparison with Libya's Gaddafi who, if caught, will be held to account for the use of the military against his own countrymen during the recent revolt for democratic rights. But Israel on May 15 was defending itself against 'a protest of rage', another violent 'intifada', which was designed to incite an attack against Israel. Thus the analogy is clearly false: Israeli Arabs have human rights and the vote and are not comparable with those Arabs in revolt against Arab dictatorships.

In this respect, Netanyahu and Barak are not 'murderers', but defending the state of Israel; just as any democratic state is entitled to defend itself, (and the Israel Defence Forces have as good a record as any progressive nation for their policy of trying to avoid non-combatant fatalities). Greenstein's repeated attempts to make Israel equivalent to Arab dictatorships are simply false, arriving at the notion that the Arab regimes and even Iran "are Israel's reliable collaborators and allies" - stretching the imagination, to say the least. Moreover, we are led to believe that the BBC is a Zionist organisation (world conspiracy of Jews?) whose director is plotting against the Palestinians.

Greenstein is losing his grip. The fact that many trade unions and student unions have started boycotts and advocated the closing down of Israeli/Jewish stores and shops in Europe is largely due to the way in which the left has singled out Israel for delegitimation and demonisation. Many states with demonstrably worse human rights records simply don't register with the left, whilst the left often supports Islamic terrorist organisations and Arab dictatorships. The singling out of Israel for unfair attack has demonstrably anti-Semitic undertones (shutting down Israeli/Jewish stores were Nazi-fascist tactics).

The notion that Israel is the "only colonial settler-state left in the world" forgets the real context of the continuous historical connection of the Jewish people with Israel and the legitimate creation of Israel in 1948. Thus the Islamist notion of the 'Nakba' or 'catastrophe' - used as analogous to the holocaust - is a lie and an insult to every victim of Nazi-fascism persecution and aggression.

Benny Morris, the Israeli historian, has shown that viewing the Palestinians as victims is too simplistic and the historical context does not support Greenstein's Islamist narrative. But this does not satisfy Greenstein's position and so he enlists the idea that Morris is a "Judeo-Nazi". It is, of course, a far more complex picture than can be dealt with in a letter, but suffice to conclude that Mr Greenstein's miseducates and misleads many socialists and communists today, especially the younger generation, who are fed into the arms of Islamists and away from a peaceful and just two-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Henry Mitchell
London

Stolen land

On Nakba Day, May 15, I participated in a demonstration in the north of Israel, 14 kilometres from the Lebanese border. We were a group of about 400 who tried to reach the border with Lebanon, but we were forced to stop by the police. We were allowed to demonstrate for one hour, but then the police tear-gassed us. Around 10 of us suffered very badly following this attack and 22 were arrested. However, compared to other Palestinians and the few Jews who participated in the demonstrations in the Golan Heights, Ras Maroun in Lebanon and Gaza, the price we paid for the right to demonstrate for the Palestinian refugees to return was negligible.

Israel is doing everything to erase the memory of the Nakba. It has removed mention of the fact from its rewritten official history books and a bill proposed by the rightwing Yisrael Beiteinu party stipulates fines for local authorities and other state-funded bodies for simply holding events marking the Palestinian Nakba Day.

Another bill, which succeeded by a majority of 35 to 20, formalises the establishment of admission committees to review the position of potential residents of Negev and Galilee communities that have fewer than 400 families. After its passing there were skirmishes in the knesset, as Ahmed Tibi, member of the knesset for the United Arab List-Ta'al, was not content to compare the bill to South African apartheid legislation, but likened its context to the Wannsee conference, where the Nazis decided on the 'final solution' in 1942.

However, following the May 15 demonstrations and the cold-blood murder of Palestinian protestors, the name 'Nakba' is becoming familiar for many people around the world.

If anyone had any doubt as to the class nature of the Egyptian army, the events in Tahrir Square on Nakba Day showed the real face of the generals. At least 120 people were injured, when security forces fired tear gas and rubber-coated steel bullets at pro-Palestinian protestors who were trying to storm the Israeli embassy. At least 20 people were arrested. Protesters responded by burning tyres and throwing stones.

This incident followed the visit to Egypt by Amos Gilad, a senior Israeli defence ministry official - the first trip by a top Israeli official since the revolution that toppled former president Hosni Mubarak in February. Clearly, just as in Mubarak's days, the Egyptian army is allying itself with Israel and oppressing the Palestinians. This army has to go, to be replaced by a workers' army. For this it is necessary to split it along class lines. The new trade union federation and workers' party must organise workers' militias to defend, among others, the Palestinians and the Copts.

The incident also shed more light on the reconciliation agreement between Hamas and Fatah - struck under the auspices of the Egyptian generals - which aims at putting together an interim Palestinian government. While the reformists present this agreement as a step forward in the struggle against Israel, it is actually a step in the direction of the Oslo agreement.

The Nakba Day events have shown anyone with eyes to see and ears to hear that a key question of the so-called Israeli-Arab conflict is the Palestinian right of return. Netanyahu said that the Nakba Day protests were not about the 1967 borders, but rather about "undermining the very existence of Israel". He is right on that. The demonstrations were not for a mini-Palestinian state, with Israel still controlling 80% of Palestine. They were for the right of the refugees to return to their land. But if that were allowed, the majority of people living in this country would be Palestinians. For this reason Israel is prepared to kill thousands and thousands of Palestinians in an attempt to prevent such an outcome and, as long as Israel exists, the Palestinian refugees will not be able to return.

Yossi Schwartz
Internationalist Socialist League

19th century

I misunderstand Marx, argues Chris Gray (Letters, May 5). However, comrade Gray doesn't explain, even briefly, what this misunderstanding consists of.

Is Marx not associated with the view that production relations are determined by productive forces? Is this not the essence of the theory of historical materialism? Marx argues in *Capital* volume one that men enter into production relations independently of their will and these relations correspond to the degree of development of the productive forces. As I argued before, I believe this view is false, because exploitative production relations are imposed by one class on another using force, and this is backed up by ideology. For Marxism, exploitation was a necessary stage in the development of humanity. I do not think so and the existence of primitive communism refutes the Marxist thesis.

Chris wants to hear any counterevidence to the peak oil thesis. There is counterevidence aplenty in the writings of various free-market economists, who believe that the market will solve the problem. This literature is mostly delusional and hides the fact that the immediate problem is not the end of oil as such, but a decline in supply and the end of cheap oil.

The positive thing about Chris's letter is that, unlike most people on the left, he recognises the need for an urgent, informed debate on the issue. Most communists base themselves on Marxism, a 19th century doctrine which did not realise that the foundation of society is energy. That leads to Marxists underestimating the coming energy crisis.

Tony Clark
email

ACTION

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

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

Radical Anthropology Group
Tuesdays, 6.45pm to 9pm, St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (Camden tube).
May 31: 'Advanced lunarchy: implementing slow time'. Speaker: Chris Knight.

Stop the EDL
Saturday May 28, 12 noon: Vigil against English Defence League provocations, headland, south of Central Pier, Blackpool.
Organised by Blackpool and Fleetwood Unite Against Fascism: http://blackpoolandfleetwooduaf.blogspot.com.

Labour's socialist left
Northumberland LRC: Thursday June 2, 7pm, Ashington Football Club (near Wansbeck Hospital). 'How Labour turned left, how Labour turned right, how Labour begins to turn left again!' Speaker: John McCormack, UCU national committee and Ashington council leader.
Northern Region LRC: Saturday June 18, 11am, Gateshead Civic Centre, Blaydon room. 'The situation in Britain today'. Speaker: Peter Doyle (former Unison full-time official).
Organised by northern region Labour Representation Committee: northern.region.lrc@wilkobro.wanadoo.co.uk.

Miscarriages of justice
Thursday June 9, 11am: Protest - stop miscarriages of justice - free the innocent! Assemble New Canal Street, Digbeth, Birmingham B5 (opposite Old Curzon Street station) for march to CCRC offices.
Organised by West Midlands Against Injustice: westmidlandsagainstinjustice.webs.com.

Drop the charges
Thursday June 9, Friday June 10, 9am: Picket, magistrates court, 70 Horseferry Road, London SW1. Drop charges against protestors.
Organised by Defend the Right to Protest: http://defendtherighttoprotest.org.

No to academies
Saturday June 11, 10.30am to 4pm: Conference, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1.
Stop schools converting to academy status.
Organised by Anti-Academies Alliance: www.antiacademies.org.uk.

Ten years on
Saturday June 11, 9.30am: Conference, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. 'Afghanistan and the war on terror 10 years on'. Speakers include: Tony Benn, George Galloway, Tariq Ali, Lindsey German, Military Families Against the War. Admission: £5 - book in advance.
Organised by Stop the War Coalition: office@stopwar.org.uk.

Cuba: 50 years
Saturday June 11, 9.30am-12.30pm: Annual general meeting, Cuba Solidarity Campaign, Hamilton House, London, WC1. Followed by anniversary event, 2pm to 4pm, with guest speakers from Cuba.
Organised by CSC: 020 8800 0155; office@cuba-solidarity.org.uk.

National Shop Stewards Network
Saturday June 11, 11.30am to 4pm: Annual conference, South Camden Community School, London NW1.
Organised by NSSN: www.shopstewards.net/conference.htm.

Remember Gaza
Sunday June 12, 6pm: Gaza Awareness Conference, Newcastle city centre (venue to be confirmed). Guests include Lowkey, Jody McIntyre, Yvonne Ridley. Proceeds to Ride to Gaza to provide kindergartens in Gaza refugee camps.
Organised by Ride to Gaza: www.ridetogaza.com

City of sanctuary
Wednesday, June 15, 6pm-8pm: Open event to keep Glasgow a place of sanctuary and solidarity, STUC, 333 Woodlands Road, Glasgow G3. Refreshments, crèche available (angela@gcin.org.uk).
Organised by Glasgow City of Sanctuary: www.cityofsanctuary.org.

Save Esol
Sunday June 19, 12.30pm: Demonstrations to save English for Speakers of Other Languages courses.
East London: Assemble Hackney town hall, Mare Street, London E8; **or** Stepney Green, Tower Hamlets, London E1 for march to Esol festival, Bethnal Green Gardens, London E3.
South London: Assemble Windrush Square, Brixton, London SW9 for march to Esol festival, Kennington Park, London SE11.
Organised by London Action for Esol: http://actionforesol.org.

Cuba solidarity
Tuesday June 21, 7pm: Ninth annual RMT garden party for Cuba, Maritime House, Old Town, Clapham, London SW4. With live Cuban band, food and bar.
Organised by Cuban Solidarity Campaign: 020 8800 0155.

Unite the resistance
Wednesday June 22, 6.30pm: Meeting, Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London NW1. Speakers include: Mark Serwotka, Kevin Courtney and Tony Benn.
Called by left union officials and promoted by Right to Work: http://righttowork.org.uk/2011/05/unite-the-resistance.

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- Platypus polemic
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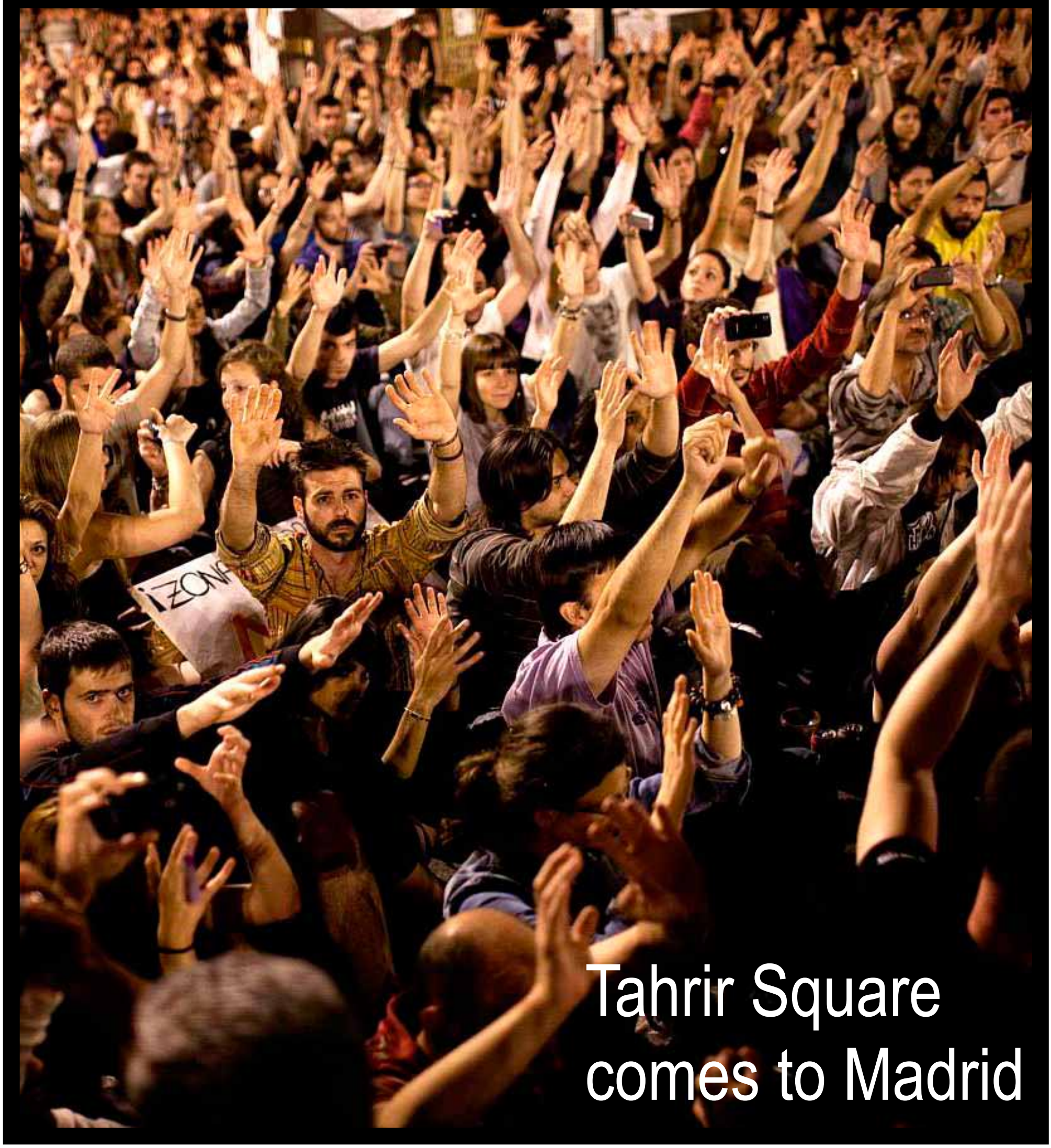

THEORY

The study of history and the left's decline

Dealing with the present demands not useful myths, writes **Mike Macnair**, but a real understanding of the past

Chris Cutrone's two letters responding to my report of the Platypus convention, and my critique of the project, are useful and clarificatory.[1] His presidential address to the Platypus convention posted on his blog is also helpful.[2]

In particular, both the second letter and the address take clearer distance from the so-called 'anti-"anti-imperialist" left' than was apparent from earlier material in the *Platypus Review*. This does not eliminate the question of imperialism as a *theoretical* problem, or, equally, as a *historical* problem in relation to the history of the workers' movement, Marxist theory and the left. But these texts do answer my political concern about this issue in the second of my two articles[3] on the convention. I suggested that Platypus was focussing mainly on the stupidities of 'anti-imperialism'. That implied placing itself in the morally untenable position of opposing loudly the 'left' supporters of the third-world tyrant/reactionary monkeys, while speaking only softly about the 'left' supporters of the 'western' organ-grinders. Comrade Cutrone's letter and address partially reassure me on this front.

The theoretical aspect of my criticism of Platypus about the issue of imperialism as an explanation of reformism and nationalism, as opposed to Lukáscian and 'New Left' explanations, remains. It is unavoidably linked to the history of the workers' movement and Marxist theories, as well as to the general history of capitalism and where we stand today - the question of 'capital's historical over-ripeness for revolution', as comrade Cutrone puts it in his second letter.

If the issues are linked, to work through them demands a degree of separation. I will address in turn the questions *why* understanding the history is important; the problem of *how* to attempt to understand it; the problem of Peter Nettl's diagnosis of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) in which *both* Bernstein *and* Luxemburg are preferable to Bebel and Kautsky, and comrade Cutrone's diagnosis of this as displaying an issue about the 'necessary authoritarianism' of the SPD; and the question of imperialism, as an issue in the pre- World War I socialist movement, and as an issue of the larger history, 'ripeness for revolution', and the diagnosis of our own future.

Memory and history

I begin with something which I have referred to before.[4] Memory is indispensable to conscious engagement with the recalcitrant material world. 'The present' is a concept without a direct referent: rather, it refers to a *presumption*, which we have to make every moment we are awake, that the immediate future will be more or less like the immediate past. We therefore constantly predict the future, and act, on the basis of probabilistic inductive inferences from the past. We cannot avoid doing so. Theories, whether in experimental sciences or in observational ones (astronomy, evolutionary biology and history count among observational sciences), are *systematised from* inductive inferences from the past to the future, not counterposed to them.

From this point of view the study of history is indispensable to politics. In reality, even those bourgeois politicians who deny its significance in public consider in private the historical development of elections, party affiliations and 'public opinion'. Hence, serious engagement with history would be essential, however successful the left was. To refuse it would either be to refuse all understanding, or to adopt *de facto* some unexamined history.

There is a subtle difference between this conception and Platypus's engagement with history and specifically with the history of the movement. Platypus's engagement with history is intimately connected with its particular conception of the *decline of the left*.

Thus Ben Blumberg, introducing a 2009 panel on that issue: "[Platypus] was brought together by a shared realisation that the social and cultural theory of Theodor Adorno and other members of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research *contained the legacy* of the revolutionary Marxism of the antecedent period. This realisation was coupled with another: to claim that Adorno's theoretical ideas were the legacy of the practical politics of Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky put Platypus at odds in numerous respects with the existing left ... *By falsely resolving the problem of theory and practice the left has relinquished the defining feature of its politics and ceased to be the left at all*. This has profound effects on the development of the history of capitalism, in which the left traditionally has acted as a transformative catalyst. Because its politics no longer mediate theory and practice, the left has begun to decompose. Following Adorno, Platypus calls this process historical regression" (emphases added).[5]

Or the panel description at the April convention on 'The Marxism of the Second International radicals': "How were the Second International radicals, importantly, critics, and not merely advocates, of their own political movement? What is the legacy of these figures today, after the 20th century - as Walter Benjamin said in his 1940 'Theses on the philosophy of history', 'against the grain' of their time, reaching beyond it? How did Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky and Lukács contribute to the potential advancement and transformation of Marxism, in and through the crisis of Marxism in the early 20th century? How can we return to these figures productively, today, to learn the lessons of their history?"[6]

These are not histories of the ordinary self-location of politics in the world as it moves. They are attempts at the *redemption* of a 'usable past' on the *assumption* of a total break in political and theoretical continuity. Platypus is not, of course, unique in this. Many tendencies and many authors try to look back to a 'true Marxism', whether this is to be found in Marx without Engels, Marx and Engels without the Second International, the Second International without the Third, the first four congresses of the Third without its later history (mainly Trotskyists), pre-war Trotskyism (Al Richardson and others) or pre-'Pabloite' Trotskyism.

My *Revolutionary strategy* (2008) argues for an attempt to understand where we are, at the level of the practical political problem of left unity, through understanding the history. But it also precisely argues *against* the idea that the film of history can be rolled back (p66) or that there is an uncorrupted historical theoretical moment to be found. There are in my view bad mistakes in Marx and Engels, which were amplified in the Second International, and fundamental errors in the views of the first four congresses of the Comintern, and so on; and these have to be addressed *with the benefit of hindsight* in order to construct a politics for the future.

Equally, the *recent* experiences of the organised left form, for me, part of the basis on which we are to look for a way forward: like the partial strengths of the post-1945 communist parties as working class organisations in spite of their nationalist, bureaucratic and class-collaborationist politics, or the failures of far-left groups in Portugal in 1974-76, or the partial successes of 'unitary' projects like *Rifondazione Comunista* ending in ultimate failure. None are to be ruled out of consideration by political 'original sins' or 'historical regression'.

Historical method

These different *purposes* of historical inquiry for politics have implications for differences in the *method* of historical inquiry. Platypus's distinction from other forms of search for a redemptive retrieval of the lost past is that (following Benjamin and Adorno) what is sought as a 'usable past' is to be a historical *myth*. To use phrases from Benjamin, "setting alight the sparks of hope in the past", "the name of Blanqui, whose distant thunder had made the preceding century tremble", a view of the past which calls forth working class "hate" and "spirit of sacrifice" and makes possible a "leap into the open sky of history".[7]

There is a strange paradox in using such an approach as a critique of a left whose decline is - as is obvious to most people, Platypus included - predicated ultimately on the shadow of Stalinism and its failure. This is that the historical lineage of the role of myth and the "leap into the open sky of history" in fact runs from the part of the Second International left influenced by Sorel and similar thinkers, through the Bogdanov-Lunacharsky *Vperyod* faction in the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, through the 'military opposition' in the Russian Civil War, through elements of the left wings of both majority and minority in the later 1920s Russian Communist Party, to - the adventurism of the first five-year plan and the 'third period', high-period Stalinism, and the Maoism of the 'great leap forward'.[8]

For the argument I have put forward above, in contrast, the purpose of historical inquiry is to grasp the processes of historical change in which we are - unavoidably - embedded in order to make choices between real available options. These political choices are in my view no different in principle from individual choices in everyday life. Memory mistakes and belief in false theories (which are built on inadequately tested claims about the past) can have real and catastrophic implications. My grandmother was lucky not to be run down when, in her 90s, she set out to cycle to town, forgetting that traffic speeds and density on the road passing her house had changed since the 1930s; my mother was less lucky when her belief in treating her 'neuralgia' with homeopathy and other 'alternative remedies' led to late diagnosis of lymphoma.

The phenomenon in which 'official communist' parties in the periphery countries since World War II have believed in strategic alliances with the 'national bourgeoisie', ending with the CP massacred or discredited and marginalised, is, I think, no more than errors of the same type scaled up to that of collective decision-making. In this view, Benjamin's, or Adorno's, philosophies of history and the search for usable myths make such errors *more*, not less, likely.

How do we attempt to get a more accurate grasp of the history in which we are embedded, in order to make better choices?

The elementary principles of historical source criticism (assessing biases of the witness, closeness to the event described, consistency of evidence, corroboration, antecedent probability of the narrative, and so on) are originally derived from legal approaches to evidence of recent events used in court, and the same approaches also form a substratum of the assessment of the reliability of observational and experimental evidence in the physical sciences. In the legal context it is clear that certainty is unavailable and the court *must* act on *probabilistic* information. Scientific and technical breakthrough was made possible when this was accepted in the physical sciences, in place of the 'certain' textual authority of scripture and ancient authors.[9]

In history, which continued to be seen as an art, the breakthrough to source criticism was later and more gradual. Once it had happened, historical inquiry acquired a partially cumulative character, as enquiry in the physical sciences has acquired a *definitely* cumulative character.

Marx is (just) this side of the source-critical watershed in history: hence the concrete documentation of the second part of *Capital* Vol 1, hence the critical notes published as *Theories of surplus value*, hence his elaborate critical notebooks on pre-capitalist property forms, as yet imperfectly published.[10]

The Frankfurt school, in contrast, wanted to *step back* from this approach to one which philosophised from the standpoint of 'critique of what is', but which picked and chose odd snippets of history which would serve its, ultimately moral, purposes. This is evident as much in Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of enlightenment* as in Benjamin on the philosophy of history.

It is for these reasons that in my report I characterised many of the papers at the Platypus convention as "neither quite rigorous philosophy nor quite rigorous history". Watson Ladd in his letter quotes Adorno's comment in *Minima moralia* that "The injunction to practise intellectual honesty usually amounts to sabotage of thought." Comrade Ladd admits that "neither nonsense nor triviality will suffice as modes of thought today".[11] In my opinion, however, the method in Benjamin, in *Dialectic of enlightenment* and in *Minima moralia*, produces precisely occasional interesting *aperçus* buried in a mass of nonsense and triviality. The idea that this method is counterposed to "obtuse French theory" (ie, postmodernism, Foucaultianism, etc) is illusory: it is, rather, a forebear of the literary theory on offer in today's academy.

The question of source-critical method then affects the specific issues of history and theory to which I referred in the beginning: Nettl on the SPD, 'authoritarianism', imperialism, and 'ripeness for revolution.'

Nettl

In the case of Nettl, the issue is that the historian has to be understood as a witness to the research he reports; and it is necessary both to check the report against other witnesses (other historians of the SPD) and, where practically possible, against the primary sources (easier now that so much is online). It is also necessary to evaluate the witness's biases.

Peter Nettl[12] was a child of Viennese émigrés from fascism, and came to the UK in 1936 at the age of 10. Unlike many émigrés, his father had a subsisting interest in a textile firm in Bradford, and Nettl was therefore privately educated. Called up in 1944, he was in 1945 at the age of 21 commissioned as a major in British intelligence, presumably in order to give him sufficient rank to be taken seriously in the interrogation of German prisoners in Berlin, to which he was immediately assigned.

On demobilisation he went to St John's College, Oxford and took the 'accelerated' degree made available to veterans. He obtained a first class and was immediately offered a teaching job at St John's and Brasenose College. However, he took only a one-year tutorship. In this period he published *The eastern zone and Soviet policy in Germany 1945-50* (Oxford 1950). The book is a conventional early cold war piece.

He then went to work in his father's textile firm - initially in Bradford, but thereafter as a global travelling salesman. While doing this job, he published a few pretty orthodox papers on issues in economics,[13] and reviews of German Democratic Republic publications for *International Affairs*. The latter suggests that he may have retained links to the 'intelligence community' in this period.[14]

In 1961 he took a visiting fellow position at Nuffield College, Oxford, where he stayed until appointed in 1963 to a lectureship in politics at Leeds University. 'The SPD as a political model' dates to 1964, two years before the publication of his biography of Rosa Luxemburg (1966). The latter

was followed by *Political mobilisation* (1967), *The Soviet achievement* (1967), which reads Soviet history in terms of Weberian modernisation theory, and *International systems and the modernisation of societies* (1968). In 1968 he was appointed to a professorship in political sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, but died in a plane crash shortly afterwards.

Hanson in his memoir of Nettl describes him as having moved from field to field, and in particular from history (the biography of Luxemburg) to sociology. It is, however, far from clear that the biography of Luxemburg was motivated by a desire to 'do history'. Nor is it a product of sympathy for the political left or for Marxism, of which there is no evidence in Nettl's other work.

Rather, 'The SPD as a political model' shows a primary motivation to understand the SPD-like aspects of nationalist and revolutionary political parties, in broadly Weberian terms, in connection with 'decolonisation' and 'modernisation'. Behind that lies - it can be guessed - practical questions for British policymakers' understanding of and relationships with nationalist 'inheritor parties' after decolonisation. The biography of Luxemburg was a *by-product* of these goals, albeit a very large one.

This is, I think, reflected in the fact that reviews by historians (as opposed to political scientists) of both the Luxemburg biography and *The Soviet achievement* commented that Nettl was quite cavalier in his treatment of those historical facts which appeared to him to be only contingently relevant to the arguments of the books.

A 1980 review essay by Richard Breitman discusses a substantial body of literature on the pre-1914 SPD, which gives sharply different theoretical accounts of the SPD's evolution: witnesses of similar standing to Nettl - ie, non-Marxist historians and sociologists of politics - who do not corroborate his account.[15]

I will not go into depth on direct confrontation between Nettl's account and the primary sources, but there is one small significant point. Nettl treats Robert Michels' *Political parties* (1911) as an unqualified primary source for SPD practice and for what comrade Cutrone calls "authoritarianism". But Nettl takes no account whatever of Michels' political bias: ie, that at the time of writing Michels was a revolutionary syndicalist (after World War I he followed another semi-syndicalist leftist of the pre-war period, Benito Mussolini, into fascism).

'Authoritarianism'

Comrade Cutrone writes in his first letter: "I think Macnair avoids ... the issue I was raising about the inherent unavoidable authoritarianism of late 19th century mass (working class) parties that needed to be worked through by later Marxism (unlike circa 1848), and the problems of which Lenin and Luxemburg were aware, unlike the German Social Democratic Party centre (Bebel and Kautsky) and later Stalinism (including Maoism)."

'Authoritarianism' is a slippery word. Early citations in the *Oxford English Dictionary* are from 1879 - "Men who are authoritarian by nature, and cannot imagine that a country should be orderly save under a military despotism"; and 1882 - "Communists of the 'authoritarian' type."[16] The latter, from Karl Blind, fairly clearly draws on Bakunin's critique of Marx's alleged 'authoritarian' aims.[17]

The first sense of 'authoritarianism' means a politics which denies the legitimacy of political dissent and the possibility of the *accountability* of authorities to those below. It may be military in character, as in the quotation, or clericalist. Modern bourgeois sociologists distinguish *authoritarianism* in this sense from the (worse) *totalitarianism*, meaning fascism, Stalinism or sub-Stalinoid nationalist regimes. The real distinction is that 'totalitarians' engage in land reform (Mussolini, Mugabe) or job creation schemes at capitalist expense (Hitler), while 'authoritarians', like Franco or Pinochet, 'permit a sphere independent of the state': ie, the capitalist market.

The second sense of 'authoritarianism' means, in Bakuninist hands, a politics which admits any sort of authority or binding collective decisions at all. In liberal-libertarian hands, it means any politics in which decisions for the common good are capable of binding 'free individuals', meaning property owners. Non-property owners are left under such a regime with the (perfectly free!) choice of submission or starvation.

Which version does comrade Cutrone mean in relation to the SPD? Nettl means simply that the SPD was not liberal-libertarian: "The English or American notion of limited government, that it might be better to do without certain activities if they involved authoritative regulation or control, was utterly alien."[18]

If what is meant is that the legitimacy of dissent, and accountability to those below, were rejected, Breitman (cited above) discusses Susanne Miller's *Burgfrieden und Klassenkampf* (1974) as showing that the SPD leadership only became authoritarian in this sense *in and after* 1914: ie, because of the choice to support the Reich in the war. In doing so, it raised up the USPD as an opposition.

Engels, in *On authority* (1872), offered a critique of the Bakuninist version. Marx, in his unpublished *Conspectus of Bakunin's statism and anarchy* (1874), makes similar points.[19] The issue was not therefore one which arose after Marx's time.

I do not mean to deny that the SPD was substantially bureaucratised before 1914 - though not, as yet, an authoritarianism (sense 1) or 'totalitarianism' of the bureaucracy like the Luxemburg-Jogiches-Dzherzhinsky Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, Stalinism or the modern '1921 Leninists' (Stalin fans, Maoists, 'orthodox' Trotskyists). Nor do I mean to deny that bureaucratic rule is a real problem facing the workers' movement and the left.

The problem is, rather, what the *alternative to* the dictatorship of the bureaucracy is. If it is to be liberalism-libertarianism, we should give up on any alternative to the present-day social order, because 'It might be better to do without certain activities if they involved authoritative regulation or control' is no more than an ideology of capitalist society.

If it is to be diluted Bakuninism, as in Sorel, Michels and in an even more diluted form the Luxemburg of *The mass strike* or the Trotsky of *Our political tasks* and *Results and prospects*, we should also give up. In the first place, mass-strikism without permanent party organisation has been repeatedly tried and as repeatedly failed. Secondly, as Bakunin was the first to admit, as Luxemburg and her comrades showed in the SDKPL and mass-strikist groups have shown repeatedly since, the attempt to move the masses into action, as opposed to winning them to a political programme, inexorably demands the 'invisible dictatorship', the small and conspiratorial group of *illuminati* which directs the 'spontaneous will to revolt' of the masses.

The option which has not really been tried is *political 'civic republicanism'*. This means the rejection, not of all subordination to the collective, but of *permanent* subordination to decision-makers.[20] It means recognition that we have to take binding collective decisions, and that this will involve delegating individuals as leaders/managers, and so on. But, on the other hand, it means insistence that these people are *subordinated to* the membership (and ultimately the masses) through freedom of information, speech and horizontal communication, and association *against* the existing leadership. In my opinion - not a CPGB view - it also involves *term limits* for leaders and managers, etc, at all levels.

Imperialism

In his second letter comrade Cutrone writes: "Moreover, what the Second International radicals meant by 'imperialism' was inter-imperialism, not core-periphery relations. The emphasis on the latter was the hallmark of the post-World War II new left and its derangement on the problem of global capital in history."

This claim is a commonplace from *somewhere* in the historiography (I have also heard it from Marc Mulholland). The problem is that it cannot really survive confrontation with the primary sources.

In early usage, it is true that 'imperialism' did not mean 'colonialism', but rather the adoption of imperial styles and titles (Louis Napoleon in 1852, Wilhelm I in 1871, queen Victoria in 1877) and of 'Napoleonic' militarism and centralised bureaucracy. 'Colonialism' rather attracted the label, 'colonial policy', in early SPD and Second International debates.

'Imperialism' came to be attached to 'colonial policy' through Joseph Chamberlain's advocacy of colonialism as a solution to 'the social problem' under the name of imperialism. Chamberlain's imperialism was then critiqued in the book of that name by Hobson in 1902, which was rapidly known to the left. Hence, though the SPD debate of 1907-08 was still conducted under the name of 'colonial policy', 'colonial policy' appears as an aspect of 'imperialism' in Hilferding's *Finance capital* (1911). And, as I cited in my second article, Hobson's and Hilferding's usage is the one found in Lenin and Zinoviev, Bukharin, Trotsky and Gorter's books on the causes of World War I.

Umberto Boccioni: continuity in space

The idea that the Second International was unconcerned with "core-periphery relations" cannot survive any look at the 'colonial policy' debates. The whole 'revisionist debate' in a sense began with the Bernstein-Bax exchange of 1896-97 about Marxists' attitude to the colonial expansion of capitalism. Kautsky responded on this specific issue in a three-part series in 1898. The issue flared up again after the SPD's defeat in the 1907 'Hottentot election' - which was, as its name indicates, fought on the issue of the Reich's dirty colonial war in what is now Namibia.

If "the Second International radicals" is to include the Lenin of the war and the early Comintern, the claim is manifest nonsense. Since I have cited some of the relevant texts in a reply to Arthur Bough (Letters, May 12), I will not repeat them here.

Before the passage I have just quoted, comrade Cutrone argues in his second letter that "Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky found that the 'imperialist' phase of 'monopoly capital', and the changing 'organic composition of capital' (at a global scale) by the turn of the 20th century had been the product of the successes of the workers' movement in the core capitalist countries. They found this success to have advanced the crisis of capital. In other words, the social democratic workers' movement had itself brought about the crisis of capital, or 'imperialism' as capitalism's 'highest' or last stage (Lenin): that is, the eve of revolution. Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky thought that the socialist workers' movement was part of and not extrinsic to the history of capital. This meant, for Luxemburg, that the workers were responsible for the world war and thus historically obligated to bring about socialism and avert barbarism. This was not a merely moral injunction."

I would be very interested to see real evidence for this proposition as a claim about what Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky wrote - as opposed to what they *might* have written. My own reading of the texts is that Lenin and Trotsky at least believed that imperialism *made possible* concessions to (sections of) the working class, rather than that it was *required by* the offensive of the working class.

I will admit that there is evidence from the political discourse of bourgeois imperialists, like Joseph Chamberlain, that imperialism was needed as a response to the rise of the workers' movement. The problem is this. The export of capital to colonial possessions and periphery states goes back to Venice and Genoa in the late Middle Ages. The ascendancy of financial capital in Britain long predates the 1870s and is, in fact, a necessity of the *rule* of the capitalist class as such. The peculiar form of 'fusion' of financial and industrial capital which Hilferding identified as a novelty turns out to have remained specific to 'civil law' countries and has never reached the 'Anglosphere'.[21] Extensive welfarism based on the gains of the East India Company goes back to the Dutch Republic.[22] So what is *new* after the 1870s?

Over-ripe?

Comrade Cutrone says that "the problem of 'imperialism' has been a symptom of capital's historical over-ripeness for revolution, at least since 1914-19, if not significantly long before". Though "capital's historical over-ripeness for revolution" is orthodox Trotskyism from the *Transitional programme*, it has two problems in this context. The first is that if it is to describe 'symptoms', those of imperialism, which go all the way back to the creation of the first proto-bourgeois and bourgeois states, the idea of 'ripeness' loses all meaning.

The second is, of course, that Marx's conception of 'ripeness' is - in outline - that "No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed" (preface to *A contribution to the critique of political economy*). And, as I said in my second article, both Moshé Machover and István Mészáros have given us strong reasons to suppose that from this point of view global capitalism was *not* "over-ripe for revolution" at the beginning of the 20th century. To this point comrade Cutrone has not responded.

If so, however, the argument that we are to explain the recent difficulties of *the left and the workers' movement* by capital's "historical over-ripeness for revolution" falls to the ground - even if this "over-ripeness" were to consist in imperialism as a response to the rise of the workers' movement. Rather, we should understand ourselves as in a historical situation which is in a sense akin to that of *bourgeois* revolutionaries between the failure of the project of the city-state in the *signorie* of the late Middle Ages and the breakthrough of the Dutch and English revolutions. Stalinism is used endlessly as a stick to beat us, just as the propagandists of the early modern monarchies (like Shakespeare) told endless stories of the disorder and corruption of Italian politics.

What we need in this situation is not a useful *myth* of the past to inspire the spirit of revolt: it is a real *understanding* of the past in order to make real choices about options in the future ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. *Weekly Worker* May 19, May 26.
2. http://chriscutrone.platypus1917.org.
3. 'No need for party?', May 12; 'Theoretical dead end', May 19.
4. 'Teleology, predictability and modes of production' *Weekly Worker* January 27.
5. http://platypus1917.org/2009/11/18/the-decline-of-the-left-in-the-20th-century-introduction.
6. http://convention2011.platypus1917.org/saturday-schedule.
7. www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm.
8. D Priestland *Stalinism and the politics of mobilisation* Oxford 2007.
9. B Shapiro *A culture of fact* New York 2000.
10. K Anderson *Marx at the margins* Chicago 2010, appendix.
11. Letters, May 19.
12. What follows is partly from the memoir by AH Hanson in TJ Nossiter, AH Hanson, S Rokkan (ed) *Imagination and precision in the social sciences: essays in memory of Peter Nettl* (London 1972) pp1-12 and partly inferences from this narrative and from Nettl's published work.
13. For example, 'A note on entrepreneurial behaviour' (1957), 24 *Review of Economic Studies* 87-94 finishes with the "distorting" effect of high taxation on entrepreneurial motivations.
14. A genealogy website reports a completely unsubstantiated and implausible rumour that at the time of his death he was working for Mossad (http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~prohel/names/misc/bauer1.html). The rumour could reflect a garbled version of links to the British 'intelligence community'. For an ex-officer of British military intelligence working as an international salesman, links to British intelligence are positively likely.
15. 'Negative integration and parliamentary politics: literature on German social democracy, 1890-1933', 13 *Central European History* pp175-97.
16. www.oed.com, quoting *Daily News* June 28 1879; *Contemporary Review* September 1882, p459 (Karl Blind, 'The radical and revolutionary parties of Europe', part 1). A search on 'Karl Blind' on MIA will display Blind's antagonistic relations to Marx at the time of writing.
17. See D Adam, 'Marx, Bakunin, and the question of authoritarianism': http://libcom.org/library/marx-bakunin-question-authoritarianism.
18. *Past and Present* No30, p58.
19. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1872/10/authority.htm; www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1874/04/bakunin-notes.htm.
20. Theoretical analysis in P Pettit *Republicanism* (Oxford 1997); on the relationship of this theory to Marxism, my 'Republicanism and Marxism' *Weekly Worker* May 29 2003.
21. Hillel Ticktin has argued that it is, in fact, a feature of early capitalism: 'Towards a theory of finance capital, part 2' (1986) *Critique* No17, 1-15, especially 9-15.
22. J de Vries, A van der Woude *The first modern economy* Cambridge1997.

Paper of the Communist Party of Great Britain

weekly worker

Chris Cutrone on Benjamin and Adorno, the philosophy of history and the abuse of theory

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Drugs war disaster: legalise all drugs

LETTERS

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

No opt-out

Dave Vincent reminds us once again about the attacks of the last Labour government on the working class (Letters, June 2). Yes, Dave, we know that the Labour leadership is (and always has been) pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist. So when he asks what the trade union link "is delivering for the working class today", the answer is pretty obvious and pretty much the same as it has been throughout Labour's history: not very much.

Dave himself has identified one of the main reasons for this. The "union barons" are more concerned about patronage and possible knighthoods than they are for their members' interests, he writes, which means that the union link "has always acted to dampen down militancy, not get union members benefits". The same barons "urge members to vote Labour in their magazines and do not allow critical letters to be published about this or the link". Union leaders - particularly in Labour-affiliated unions, thinks Dave - exercise a "dictatorship" over their members.

This points to one of the main tasks facing rank-and-file members - irrespective of whether their unions are Labour-affiliated or not, actually: the urgent need to organise in order to hold leaders to account, to ensure they act in the interests of the membership or are replaced. In other words, the problem is not the link with Labour at all, but the *behaviour and unaccountability of the bureaucracy*.

Dave completely writes off the possibility of the left or pro-worker forces making headway in the Labour Party. But he has told us himself why things seem that way and as a result unwittingly indicates *how* things can be changed. We are unable to make headway at present because the union tops *choose* not to pursue pro-worker policies and instead cooperate with the rightwing leadership. As I have said, that is first and foremost a question of *union* democracy and demonstrates the necessity of workers themselves taking control. If we had responsive, democratic trade unions, the leaders would be obliged to fight for change within the Labour Party, not act as the main block against progressive policies.

So there is no short cut in the fight to win a party that really does act in workers' interests - and certainly not in the way the Socialist Party in England and Wales proposes. If the unions under their current leadership broke away from Labour to form a 'genuine' workers' party (in reality a Labour Party mark two), why would the bureaucracy behave any differently? The new party would just be a repeat of mark one.

Dave tries to convince himself that workers "will only vote [Labour] back in if there is no left alternative". But you only have to look at May 5 to see that this is not so. *Sitting* left candidates were voted out in favour of Labour. Dave says: "We need alternative left anti-cuts candidates until the working class come to see the need for a Marxist party." But that is exactly what we had on May 5 in the form of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, whose results he calls "abysmal". No, Dave, standing in elections is not a panacea.

He is correct on the need to "establish credibility". But, once again, how is that to be done? Anything less than Marxism is simply *not* credible. Just what is our alternative to cuts? Keynesianism? No, that would not take the working class forward one centimetre. The "alternative" *is* Marxism.

So Dave's proposal, quoted above, needs rephrasing. We need to fight for a Marxist party in order to stand alternative anti-cuts candidates - if we want them to *be* credible, that is. This fight is central and needs to be fought in all the organisations of the working class. Including in the unions and in the Labour Party. We can no more opt out of the fight within Labour than we can the fight within the unions.

Peter Manson
South London

Organic link

While I generally avoid making comments on issues in dispute on the left 10,000 miles away, my own experience of having lived in Britain in the past, and having been a member of the Labour Party Young Socialists, plus the function and make-up of the New Zealand Labour Party, tends me to agree with Dave Vincent. I think he's quite right to question just what 'organic links' the British Labour Party has with the working class and point out the dangers of confusing the union barons with the class.

I'd also question an idea that Dave's letter touched on, but didn't delve deeply into: Labour Party financing. The lazier elements of the left in NZ argued for years that the Labour Party here was mainly financed by the unions. This simply wasn't true and hasn't been the case for many a year. In fact, it is predominantly financed by the state, through the allocations of parliamentary services funding. Its next biggest source of funding is business donations. Unions here supply a minuscule fraction of the Labour Party's total income. I find it hard to believe that the situation in Britain would be completely different.

Perhaps it's time to look more deeply at how Labour in Britain is funded, in particular to what extent the state underwrites Labour's total income and expenditure. To do that you'd have to investigate not the party's official accounts, but the allocations of parliamentary services, or whatever they are called in Britain, to political parties.

You might just find that, as in New Zealand, the primary 'organic link' Labour has is to the state, just as its primary loyalty link is to managing the capitalist system.

Philip Ferguson
Christchurch

Hairy monster

Peter Manson confirms the CPGB's 'dual' or two-party strategy ('Give up on Tusc', May 26). I have referred to this before (Letters, April 21) and nobody has disputed it - one party for communists and at the same time an 'AN Other' party. Peter suggests an identity for these two parties: "The working class needs its mass Marxist party. But a Labour Party that was an 'instrument of struggle for working people' could play a vital role in bringing together partisans of our class in the fight for workers' power."

This is no abstract sloganeering. The CPGB's Ben Lewis calls for industrial action on June 30, combined with the political demand to join the Labour Party ('Striking together', June 2). Surely this is not an end it itself, but merely a step to some variation on 'Labour to power on a socialist programme'?

No real surprises here. The *British road* of the former CPGB had a dual strategy. This was rejected by the current CPGB in its ultra-left phase. Then the CPGB berated the left for supporting calls for an 'AN Other' party. They argued that true communism stood for one party alone. Fortunately, this stage of 'one-club golfing' passed when the Provisional Central Committee ditched it to back Labour.

I was reminded of the difficulty communists have in criticising anarchist leaders. Since anarchists reject leadership as such, there is no leadership to criticise. One could not criticise the CPGB's argument for an 'AN Other' party simply because there wasn't one. Some of us did not believe that. Now this second party turned up and called itself the Labour Party!

The 'debate' between the CPGB and the Socialist Party is about the 'AN Other' party. On one side we have Miliband's 'New New Labour' party and on the other we have Bob Crow's 'New old Labour' party. Both have fundamental flaws which each side can expose. Dave Vincent did exactly that in last week's letters. What we have is Hobson's choice between two dead-end parties.

Backing the conservative Labour Party means ignoring decades of the practice which contradicts the CPGB theory of Labour as "an instrument of struggle for working people". Peter's view that Labour "could play a vital role in bringing together partisans of our class in the fight for workers' power" is very *Labour Briefing* and more Alliance for Workers' Liberty than the AWL. On the other side, in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, we have the theory of spontaneity, or making it up as we go along. Workers do not need dead-end parties, whether conservative or spontaneist.

It was Peter himself who came up with the alternative in theoretical terms. He produced the slogan of a 'halfway house party'. Of course, he invented this by accident because he wanted a hairy monster to frighten the children. It worked when the lights were off during the dark night of leftism. Today the monster has been banished by the PCC and children can stop hiding behind their fingers.

Nevertheless, like the apple that fell on Newton's head, it either makes us frightened or has us thinking in the right direction. A halfway house is not going back to the past in the search of true Labour. It is going forward at least halfway to where we want to be. Since a democratic republic is on the road to communism, then it too is a clue adding to what Peter started. A halfway house party must be a republican party. If this is a working class party, then it is the republican party of the working class. Therefore, neither the Labour Party nor Tusc are halfway houses. If they are houses at all, they are prison houses of the old constitutional monarchy.

Steve Freeman
email

Can't consent

Grant Williamson (Letters, June 2) has very strong opinions on the definition of rape. He states: "… forcing a person *against their will* by physical force, threat or other coercion to have sex when they don't want to. That *is* what rape is." He relies on a 'common sense' notion of rape; 'common sense' is notoriously likely to be based on reactionary ideas.

The current legal definition rests on the question of consent, not physical force, because the victim's willingness to potentially sustain further injury in a fight is not on trial. The onus is on the (overwhelmingly usually) man to have a reasonable belief that the (overwhelmingly usually) woman consented to his actions. This emphasis on consent is why people under 16 are described as having been raped - because they do not have the capacity to consent, just as they can't consent to surgery or getting tattoos.

But Grant does not discuss our attitudes to young people's sexuality outside of this narrow legal framework. He does not define what he means by 'sex', but, under the previous legislation which he seems to think was better, it meant 'penis in vagina'. Not 'broken bottle in vagina' (a disturbingly common phenomenon), not 'penis in mouth'.

It is 'penis in vagina' because rape legislation was originally a form of property law, not concerned with injury to the victim so much as damage to her husband's property: her capacity to produce legitimate heirs to inherit the rest of his property. By shifting the narrow definition of 'sex' to one of considering the damaging physical and psychological effects of sexual violence, the (only partially successful) attempt was made to address the experiences of victims more sympathetically. Obviously, reducing women's sexual behaviour to granting or withholding permission to have things done to us is extremely limited, but not at the top of many people's list of priorities for change in an area with so many more pressing issues.

From the tone of his letter, Grant seems to believe large numbers of teenage boys are incarcerated for having consensual sex with their girlfriends. I have never seen any evidence of this. I have seen surveys showing that one in three girls are sexually assaulted at school, that 42% of young people in Britain know at least one girl who has suffered physical violence from a boyfriend, and that 40% know at least one girl who has suffered sexual violence from a boyfriend. Equally disturbing are the figures showing that large numbers of young people believe this kind of male violence to be acceptable; 27% believed a boy could expect sex with a girl who had been 'flirtatious' (Amnesty International, 2006). But we are told the real victims are not girls, but young men.

Grant then goes into some detail concerning the high numbers of what he believes to be completely unjustified complaints and convictions of rape. This is an absolutely bizarre interpretation of the facts. In anonymous surveys, around a quarter of women say they have been raped. The majority (80%-90%) of cases are not reported; of those that are, most are not prosecuted, resulting in a conviction rate of about 6%.

I am looking forward to the day when I will read something in a socialist paper written by a man giving his unconditional support to women who suffer male violence. It is a depressing experience to be able to predict the response of the left press as being a series of obfuscation, qualification and minimisation; this paper has reported the Slutwalk circus in terms virtually indistinguishable from the mainstream media. No surprise to find the only way women claiming their right to self-determination is made acceptable is when its dominant image is one of sexual availability.

More than two women a week are killed by their male partners in this country; all we get from the left is the resentful defence of male privilege and some feeble hand-wringing. It is insulting to focus on an abstract aim of 'left unity' when you are prepared to tolerate this level of male violence against women in virtual silence.

Heather Downs
email

Political status

There will be a lobby of Sinn Féin's conference marking the 30th anniversary of the hunger strike at 12 noon on Saturday June 18 at London Irish Centre, 50-52 Camden Square, London NW1. We will be calling Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness to support the demand for political status now.

The hunger strike shaped the course of history, says Gerry Adams in the blurb for Sinn Féin's conference, implying that the hunger strikers would have supported the Good Friday agreement (GFA) and Sinn Féin's acceptance that the conflict was about loyalism's 'legitimate concerns' (that they might have to concede equality to nationalists) and not about the occupation of the six north-eastern counties of Ireland by the armed forces of British imperialism.

Stiofán Ó Morna has written a horrific account of what happened to Harry Fitzsimmons in Maghaberry on May 29: "Harry's cell was entered by the riot squad; there had been no confrontation, no exchange of words, just brutality. His glasses were smashed into his face with such force that Harry believes there may be glass in his eyes. He said it is definitely in the multiple lacerations in his face. The thugs held him, while others punched, kicked and tore his clothing from his body."

Now tell us that Bobby Sands and his comrades would not have championed the right to political status for Harry and all his comrades in Maghaberry and elsewhere today. This conference cannot even mention that there are Irish prisoners-of-war today - in the exact same position, fighting the exact same battles as 1981 and the years preceding and following those hunger strikes.

But there is inevitable resistance. 'Dissident' republicans recognise that British imperialism is dividing the Irish people by force and continue to fight for the expulsion of the forces of the crown.

The fight for political status is intensifying inside the prisons - the very thing that the 10 hunger strikes died for 30 years ago, which was abandoned 13 years ago with the signing of the GFA. The *Belfast Telegraph* reports from Maghaberry: "The jail protest is about a number of issues - strip searches, lock-up times and freedom of movement inside Roe House, where on two landings more than 30 dissident prisoners linked to a number of groups are held … Some of those prisoners are now involved in a so-called dirty protest. Others have been involved in 'hand-to-hand fights' with prison officers in recent days" (May 26).

The GFA has not improved the relationship between the communities in the north of Ireland. In Belfast, according to Henry McDonald in *The Guardian*, "There are now 80 permanent barriers dividing loyalist and nationalist areas of the city, according to a report by the Community Relations Council in Northern Ireland. In 1994, when the troubles were declared over, there were 26" (July 28 2009).

The GFA has legitimised sectarian bigotry. This has made the unification of Ireland far more difficult. We demand that the participants in this meeting take their responsibilities to today's republican prisoners seriously, fight for their political status and that Sinn Féin cease imposing severe economic austerity on the working class and the poor, which is bound to exacerbate community tensions.

Gerald Downing
email

Facts

A couple of factual points regarding JP Nettl and his political sympathies ('The study of history and the left's decline', June 2). Firstly, he was a supporter of the Labour Party. I heard him address a Labour Party election meeting in 1959 in Shipley. Secondly, he contributed a book review to *International Socialism* in 1964 (www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/isj/1964/no016/nettl.htm).

Ian Birchall
email

DEBATE

The philosophy of history

Chris Cutrone responds to Mike Macnair

Mike Macnair's critique of Platypus takes issue on the philosophy of history of Marxism ('The study of history and the left's decline', June 2). I would like to clarify this, and the senses in which I used the terms 'authoritarianism' and 'imperialism' in my letters of May 19 and May 26, in response to Macnair's two articles written after his attendance at the Platypus 2011 convention in Chicago.[1]

Historiography of Marxism

First, however, I would like to address the issue of historiography with respect to the German Social Democratic Party in the 2nd International era. Carl E Schorske[2] and James Joll[3] are, among others, important historical sources for my and other Platypus members' views. But I do not think that what Macnair calls a "source-critical" approach to history should be attempted with reference to historians' biographies, which does not clarify but potentially compounds the problem of philosophy of history.

On JP Nettl, I would point to his substantial essay on 'Ideas, intellectuals, and structures of dissent'.[4] I dispute Macnair's characterisation of Nettl's concerns. I think Nettl's biography of Luxemburg was his life-work and not ancillary. Nettl was a liberal/non-Marxist, so there are perhaps some issues to be taken with his work on Luxemburg, but Nettl's views as a political scientist were drawn from his long and close study of Luxemburg and her relation to Marxism, not applied by Nettl to Luxemburg from elsewhere. For him, the history of Marxism raised questions about the possibilities of politics *per se*. Hence, the importance of Nettl's argument.

Thus, his article on 'The German Social Democratic Party 1890-1914 as political model'[5] argued that Luxemburg's views, as expressed in *Reform or revolution?* and *The mass strike*, among other writings, were not actionist, but concerned with the transformation of the SPD, in which the Marxist left had a stake. Luxemburg and Lenin were not opposed to the formation of workers' political parties as necessary instruments of emancipation, but they were aware of the dangers inherent in this, from a Marxist perspective on the historical development of capital, in which such workers' organisations (including labour unions) were inevitably bound up. In other words, how, for example, the SPD was a phenomenon of the history of capital, or, more precisely, how the workers' movement for socialism was part of the historical development of capital, and did not somehow oppose it from outside.

In this sense, there was an affinity of Eduard Bernstein's views on 'evolutionary socialism' with Luxemburg's, but they drew the opposite political conclusions: where Bernstein found the transformation of capital through reforms to be ameliorative, Luxemburg found a deepening crisis. This was Luxemburg's thesis in *Reform or revolution?* - only reformists separated social reform from political revolution, because Marxism recognised that reforms deepened the crisis of capital and made revolution not less, but more necessary.

Benjamin and Adorno

I dispute Macnair's characterisation of Benjamin's and Adorno's philosophy of history as attempting to generate "useful myths".[6] Rhetorical and literary style aside, Benjamin and especially Adorno were rigorous Marxists and Hegelians who engaged the issues of 'historical materialism', as manifested after the failure of Marxism. Benjamin and Adorno were not postmodernists *avant la lettre*, despite their spurious late pomo popularity. Rather, Benjamin and Adorno, like Lukács and Korsch (from whom they took direct inspiration), followed Luxemburg's and Lenin's judgments about the crisis of Marxism as the crisis of bourgeois society that Marxism itself, as part of the ideology and practical political leadership of the international social democratic workers' movement, had brought about.

Benjamin and Adorno challenged the linear-progressive conception of history, recovering from the history of Marxism what might appear to be an obscure point, but one addressed, for example, by Plekhanov as history moving in a "knotted line," and by Lenin as history moving in "spirals" of repetition and crisis.[7] This Hegelian-Marxist approach to the dialectics of history was digested usefully by Lukács, as a discussion of historical "moment" and "process" in 'Tailism and the dialectic' (Lukács's unpublished 1925 defence of *History and class consciousness*).

Paul Klee's *Angelus novus*: according to Benjamin, looking upon the unfolding catastrophe with horror

Hegel and Kant

The Hegelian - and Kantian - point is that the relation between theory and practice is not one of empirical deduction from trial and error, in which an always imperfect theory is corrected, but 'inductive', in that the concrete 'material' object of practice is the concretisation of abstractions, and, furthermore, the object of practice is indeed first and foremost the human subject: ie, the 'subject-object' of transformation.

The question is the adequacy of the relation of theory and practice. Metaphysical ('theoretical') categories refer not to a world extrinsic to human subjectivity, but to the world constituted socially in and through such categories, which are always eminently practical as well as theoretical. So, in the most pertinent example, the 'commodity form' is, for Marxists, a category of social relations, which gives it an effective *social* reality, different from physical nature. Macnair seems not to have attended to the Kantian revolution in philosophy, from which Hegel, Marx, Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno followed.

How this matters for the philosophy of history is that history is not a compendium of past facts, but a *social relation* of the 'present' with itself. The past is not 'past' but present, and present 'historically'. So, for Benjamin and Adorno (following Lukács and Korsch, who, in turn, followed Lenin, Luxemburg, and Marx and Engels on this point), the question was how to reckon the history of Marxism and the greater socialist workers' movement as *symptomatic expression* of the history of capital, or how the 'proletariat' was and could become the transformed 'subject-object of history'. Lukács's term for the self-alienated character of this 'subject-object' condition of the working class in capital was 'reification'. 'Reification' referred not to the workers' quotidian consciousness in capitalism, but to the 'class consciousness' of the workers, as expressed by social democracy (and 'Marxism') at its height. For Lukács and those who followed, 'reification' meant Kautsky.

Abuse of theory

Nettl has a great line about how Kautsky attempted to "invest certain observed phenomena with the normative sanction of Marxist theory". Nettl cited Parvus against Kautsky: "All the guts knocked out of [Marxism]. Out of Marx's good raw dough Kautsky made *Matzes*".[8] Kautsky abused theory, making it serve as justification or rationalisation - as most 'Marxists' do - rather than as a provocation to the self-reflection of consciousness, in the Hegelian sense.

While it may be tempting to oppose such apparent static/immobilised (or 'contemplative') consciousness with action(ism), Lukács knew well that the opposition of static and dynamic was an antinomy of capital itself, that capital moved through a dialectic of the antinomy of the dynamic and the static in history. This is where the recovery of the Hegelian dimension of Marxism was critical: Marxism itself had become 'vulgarised' in its self-understanding, and had failed in taking a dialectical approach to itself as a historical phenomenon, as a symptom of the history of capital. Marxism had succumbed to the 'bourgeois' (pre-Kantian) view of (linear) progress through trial and error, the asymptotic view of knowledge, in which, as Benjamin put it, mordantly citing, in his 'Theses on the philosophy of history', Dietzgen as pathological example of social democratic progressivism, "Every day our cause becomes clearer and people get smarter." History has proved otherwise.

Philosophy

Benjamin's and Adorno's challenge to such a 'progressive' view of history, which they thought was ideologically blinding, was not irrationalism any more than Hegel was. It does not call for "myth", but a different philosophy of history than the empiricist-deductive one. Dialectics is not a matter of estimating probability, but grasping inherent possibility in history.

As Adorno put it, in his 1942 essay 'Reflections on class theory', in response to both Benjamin's 'Theses' and Marx's and Engels' *Communist manifesto*, "According to [Marxian] theory, history is the history of class struggles. But the concept of class is bound up with the emergence of the proletariat ... By exposing the historical necessity that had brought capitalism into being, political economy became the critique of history as a whole ... All history is the history of class struggles because it was always the same thing: namely, prehistory. This gives us a pointer to what history is. From the most recent form of injustice, a steady light reflects back on history as a whole. Only in this way can theory enable us to use the full weight of history to gain an insight into the present without succumbing in resignation to the burden of the past. [Marxism has been praised] on account of its dynamism ... Dynamism is merely one side of dialectic: it is the side preferred by the belief in practicality ... The other, less popular aspect of dialectic is its static side ... The law that, according to the Hegelian dialectic, governs the restlessly destructive unfolding of the ever-new consists in the fact that at every moment the ever-new is also the old lying close at hand. The new does not add itself to the old, but is the old in distress."[9]

Authoritarianism

This brings me around to the issues of authoritarianism and imperialism, which have different usage for me than the colloquial ones. Adorno co-authored the famous study on *The authoritarian personality*. This followed from the earlier Frankfurt School *Studies on authority and the family*.

A commonplace misunderstanding of Frankfurt School critical theory is that it attempted to synthesise Marxist and Freudian psychoanalytic approaches, but this view is mistaken. Rather, Freudian psychoanalysis was itself taken by Adorno *et al* to be a symptom of the historical development of capital. Freud's categories were taken to be descriptive and then resituated, critically, in a Marxian view of historical development of society. In this view, Marx was not ignorant of Freudian insights, but rather it was only as a function of the later social-historical development of capital that human 'psychology' appeared as it did to Freud.

A contemporary of Benjamin and Adorno, Wilhelm Reich, in his early work on 'Ideology as a material force', published later in his book *The mass psychology of fascism* (1933), pointed to how Marxism had failed to apprehend the 'progressive' character of fascism; in other words, how fascism had expressed, however pathologically, the social-historical transformation of capital in the early 20th century better than 'vulgar', economic-determinist Marxism had been able to do. Hence, fascism's ideological and political victory over Marxism. For Reich, (the failure of) Marxism was responsible for fascism. Fascism expressed the workers' 'fear of freedom', which Marxism, in its false rationalism of 'economic interest', had failed to overcome. Workers had a subjective, 'psychological' interest in unfreedom that Marxism needed to address.

What this meant to Benjamin and Adorno, following Lukács's view on reification, was that Marxism had failed to address authoritarianism dialectically, as a function of the transformation of capital. In the Marxian view, the workers' movement for socialism is itself the most important 'self-contradictory' and self-alienated phenomenon of the history of capital. This is why Marx began with the critique of socialism, or, why the 'critique of political economy' is the critique of the necessary and symptomatic consciousness of the socialist workers' movement.

Imperialism

What I raised in my May 26 letter concerning the changed organic composition of capital is this: that the 'mass' proletarianisation of the core capitalist countries was the result, as Marx discussed in *Capital* Vol 1 on 'the working day', of politically variable social conditions of wage labour that, with increased worker empowerment, cause a shift from variable to constant capital, or from labour-time-intensive sweatshop to automated machine production, requiring ever less labour input and resulting in ever greater value-crises.

This, in turn, affected the conditions of colonialism. Whereas colonies in the classical bourgeois era of the emergence of modern capital were sites of market expansion, in the late era of 'imperialism' or 'monopoly capital', colonies become raw material resource-extraction zones feeding metropolitan industry. The humanity of not only those who were thus colonised, but also of the metropolitan proletariat hence became superfluous - not even a 'reserve army of unemployed', but a fascist rabble, subject to more or less desperate authoritarian politics. This was already true of the post-1848 world Marx addressed in Bonapartism (also evinced contemporaneously by Bismarck and Disraeli), but became even more so subsequently. The question is why the workers supported authoritarian politics, and how the workers' movement for socialism was not free of this effect. (In this sense, Hayek's critique of socialism in *The road to serfdom* is apposite.[10])

This is the world in which we continue to live today, but without the proximal history of the late 19th-early 20th century social democratic workers' movement and its Marxist political leadership that, in a 'dialectical' (self-contradictory) way, participated in the history that brought these conditions into being - producing the need for world revolution that is Marxism's legacy ●

Notes

1. M Macnair, 'No need for party?' *Weekly Worker* May 12; and 'Theoretical dead end', May 19.
2. C E Schorske *German Social Democracy 1905-17: the development of the great schism* Harvard 1955.
3. J Joll *The Second International 1889-1914* London 1974.
4. Collected in P Rieff (ed) *On intellectuals: theoretical studies, case studies* New York 1969.
5. *Past and Present* No30, April 1965.
6. M Macnair, 'The study of history and the left's decline', June 2.
7. See Lenin's 1915 *Granat Encyclopaedia* entry on Karl Marx.
8. P Nettl, 'The German Social Democratic Party 1890-1914 as political model' *Past and Present* No30, April 1965.
9. T Adorno *Can one live after Auschwitz? A philosophical reader* Stanford 2003, pp93-95.
10. F Hayek *The road to serfdom* Chicago 1944.

Paper of the Communist Party of Great Britain

weekly worker

Platypus debate: a common language is needed for the left to talk, writes Mike Macnair

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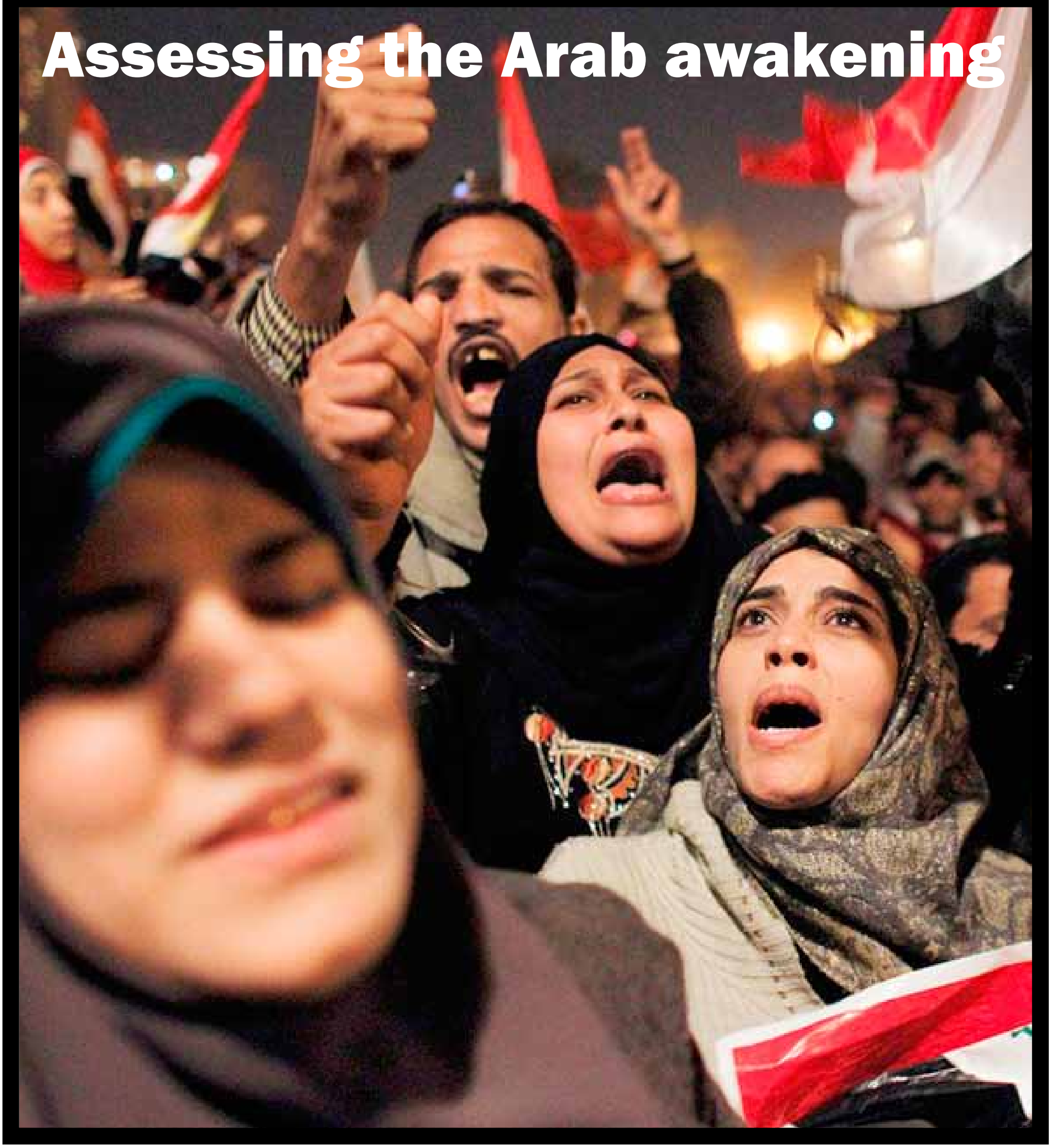


Assessing the Arab awakening

DEBATE

Divided by a common language?

The Frankfurt school methodology employed by Platypus is worse than useless, argues **Mike Macnair**

The US Platypus grouping aims, as its comrades have told us before, to "host the conversation" about the past and future of the left (in the group's own terms, about the left's non-existence and necessity).

Conversation, however, requires mutual comprehension, or - to put it another way - some degree of common ground. If I address you in Latin and you reply in Japanese, but neither of us understands the other language, we are attempting to interact, but it would be bizarre to call this attempt a "conversation".

We may, for that matter, be 'divided by a common language' (as is commonly said of Britain and the US). For a simple example, the 'No solicitors' sign not uncommonly found on building entrances in the US bans door-to-door sellers, not lawyers. If we use the same words for different entities or processes, we will talk at cross-purposes.

I raise this issue because comrade Cutrone's response to my criticisms concludes by attempting to explain specialised senses in which he uses the terms 'authoritarianism' and 'imperialism'.[1] In both cases the senses he uses are, in my opinion, unhelpful.

The underlying problem is to find common ground from which conversation is *possible*. I have argued before that there is negligible chance of the left finding such common ground on the basis of seeking *philosophical* agreement.[2] This problem is *more* acute in relation to Platypus, precisely because the Hegelian commitments make the philosophical argument more 'closed' to ideas and information from its outside than more conventional forms of Hegelian Marxism.

For this reason, I am not going to engage directly with comrade Cutrone's epistemological claims about the so-called "Kantian revolution in philosophy" (which in my opinion is merely a part of the process of transition from enlightenment to counter-enlightenment thought), except very briefly at the end of this article. In addition, to elaborate on the politics of epistemology and theoretical method from Locke and Spinoza to the present would take too long and too much space for now.

In my May 19 article, 'Theoretical dead end', I attempted to find this common ground necessary to any conversation: in the project of general human emancipation. This is a project which - as an aim - we in CPGB, and the whole global self-identified Marxist left, share with Platypus.

Indeed, in a certain sense the common ground goes further. The self-identified 'anti-imperialist left' advocates *de facto* alliance of the left with 'resistance' to the US even if it is clericalist (the Iranian regime) or Stalinoid shading into hereditary monarchy (the Gaddafi family-led Jamahiriya in Libya, the Assad family-led form of Ba'athism in Syria). The self-identified 'anti-fascist left' (Eustonites, Alliance for Workers' Liberty and so on) advocates *de facto* alliance with the 'western democracies' against the clericalist and Stalinoid-monarchist regimes and movements. Platypus comrades say that both sides have abandoned the project of general human emancipation (though their fire has, at least until recently, been most heavily concentrated against the 'anti-imperialist left'). CPGB comrades, I think, *agree* that both the 'anti-imperialist left' and 'anti-fascist left' represent political dead-ends. Here is, in principle, a degree of common ground which could represent a starting point for a conversation.

For it to be a possible starting point does, however, require us to be speaking broadly the same language. And from comrade Cutrone's June 9 article it seems that we are speaking different theoretical languages.

Imperialism

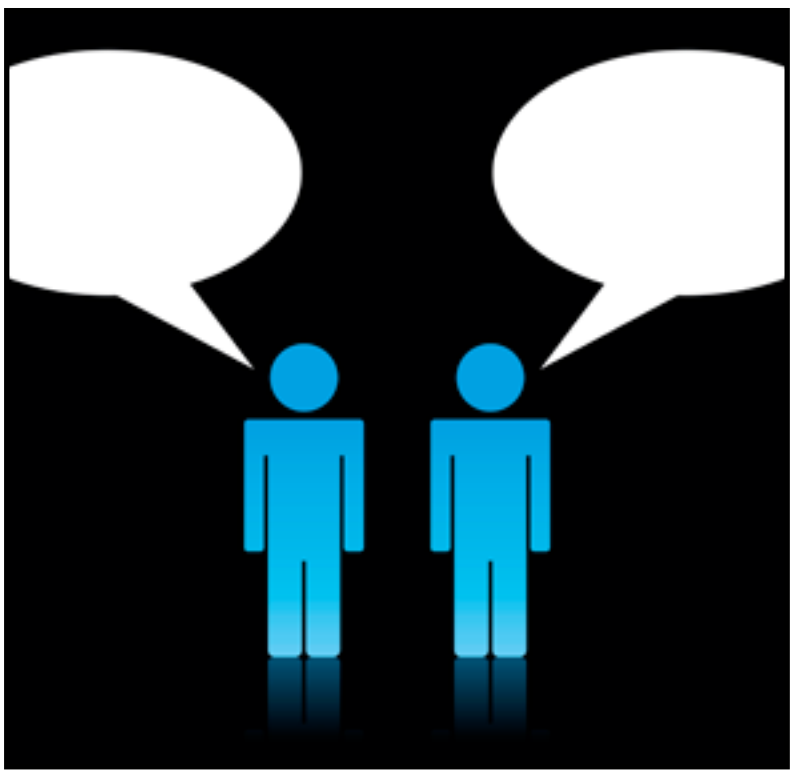
On imperialism, it is regrettably necessary to trace through the shifts in the arguments. In my May 19 article I used 'imperialism' in the way it has been used conventionally on the left since - at the latest - World War I: to mean the systematic subordination of some nations to others, connected with economic superexploitation. I argued, first, that as a matter of politics the project of general human emancipation required upfront public opposition to this systematic subordination and not *only* to domestic forms of subordination.

Secondly, I made the point that the Hegelian Marxist explanation of the 'crisis of Marxism' was *opposed to* the explanation of reformism in terms of the effects of imperialism - in the sense of the ability of states to redistribute economic gains from the subordination of other countries - offered by an important part of the 'Second International lefts': Lenin, Zinoviev, Trotsky, Bukharin and Gorter, among others. I suggested that Bukharin's version at least had more *explanatory power in relation to the concrete history* than Lukácsian or other Hegelian Marxist accounts of the 'crisis of Marxism'.

In his May 26 letter comrade Cutrone responded to this aspect of my argument (1) that "Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky found that the 'imperialist' phase of 'monopoly capital' and the changing 'organic composition of capital' (at a global scale) by the turn of the 20th century had been the product of the successes of the workers' movement in the core capitalist countries" and (2) that "what the Second International radicals meant by 'imperialism' was inter-imperialism, not core-periphery relations. The emphasis on the latter was the hallmark of the post-World War II new left and its derangement on the problem of global capital in history."

My June 2 reply was largely addressed to issues of *historical* method, which engage the epistemological question, and why these should matter to the political left.[3] I responded to the specific points on imperialism with the observations as to point (2) that, though this is a commonplace in the historiography, it cannot survive confrontation with the primary sources; and, as to point (1), that "I would be very interested to see real evidence for this proposition as a claim about what Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky wrote - as opposed to what they *might* have written." I went on further to argue that the symptoms of imperialism go back to the beginnings of capitalist class rule, and to ask the question: (3) "So what is *new* after the 1870s?"

Comrade Cutrone's June 9 article does not reply to any of these points. Instead, he steps sideways to a different argument. I will, therefore, take him as *conceding* (1) that there is no evidence in the writings of Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky for his reading of their views on imperialism; and (2) that I am correct that the 'Second International radicals' *were* concerned with core-periphery relations, not just with 'inter-imperialism'.



Let's talk

I do not take him as conceding the third point, since, though he has not attempted to answer it, his new point attempts to reassert the idea of 'imperialism' as a response to the rise of the workers' movement in a different way.

Comrade Cutrone's new point is that:

"[T]he 'mass' proletarianisation of the core capitalist countries was the result, as Marx discussed in *Capital* Vol 1 on 'the working day', of politically variable social conditions of wage labour that, with increased worker empowerment, cause a shift from variable to constant capital, or from labour-time-intensive sweatshop to automated machine production, requiring ever less labour input and resulting in ever greater value-crises.

"This, in turn, affected the conditions of colonialism. Whereas colonies in the classical bourgeois era of the emergence of modern capital were sites of market expansion, in the late era of 'imperialism' or 'monopoly capital', colonies become raw material resource-extraction zones feeding metropolitan industry. The humanity of not only those who were thus colonised, but also of the metropolitan proletariat hence became superfluous - not even a 'reserve army of unemployed', but a fascist rabble, subject to more or less desperate authoritarian politics."

This side-step *dodges* both the political issue of the attitude of Marxists to the subordination of some nations to others, and the issue of the relative explanatory power of Hegelian Marxist accounts and of the theory of imperialism in relation to the 'crisis of Marxism' around 1900. It does so by shifting the issue into that of 'authoritarianism' - to which it will be necessary to return separately later.

The argument is independently false, for two reasons. The first concerns the shift from variable to constant capital. If this were *primarily* a response to the rise of the workers' movement, we would expect to see it *first* emerging as the workers' movement is strengthened and begins to make an impact on wages and the length of the working day. But in fact new, labour-saving technology involving a relative increase in constant capital already began to develop under conditions of wholly unfree labour in the sugar-cane industry, and of semi-free labour in cotton mills - to a considerable extent worked by the forced 'apprenticeship' of unemployed youth under the old Poor Law.[4]

Equally, we would expect to see old labour-intensive technology exported to the periphery, where labour is *prima facie* cheaper; but in fact, though this does happen, we also see new *capital*-intensive technology exported to the periphery (for example, railways in the 19th century).

Why? The answer has two aspects. The first is that the working day is not only subject to social limits, but also to a physical maximum; and the wage is also subject to a physical minimum of subsistence goods. Suppose capital succeeds in driving wages down to this minimum and hours up to this maximum, it will *still* be the case that improving the productivity of labour will lead to an increase in relative surplus value.

The second is that capitals are, in fact, in competition with one another, and the first capital to introduce technology which improves labour productivity will therefore gain not only improved relative surplus value, but also an improved share of total profits relative to other capitals. Hence each individual capital has an interest in introducing labour-saving technology even if absolute surplus value is already maximised.

Secondly, the early modern 'periphery' was *already* "raw material resource-extraction zones feeding metropolitan industry" in the sugar-cane colonies feeding the late medieval Venetian sugar end-processing industry, and *a fortiori* in the eastern European 'second serfdom', which fed raw materials to the Dutch republic and England.[5]

Conversely, however, there is no conflict at all between the colonies being "sites of market expansion" and "raw material resource-extraction zones". Leave aside the market for capital goods in transportation and first-stage processing: if a formerly peasant and artisan population is forced into wage-labour (or even merely into putting out production), domestic production of basic goods will be reduced and a secondary market will be created for food, clothes, etc.

Authoritarianism

This point can be briefer. I said in my June 2 article that 'authoritarianism' can have more than one meaning, and asked which comrade Cutrone was using. I pointed out that unless a Bakuninist or libertarian/liberal sense is being used, the late 19th-early 20th century workers' movement cannot be described as 'authoritarian' without violent distortion.

Comrade Cutrone responds that he is using Adorno's co-authored *The authoritarian personality* (1950) and Wilhelm Reich's *The mass psychology of fascism* (1933; translated 1946); in particular, he paraphrases Reich as arguing that "Fascism expressed the workers' 'fear of freedom', which Marxism, in its false rationalism of 'economic interest', had failed to overcome."

This response, however, does not in the least answer my question about what comrade Cutrone means by 'authoritarianism' *as a political phenomenon*: is 'authoritarianism' to mean a politics which denies the legitimacy of political dissent and the possibility of the accountability of authorities to those below? Or a politics which admits any sort of authority or binding collective decisions at all? Or any politics in which decisions for the common good are capable of binding 'free individuals', meaning property owners?

In fact, it involves him in further difficulties. Following the Frankfurt school, he claims that "Fascism expressed the workers' 'fear of freedom'", and, quoted above, that "The humanity of not only those who were thus colonised, but also of the metropolitan proletariat hence became superfluous - not even a 'reserve army of unemployed', but a fascist rabble, subject to more or less desperate authoritarian politics."

But these claims suppose that the workers actually voted for the fascists - and that they did so because the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) had already habituated them to 'authoritarianism' (whatever that is to mean). The reality is very different. The Nazis did pick up working class voters and supporters - from the countryside and the small towns, among atomised workers who had previously voted for one of the kaleidoscopic array of rightwing parties in the Weimar Republic. However, the urban-industrial core of the support of the SPD and Communist Party of Germany (KPD) was not tempted, even in 1932, by Hitler's rightist demagogy.[6] The Frankfurt school explanation of the victory of Hitler is thus hollow at its core.

At root, explaining the failure of the SPD to defeat Hitler does not in the least require any such theoretical fantasies. Quite simply, sometimes civil war is unavoidable and necessary. The SPD was unwilling to fight a civil war it could have won in 1918-21, and still unwilling even to attempt to fight a civil war in 1933. The KPD's fantasies of 'social-fascism' and 'after Hitler, us' rendered it equally useless. The world, and in particular Europe's Jews and the other targets of the holocaust, paid in 1939-45 the price of the SPD's pacifism and constitutionalism in 1918-21 and 1933. But to call pacifism and constitutionalism 'authoritarianism' would be obvious nonsense.

Evidence

I say here and in relation to imperialism that comrade Cutrone's arguments simply fail to explain the historical evidence. In a sense he responds in advance to this by denying the relevance of the evidence, when he says that "history is not a

compendium of past facts" and that "the concrete 'material' object of practice is the concretisation of abstractions". This latter is a confused version of Marx's argument in *Grundrisse*, chapters 1, section 3, on the method of political economy.

To quote just a little of this argument: "The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse. It appears *in the process of thinking*, therefore, as a process of concentration, as a result, not as a point of departure, *even though it is the point of departure in reality and hence also the point of departure for observation and conception*." (emphasis added); and

"Hegel fell into the illusion of conceiving the real as the product of thought concentrating itself, probing its own depths, and unfolding itself out of itself, by itself, whereas the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is only the way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind. But this is by no means the process by which the concrete itself comes into being."[7]

The problem is that comrade Cutrone's "history is not a compendium of past facts" amounts, in substance, to the denial of Marx's point that the concrete "is the point of departure in reality and hence the point of departure for observation and conception". This denial leads to starting from the abstractions of Hegel's *Phenomenology of spirit*. Instead of working up the perceptible concrete "as a concentration of many determinations", this method works up a *fantasy of* the concrete which is inconsistent with the perceptible and recalcitrant concrete.

"To add verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative", more or less arbitrarily selected corroborating material is added. In comrade Cutrone's account of the SPD this corroborating role is played by Nettl, James Joll's *The Second International* (1955) and Carl Schorske's *German Social Democracy* (1954) - all cold war products, not confronted with the *post*-cold war historiography. This follows Hegel's method in the *Philosophy of right*.[8] The method is, in fact, Hegelian at precisely the point at which Marx broke with Hegel.

Platypus on June 4 held a discussion of my critique. The blurb for the meeting contains the comments that "Marxism could be considered (today, and perhaps also in the past) as either: (1) a guide to action; or (2) a guide to history. We would pose the latter, Marxism as a guide to history, against the typical sectarian 'left' rationale for (or, eg, anarchist or liberal, *rejection of*) Marxism as a guide to action"; and "We would, indeed, maintain (controversially) that Marxism has *always* been primarily a 'guide to history' rather than a 'guide to action', or, more precisely, that it has only been a guide to action through being a guide to history."[9]

The boot is in my opinion on exactly the other foot. It is possible that Platypus might, by "hosting the conversation", serve a useful anti-sectarian purpose in near-future politics. It is also possible that it serves a useful political purpose by hammering home the bankruptcy of both the 'anti-imperialist' and 'anti-fascist' left (though it needs to step up on its critique of the latter). But as a "guide to history" its Frankfurt school methodology is worse than useless ●

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Notes

1. 'The philosophy of history' *Weekly Worker* June 9.
2. 'Against philosopher kings' *Weekly Worker* December 11 2008.
3. For this reason I respond only in this footnote to comrade Cutrone's objections to my comments on Peter Nettl, and to Ian Birchall's points (Letters, June 9) that Nettl was a Labour supporter in 1959 (at the height of the 'Butskellite' Labour-Tory consensus) and contributed a review of Luxemburg's *The accumulation of capital* to *International Socialism* in 1964. On comrade Birchall's points I would refer him to Jim Higgins' 1966 review of Nettl's biography of Luxemburg (www.marxists.org/archive/higgins/1966/xx/luxlen.htm): evidently Higgins did not regard Nettl as in any sense a comrade, though he thought he had "carried out a useful and long overdue service". Nettl's 1964 review, in spite of where it appeared, placed particular stress on Joan Robinson's left-Keynesian critique of Marxist political economy. Comrade Cutrone objects to my consideration of the politics of Nettl's writing apart from the biography as *partially* explanatory of Nettl's interpretive choices in relation to the SPD. I am not persuaded by this objection. I see no reason to suppose that the biography of Luxemburg was Nettl's "life-work" (Cutrone), as opposed to the product of three years' intensive full-time research by a man who was characterised in Hanson's memoir of him as both polylingual and a speed-reader, who was otherwise occupied before 1960, and who produced three more books at great speed between 1966 and 1968. I note, moreover, that comrade Cutrone responds to *this* point about Nettl, but offers no response at all to my citation of Breitman's review of more recent literature on the SPD, which offers other interpretations.
4. Sugar-cane industry: JH Galloway *The sugar cane industry: an historical geography from its origins to 1914* Cambridge 2009. Cotton mills: K Honeyman, 'The London parish apprentice and the early industrial labour market', www.ehs.org.uk/ehs/conference2007/Assets/HoneymanIIB.doc, which refers to a good deal of earlier literature.
5. Sugar-cane: JH Galloway *op cit*. 'Second serfdom': B Kagarlitsky *Empire of the periphery* London 2008, chapters 4-9 is a convenient discussion of one example.
6. D Geary, 'Nazis and workers before 1933' (2002) 48 *Australian Journal of Politics and History* pp40-51.
7. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch01.htm#3.
8. M Macnair, 'Law and state as holes in Marxist theory' (2006) 34 *Critique* pp211-36.
9. www.archive.org/details/PlatypusDiscussionOfMikeMacnairsCritique6411.

Summer Offensive

Hitting the big numbers

"Why hasn't anyone chased me for a regular financial contribution?" PS wonders in a message to me this week. Despite being "not *so* despicably rich, as my bank balance would prove", the comrade - an ex-member of the CPGB - is keen to contribute to the paper, which she reads online (along with 12,568 others last week, by the way). Notwithstanding her criticisms of the details of the party's current strategic orientation, PS feels the need to show her appreciation for the *Weekly Worker*, the tangible manifestation of the political work of that organisation and the way the party 'comes alive' for the vast majority of the comrades in our quite substantial periphery, of course.

LC, another ex-member, wrote in response to a mailing of our occasional e-bulletin, *Notes for action*. He admits that he has "been meaning to subscribe to the paper for ages. It's just getting round to it. I will do it immediately and post today." That's the sort of response we want to our comradely cajoling! An instant 'yes' and a promise of a standing order in the next day's post! (So, LC. You've now been 'name'-checked in this column. As you well know, this amounts to a solemn pact in our culture. Renege and the CPGB's 'Taffia' - fellow Welshman Ben Lewis and myself - will come round and make you an offer you can't understand, in the immortal words of John Cooper Clarke).

The drive for an expanded base of regular financial donations to this paper is the core component of this year's Summer Offensive, our annual fundraising drive. In addition, comrades are planning other initiatives to raise cash either directly for the CPGB or for political organisations and campaigns we are centrally involved in. The SO is a gauge of the intensity of the work of party members in a wide variety of fields - amongst students, in the anti-war and Iranian solidarity movements, left cultural initiatives like the new Red Mist website (see last week's paper). We don't take a narrow approach.

You can help with this work. We need comrades to pitch in to build this year's cricket match between the Labour Representation Committee and Hands Off the People of Iran. (This has been an annual humiliation for our Labour comrades so far - Hopi activists confidently predict another long day at the office for the LRC in 2011. Here's hoping …). There are CPGB stalls to be staffed at some music festivals, pints of beer to be pulled for the Workers Beer Company at others; film screenings to be organised in support of Iranian director Jafar Panahi; solidarity music gigs for Workers Fund Iran to build and an international contingent of comrades running the recent Berlin marathon for the same cause.

How could you help? Quite apart from any direct physical support you could offer, you could advertise these events on your blog/website if you have one - and/or nag friends/comrades to do the same (we can supply banners and technical support). You could contact local trade union branches or progressive organisations and campaigns for support and direct affiliation in the case of Hopi, for example. (Or organise a front-room solidarity screening of a Panahi film, as groups of Hopi supporters have - a guide will be available on Hopi's website soon for ideas on this sort of 'cottage industry' solidarity work).

CPGB comrades have been getting on the phone for personal follow-ups to the blunderbuss SO mailings that have been coming from the party office over the past week or so. One initial criticism that has been made about both our comrades' individual approach as well as some of this written material is that is talks *down* what we should be able to achieve. Perhaps we have unconsciously bought into a culture of low expectations when it comes to comrades' commitment, their appreciation of the role of the *Weekly Worker*, their partisan identification with the project of re-establishing genuine *Marxism* as the hegemonic politics of the entire workers' movement - and this is even before they *start* haggling about how much pain their standing order is going to entail.

So instead let's talk some big numbers this week, comrades. We are delighted with *any* commitment you can make to regularly donate to the *Weekly Worker* - that's a given. The fact that the vast majority of comrades who read us are hard-pressed working class people - again, a given. However, in this week's column, I want to emphasise that neither are we embarrassed by large - nay, *huge* - regular donations. There are no lower limits, comrades; and trust me when I write, there are no upper limits either.

The new standing orders we have received this week, however, all fall in the former category - three £5 commitments from comrades JC, TP and DL. In the case of DL it was a £5 *increase* - he modestly raised his existing monthly donation from £15 to £20 without even telling us! The extra regular income that has come in for the *Weekly Worker* since the start of the SO already stands at £74 a month.

In terms of hard cash this week has seen £734 come in towards our target of £25,000. We're over £5k, comrades, after just two weeks - outstanding work.

Mark Fischer

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

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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LETTERS

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

Useful Platypus

I am writing to respond to Mike Macnair's critique ('Divided by a common language', June 30) of my article on 'The philosophy of history' (June 9).

JP Nettl's biography of Rosa Luxemburg can be plausibly considered his life work and not ancillary to his primary intellectual concerns because it was the product of almost 20 years of thinking, not the three years of intensive writing that produced his book. Nettl's preface clearly indicates this. Immediately after World War II, his imagination was captured by the history of pre-World War I Marxism in the German Social Democratic Party and Luxemburg in particular, but the controversial nature of the subject made him ruminate long on it and forego available sources of support for his study of it, before publishing his 1,000-page book in 1966. Let's be clear: Nettl was not a Marxist. But that should not anathematise any insights he may have had.

On 'imperialism' and 'authoritarianism', I was concerned to show their interrelated character, which I sketched only in very broad outline: the general historical trend of post-1848 Bonapartism, all the way up to the present. As Marx and Engels put it, Bonapartism expressed a situation in which the capitalists could no longer and the workers could not yet rule society (see Engels' 1891 introduction to Marx's *The civil war in France*). I agree with Mike Macnair that, for example, Bukharin's explanation of imperialism's effect on the socialist workers' movement, the political compromise of the metropolitan workers with respect to their national states, is better than the idea that they were economically 'bought off' (I disagree, however, that the latter was Lenin's and Trotsky's essential perspective). I agree as well that the virtue of such an emphatically political explanation is that it can account for similar phenomena in the periphery.

But this raises the issue of what I have called 'authoritarianism' or willing support for the status quo and hostility to alternatives, and the subjectivity for doing so, again. Why are the workers more often conservative, even virulently and self-destructively so, than not? The explanation of (some) workers' support for fascism by reference to their peripheral character (ie, the unemployed or 'lumpenised') is what indeed 'dodges the issue'. While the SPD and KPD's refusals to fight a civil war against fascism in Germany in 1918-21 and circa 1933 may have been of decisive, conjunctural importance, this itself is what requires explanation (it also leaves aside the Italian case). It cannot be laid simply on bad leadership - on the parties' bad decisions - without reference to the workers' fear, or lack of support for better action, which was broken, however briefly, in Germany in 1918-19, but precisely as a civil war among the workers. The contrast of 1918-19 with 1933 could not be clearer: as Adorno put it, 1919 already decided what came later (see *Those twenties* Columbia 1998).

The issue of Hegelianism is a difficult one: how to include the 'subjective factor in history'. I think this turns on how one understands Marx's critique of Hegel. I don't think that Marx's reference to the 'real' is in an empiricist sense, but rather in Hegel's sense of the actuality of the rational in the real. The issue turns on the relation of essence and appearance, or, with what necessity things appear as they do. What is essential is what is practical, and what is practical is subjective as well as objective. Theoretical reflection on the subjective must use metaphysical categories that are not merely handy, but actually constitutive of social practices in which one is a subject. The commodity form is not a generalisation from experience.

All of this, however, is largely beside the point regarding Platypus. For the conversation we seek to host is not between ourselves and others, but much more widely on the avowed left, and among those with far greater experience than what is available among our own members. We serve only to facilitate, even if we have to elbow our way in, provocatively, to make the space for such conversation, otherwise foreclosed. We consider the need for such conversation to be more ideological than practical at present.

I am glad that comrade Macnair recognises that Platypus may "serve a useful anti-sectarian purpose in near-future politics. It is also possible that it serves a useful political purpose by hammering home the bankruptcy of both the 'anti-imperialist' and 'anti-fascist' left." This is precisely what we intend, though I think it is potentially much more. If Platypus does successfully what Macnair thinks it might, I for one will be happy to allow the "guide to history" through which we understand our own efforts to be considered a 'useful myth'.

Chris Cutrone
email

Abstract slogan

One has to wonder what the point is of theses such as 'The Arab awakening and Israel-Palestine' (June 30). On even the most basic level, it asserts that which it attempts to prove, underlying which is a paucity of analysis, made up only by half-digested generalisations.

The whole question of an Arab nation is problematic. Arab unity died with the Abassid caliphate nearly 800 years ago and arguably long before. So there is very little tradition of political unity. There is a common language, of sorts, but there is no common economy. What there is, of course, is a feeling that the region as a whole has been subject to the depredations of western imperialism, albeit in different ways.

Although the recent uprisings were sparked off in Tunisia, they spread almost entirely to the Arab east. Although the people of the region, including non-Arab minorities, felt a common desire for freedom from their US-imposed dictators, these demands were unsurprisingly focused on the local rulers. Although there is a consciousness of being part of an overall Arab people, the immediate struggles were of necessity local. To raise the demand of Arab unity is to raise an abstract slogan that has no immediate relevance to the most pressing needs of the Arab peoples at this particular juncture. That is not to say that the removal of imperialism from the region as a whole is not an important demand in the future.

However, the failure of the United Arab Republic tells us little. It was a consequence of its own irrelevance to the pressing needs of the day. The theses say: "Evidently, Arab reunification remains a burning but unfulfilled task." Would that it were so.

Yes, the Israeli Jewish 'nation' is historically constituted, but so what? Wasn't the tiniest principality historically constituted? You can tick all Stalin's boxes on territorial contiguity and language, but this does not a nation make. Israeli Jewish identity is versus the other, the Palestinians and Arabs. Even within the Israeli Jewish 'nation', there are deep ethnic divisions, over such fundamental issues as 'who is a Jew'. As to their common culture, thousands of nationalist Israeli Jews marching through Arab Jerusalem on Jerusalem day chanting 'Death to the Arabs' is one manifestation of this national culture.

It is no more reactionary to deny the existence of an Israel Jewish nation than to deny similar colonial phenomena. But, whereas in the United States and Australia the indigenous people were defeated, if not wiped out, in Israel the colonists have only been partially successful. Israel lives in permanent tension with the Arabs, including its own Arab citizens. That this is precisely the role that imperialism intended for this Jewish Sparta seems to have escaped the attention of some of the most astute Marxist observers and also those who seek explanations in the 'Jewish' or Zionist lobby.

Nor is it "half-baked or perverted" to suggest that self-determination, which you accept as being a question of national equality, does not apply to a settler nation. Self-determination simply means the right to be free from national oppression, not that nations have the "right to determine their own fate", which is a blank cheque for Zionist expansion (as if under capitalism anyone has such a choice). It is therefore meaningless to talk of the right of self-determination of a warrior state, an armed satrap of the west, in such terms. It is a capitulation to social and national chauvinism.

Israel is an artificial entity. It was always intended thus. The fact that it has created a civil society should not blind us to this. The inability of its working class to create its own labour party or even a genuine trade union - and the statist Israeli Labour Party has all but collapsed - is a symptom of this. It is the most rightwing 'nation' in the west and also the most racist. Its most atavistic religious elements are increasingly to the fore in national politics and openly argue for the removal and murder, on religious grounds, of the Palestinians. This is the real Zionist national identity coming to the fore. And it finds its expression in the Zionist belief, which is part of Israel law, that there is no Israeli nation - only a Jewish nation. In other words, Israel is not even a state of its own citizens, but a state of Jewish people worldwide.

Yes, the French state is entitled to self-determination, should it be attacked, as in 1940, and its independence threatened. But this is a state that was historically constituted, which underwent a bourgeois revolution and the battle of the Third Republic between democratic republicanism and the clerical-military-royalist castes, imbued with anti-Semitism. It was a fight that was symbolised above all by the trials and tribulations of the Dreyfusards. Pray tell me the name of Israel's Dreyfus? There is no democratic or republican conflict within the Israeli Jewish people. Alone in the world, there are no anti-imperialist currents. The majority support 'transfer' even of Israeli Arab citizens. By a large majority, Jews don't wish to be neighbours or friends of Arabs. This is the 'culture' of a settler people or nation, if you will. But self-determination?

How are Israeli Jews oppressed other than in their dreams? When you use the term 'genocide', it is noticeable that it is not applied to those who have suffered from it, the Arab peoples, but instead Jewish Israel. The holocaust was in Europe, not Palestine! It is not the hard-nosed Israeli generals and the rabbi Dov Liors, for whom Jewish blood is superior to that of Arabs, who are in any danger of genocide, but their victims. Even the most common and garden settler racist in Israel has a better understanding of these things than the CPGB aggregate. 'Gas the Arabs' is a popular form of settler graffiti. It is no coincidence that a section of the settlers identify their own role with that of Hitler.

The idea of two states is simply not credible because it does not deal with the root of the problem - Zionism. It's like a solution in Ireland that ignores partition. In fact, British socialists have long since done just this - eg, the Socialist Party. And, in any event, apart from political objections, the settlers have long since ensured that there can be no Palestinian state worthy of the name.

But socialists cannot just counterpose an abstract socialist federation of Arab states to the conflict in the here and now. We have to pose national solutions that are in fact only attainable as a consequence of the overthrow of the Arab order. This means that the solution of a democratic, secular state in Palestine is the only solution in the socialist book. Two democratic, secular states is a nonsense. If they are secular, why have two states?

Moshé Machover asks mischievously, why 'secular' *and* 'democratic'? I would have thought the answer was obvious: a democratic state can also become a religious tyranny. It is a fundamental precondition that a democratic state should also be a secular state, precisely in order that there is no subjugation of religious minorities.

Tony Greenstein
email

Here and now

We can all sympathise with David Douglass in his plea for action now (Letters, June 30). But is it logical to argue that world socialism may be the answer, but we'll have to wait a long time for it? It is just that attitude that delays socialism and the chance to make a real change. There is nothing "now" to be done that will solve the problem. (He is also overlooking that there is an endless stream of issues under capitalism and a myriad of organisations involved in them all.)

Socialists are not immune to the human tragedies which occur daily. Socialists suffer those tragedies as severely as anyone else. If social activism had solved all the workers' problems, or were even to be able to say that things were steadily improving, that would argue in favour of the approach that Dave advances. But that is not the case. The reality is that the reforms which the social activists promote do not work. The social activists are not gaining much and the same problems continue to appear. It is so often one step forward, several steps back. One can pick any problem and sometimes find an improvement has taken place but most likely only after a very long period of agitation. Rarely, if ever, has the problem disappeared, and usually other related problems have cropped up to fill the vacuum of suffering left by the 'solution'.

Socialist activists have claimed impressive 'successes' and 'victories' in every field except one. History has proven beyond any shadow of doubt that they have not remotely convinced the workers of the need for socialism. The efforts of social activists have been geared to an attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable contradictions of capitalism.

There are two kinds of reformism. One has no intention of bringing about revolutionary change; the other being the one Dave appears to favour that cherishes the belief that successful reforms will somehow prepare the ground for revolution. He is seeking the best of both worlds by both supporting reforms and advocating revolution. Reformists always claim how much better everything would be if only they were in power: the NHS, the environment, the economy, education. And how is all this to be achieved? Dave prudently exercises silence, but we do know the typical left solution: taxing the rich and nationalisation - ie, state capitalism.

Dave also risks believing class struggle militancy can be used as a lever to push the workers along a political road, towards their emancipation. But how is this possible if the workers do not understand the political road and are only engaging in the economic immediate struggles? It can only be concluded that the answer lies in 'leaders in the know' who will direct the workers. For revolutionaries to attract support on the basis of reformist policies - on the basis of saying one thing, while really wanting something quite different - would be quite dishonest. And then to maintain non-socialist support, revolutionaries will be forced to drop all talk of socialism and become even more openly reformist.

Dave's argument (I stand to be corrected) is that the working class is only reformist-minded and winning reformist battles will give the working class confidence. Thus the working class will learn from its struggles and will eventually come to realise that assuming power is the only way to meet its ends, that the working class will realise, through the failure of reforms to meet its needs, the futility of reformism and will overthrow capitalism. Yet, regardless of why or how the reforms are advocated, the result is the same: confusion in the minds of the working class instead of growth of socialist consciousness. Dave desires that revolutionaries should change their ideas to be with the masses rather than trying to convince the masses to change their minds and be with them.

There is little wrong with people campaigning to bring improvements to enhance the quality of their lives and some reforms can indeed make a difference. Our objections to reformism is that our continued existence as propertyless wage-slaves undermines whatever attempts we make to control and better our lives through reforms, that it throws blood, sweat and tears into battles that will be inevitably undermined by the workings of the wages system. All that effort, skill and energy could be better turned against class society.

It is only when people leave reformism behind altogether that socialism will begin to appear to them not as a vague, distant prospect, but as a clear, immediate alternative which they themselves can achieve.

Alan Johnstone
SPGB

Straight talking

Wow! Four great letters in the *Weekly Worker* (June 30).

David Douglass is pretty much as right as someone can be. The left has become all about the fetishes of metropolitan talking heads and chattering professionals. Dave thinks socialists should be talking to and responding truthfully to the working class concerns. What a revolutionary practice that would be.

Pat Corcoran is dead on the target as well. It's a shame that the lumpenproletariat hasn't gone away - but most Marxist thought about seeing the real world as it is, rather than how we would wish it to be, has. I've always thought the best way to deal with scum is have the threat of a jolly good kick in the knackers, not a promise of a hug from a social worker.

Heather Downs is also right. You lot (the *Weekly Worker*/CPGB) remind me of the character, Jack, in *Fight club*. He takes solace from those in pain and gives solace by saying he understands and feels their pain. In the meantime, he does nothing to stop more such desperate cases coming along the production line of society. Now I know that you claim to believe in a socialist-communist society, but, as Dave said, it's about the here and now.

What a compliment it is for a

Paper of the Communist Party of Great Britain

weekly worker

Washington paralysis: Jim Creegan looks at the politics of division

- Stock market panics
- Debating Labour
- Israeli demonstrations
- Chris Cutrone

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DEBATE

Defending Marxist Hegelianism against a Marxist critique

Chris Cutrone of the US Platypus group takes issue with Mike Macnair

I am writing in response to Mike Macnair's 2003 critical review of books by John Rees and David Renton,[1] cited in Macnair's critique of Platypus ('No need for party?' *Weekly Worker* May 12 2011).[2] I wish to refer also to my three letters and article in response.[3]

I find Macnair's analysis and critique of the political motivations and potential consequences of Rees's affirmative account of Marxist Hegelianism compelling and good. I agree with Macnair's conclusion that, despite Rees's former SWP/UK leader Alex Callinicos's anti-Hegelian Althusserianism, Rees considering "historical experience summed up in theory" was intrinsically connected to the SWP's concept of the party as one which "centralises experience", with all the problems such a conception entails.

I wish to offer a rejoinder to Macnair's idea that such problematic conceptions of theory and political practice have roots in Lenin, Luxemburg and Lukács, Macnair's analysis of whom I find to be false. Also, I do not think that Macnair quite gets Hegel, although I agree with his characterisation that "philosophy - as such - is *inherently* only a way of interpreting the world", and so limits Hegel's work for the political purposes under consideration.[4] Furthermore, I agree with Macnair's interpretation of Lenin with respect to the purposes of his polemical defence of Marxist approaches to philosophy in *Materialism and empirio-criticism* (1908). Moreover, I agree with his central point that philosophical agreement cannot be the basis of agreement on political action.

However, as Nicholas Brown responded to comrade Macnair's question at the opening plenary on 'The politics of critical theory' of the Platypus convention in Chicago on April 29, it is not possible to 'Hegelianise' Marx, because Marx was more Hegelian than Hegel himself.[5] That is, Marx tried to achieve the 'Hegelian' self-consciousness of his own historical moment. The question is, what relevance has Marx's Hegelianism today, and what is the relevance of taking such a Hegelian approach to the history of Marxism subsequent to Marx?

Lukács, Lenin, Luxemburg

I disagree that Lukács's "subject" of history is the point of view or relative perspective of the proletariat as the revolutionary agent that must assert its "will". Rather, I take Lukács to be following Lenin and Luxemburg (and Marx) quite differently than Macnair seems to think, in that the workers' movement for socialism is the necessary mediation for grasping the problem of capital in its "totality", that the workers must not remake the world in their image, but rather lead society more generally beyond capital. Hence, as Macnair characterises the approach of the Kautskyan "centre" of the Second International, the socialist workers' movement must be a leading, practical force in democratic struggles beyond the workers' own (sectional) interests in the transformation of society as a whole.

I disagree that Lenin made a virtue of necessity in the Russian Revolution after October 1917 and adopted a voluntarist (and substitutionalist) conception of the working class and the political party of communism. Rather, Lenin consistently criticised and politically fought against those tendencies of Bolshevism and in the early Third International. I do not think that Lenin's newly found 'Hegelianism' after 1914 was the means by which he achieved (mistaken) rapprochement with the 'left'.

The key is Luxemburg. I do not think she was a semi-syndicalist spontaneist/voluntarist, or that she neglected issues of political mediation: she was not an 'ultra-left'. I take her pamphlet, *The mass strike, the political party, and the trade unions* (1906), to have an entirely different political purpose and conclusion. It was not an argument in favour of the mass strike as a tactic, let alone strategy, but rather an analysis of the significance of the mass strike in the 1905 Russian Revolution as a historical phenomenon, inextricably bound up in the development of capital at a global scale, and how this tasked and challenged the social democratic workers' movement (the Second International and the SPD in particular) to reformulate its approach and transform itself under such changed historical conditions, specifically with regard to the relation of the party to the unions.

Luxemburg's perspective was neither anarcho-syndicalist/spontaneist nor vanguardist, but rather *dialectical*. The mass strike was not a timeless principle. For Luxemburg, 1905 showed that the world had moved into an era of revolutionary struggle that demanded changes in the workers' movement for socialism. A contradiction had developed between the social democratic party and (its own associated) labour unions, or 'social democracy' had become a self-contradictory phenomenon in need of transformation.

Furthermore, I take Lenin's critiques of Kautsky for being "non-dialectical" to be very specific. This is not a critique of Kautsky 'philosophically' (although it does speak to his bad practices as a theorist), but *politically*. It is about Kautsky's non-dialectical approach to politics: that is, the relation of theory and practice, or of social being and consciousness, in and through the concrete mediations of the historically constituted workers' movement. Kautsky failed in this. Lenin agreed with Luxemburg in her *Junius pamphlet* (1915) that the problem was Kautsky thinking that the SPD's Marxism (that is, what became Kautsky's USPD) could "hide like a rabbit" during World War I and resume the struggle for socialism afterward. Or, as Lenin put it in his *Imperialism: the highest stage of capitalism* (1916) and *Socialism and war* (1915), *contra* Kautsky's theory of 'ultra-imperialism', the world war must be seen as a necessary and not accidental outcome of the historical development of capitalism, and so a crisis that was an opportunity for revolutionary transformation, and not merely, as Kautsky thought, a derailment into barbarism to be resisted. This was the essential basis for agreement between Luxemburg and Lenin 1914-19.

I do not think the separation of the pre-World War I Lenin from Luxemburg is warranted, especially considering their close collaboration, both in the politics of the Russian movement and in the Second International more generally, throughout the period 1905-12 and again 1914-19. Throughout their careers, Lenin and Luxemburg (and Trotsky) were exemplars of the Second International left, or 'radicals' in the movement. They all more or less mistook Kautsky to be one of their own before August 1914. Also, Kautsky himself changed, at various points and times - which is not to say that Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky never changed.

But the question is the nature and character of such change, and how these figures allow us to grasp the history of Marxism. It is not about learning from their trials and errors, I think, but rather from the example of their 'consciousness', not merely theoretically, but practically. Moreover, the history of Marxism must be approached as part and parcel, and the highest expression, of the history of post-1848 capital.

Hegelianism

Lukács's 'Hegelian' point was that "subjective" struggles for transformation take place in and through "necessary forms of appearance" that misrecognise their "objective" social realities, not in terms of imperfect approximations or more or less true generalised abstractions, but specifically as a function of the "alienated" and "reified" social and political dynamics of capital. Capital is "objective" in a specific way, and so poses historically specific problems for subjectivity.

The reason for Marxists distinguishing their approach from Hegel is precisely historical: that a change in society took place between Hegel's and Marx's time that causes Hegelian categories, as those of an earlier, pre-Industrial Revolution era of bourgeois society, to become inverted in truth, or reversed in intention. Marx's idea was that the "contradiction" of bourgeois society had changed. Thus the dialectical "law of motion" was specific to the problem of capital and not a transhistorical principle of (social) action and thought. Marx's society was not Hegel's. The meaning of Hegel had changed, just as the meaning of the categories of bourgeois society had

Dialectical spiral

changed. Labour-time as value had become not productive (if not unproblematically) - as in Hegel's and Adam Smith's time, the era of 'manufacture' - but destructive of society; as a form of social mediation, wage-labour had become self-contradictory and self-undermining in the Industrial Revolution, hence the 'crisis of capital'.

One fundamental disagreement I have with Macnair's approach, in which I think I follow Lenin, Luxemburg, Lukács and Marx, is with the idea that the potential transformation of capitalist society involves the confrontation of two antithetical social principles, of the workers (collectivism) vs the capitalists (individual private property). Capital, as Marx understood it, is not based on the mode of existence of the capitalists, falsely generalised to society as a whole, but rather that of the workers. This is not a top-down, but a bottom-up, view - shared by Smith, for example. As Lukács put it, the fate of the worker becomes that of "society as a whole".[6] The contradiction of capital is the contradiction of the workers' - not the capitalists' - existence in society. For Marx, capital is a social mode of production and not merely a relation of production. As a mode of production, capital has become increasingly self-contradictory. As a function of capital's historical development, through the Industrial Revolution, in which the workers' own increasing demands for bourgeois rights, to realise the value of their labour, and not merely capitalist competition, played a key, indispensable role, bourgeois society became self-contradictory and self-undermining. That is, the workers centrally or at base constituted the self-destructive, social-historical dynamic of capital through their labouring and political activity. This development culminated in the crisis of world war and revolution 1914-19.

As Lenin put it in *The state and revolution*, the social relations of bourgeois society - namely, the mutual exchange of labour as the form of social solidarity in capital - could only be transformed gradually and thus "wither away," and not be abolished and replaced at a stroke.[7] The proletarian socialist revolution was supposed to open the door to this transformation. The potential for emancipated humanity expressed in communism that Marx recognised in the modern history of capital is not assimilable without remainder to pre- or non-Marxian socialism.

As Marx put it, "*Communism* is the necessary form and the dynamic principle of the immediate future, but communism as such is not the goal of human development, the form of human society."[8] This was because, according to Marx, "Communism is a dogmatic abstraction and ... only a particular manifestation of the humanistic principle and is infected by its opposite, private property."[9] Marx was not the pre-eminent communist of his time, but rather its *critic*, seeking to push it further. Marxism was the attempted Hegelian self-consciousness of proletarian socialism as the subject-object of capital.

As Lukács's contemporary, Karl Korsch, pointed out in 'Marxism and philosophy' (1923), by the late 19th century historians such as Dilthey had observed that "ideas contained in a philosophy can live on not only in philosophies, but equally well in positive sciences and social practice, and that this process precisely began on a large scale with Hegel's philosophy".[10] For Korsch, this meant that 'philosophical' problems in the Hegelian sense were not matters of theory, but practice. From a Marxian perspective, however, it is precisely the problem of capitalist society that is posed at the level of practice.

Korsch went on to argue that "what appears as the purely 'ideal' development of philosophy in the 19th century can in fact only be fully and essentially grasped by relating it to the concrete historical development of bourgeois society as a whole".[11] Korsch's great insight, shared by Lukács, took this perspective from Luxemburg and Lenin, who grasped how the history of the socialist workers' movement and Marxism was a key part - indeed the crucial aspect - of this development, in the first two decades of the 20th century.

The problem we have faced since then is that the defeat of the workers' movement for socialism has not meant the stabilisation, but rather the degeneration, disintegration and decomposition, of bourgeois society - without the concomitant increase, but rather the regression, of possibilities for moving beyond it. This shows that the crisis of Marxism was a crisis of bourgeois society, or the highest and most acute aspect of the crisis of capital: bourgeois society has suffered since then from the failure of Marxism.

Crisis of Marxism

The 'crisis of Marxism', in which Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky took part (especially in 1914-19, but also in the period leading up to this, most significantly from 1905 on), and Lukács tried to address 'theoretically' in *History and class consciousness* and related writings of the early 1920s, was (the highest practical expression of) the crisis of bourgeois society.

This crisis demanded a Marxist critique of Marxism, or a 'dialectical' approach to Marxism itself: that is, a recognition of Marxism, politically, as being a self-contradictory and so potentially self-undermining historical phenomenon (a phenomenon of *history* - hence the title of Lukács's book, *History and class consciousness*), itself subject to necessary "reification" and "misrecognition" that could only be worked through "immanently". This meant regaining the "Hegelian" dimension, or the "self-consciousness" of Marxism. This is because Marxism, as an expression of the workers' "class-consciousness", was - and remains - entirely "bourgeois", if *in extremis*. While self-contradictory in its development, the socialist workers' movement, including its Marxist self-consciousness, pointed beyond itself, 'dialectically' - as consciousness of the bourgeois epoch as a whole does.

I follow Adorno's characterisation of the problem of workers' consciousness and the necessary role of intellectuals, which he took from Lenin, in his letter to Walter Benjamin of March 18 1936: "The proletariat ... is itself a product of bourgeois society ... the actual consciousness of actual workers ... [has] absolutely no advantage over the bourgeois except ... interest in the revolution, but otherwise bear[s] all the marks of mutilation of the typical bourgeois character. This prescribes our function for us clearly enough - which I certainly do not mean in the sense of an activist conception of 'intellectuals' ... It is not bourgeois idealism if, in full knowledge and without mental prohibitions, we maintain our solidarity with the proletariat instead of making of our own necessity a virtue of the proletariat, as we are always tempted to do - the proletariat which itself experiences the same necessity and needs us for knowledge as much as we need the proletariat to make the revolution."[12]

The problem we face today, I think, is the opacity of the present, due to our lack of a comparably acute, self-contradictory and dialectical expression of the crisis of capital that Marxism's historical self-consciousness, in theory and practice, once provided ●

Notes

1. '"Classical Marxism" and grasping the dialectic' *Weekly Worker* September 11 2003.
2. See also Mike Macnair's 'Theoretical dead end', May 19; 'The study of history and the left's decline', June 2; and 'Divided by a common language?' June 30.
3. See Letters May 19, May 26 and July 7; and my article, 'The philosophy of history', June 9.
4. 'Against philosopher kings', December 11 2008.
5. 'The politics of critical theory' *Platypus Review* No37, July 2011: http://platypus1917.org/2011/07/09/the-politics-of-critical-theory/#q+a.
6. G Lukács *Reification and the consciousness of the proletariat* (1922) part 1, 'The phenomenon of reification' in *History and class consciousness: studies in Marxist dialectics* Cambridge MA 1971, p91: www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/history/hcc05.htm.
7. See VI Lenin *The state and revolution* chapter 5, 'The economic basis of the withering away of the state', part 3, 'The first phase of communist society': www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch05.htm#s3.
8. K Marx *Economic and philosophic manuscripts* (1844), manuscript 3, section 2, 'Private property and communism': www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/comm.htm.
9. K Marx, letter to Arnold Ruge, September 1843, 'Ruthless criticism': www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_09.htm.
10. K Korsch, 'Marxism and philosophy' (1923), in *Marxism and philosophy* New York 2008, p39.
11. *Ibid* p40.
12. TW Adorno, 'Correspondence with Benjamin' *New Left Review* September-October 1973, pp66-67.

Summer Offensive

Set to hit target

This bumper issue of our paper is the last to appear before our annual school, Communist University, and the last before our two-week summer break (*Weekly Worker* 879 will appear on Thursday September 1). It is also the last before the end of our intensive fundraising campaign, the Summer Offensive.

The SO actually ends in just over a week's time, when the final total will be declared at our celebratory meal. And we are looking set to surpass our £25,000 target, with £17,593 already in the kitty. True, seven and a half grand is a lot to raise in the last week, but we know from experience that large amounts will come in during Communist University itself. Many comrades - especially those from outside London - will come armed with their cheque books or cash. They will hand over their donations, buy food and drink, and snap up CPGB merchandise. All the profits count towards the total.

Among the goods they will be able to buy this year are two new publications: first, Ben Lewis's and Lars T Lih's eagerly awaited *Zinoviev and Martov: head to head in Halle*, which describes the historic confrontation in October 1920 between leaders of the two wings of the Russian workers' movement; and the CPGB's *Draft programme*, as revised at our January conference.

Also available will be all kinds of literature, badges and T-shirts. Speaking of which, comrade AG has added to his own SO target thanks to the £189 already raised through the sale of T-shirts he designed - including one featuring our CU logo, which is being raffled at Communist University.

That £189 was part of the £1,522 that we received over the last seven days, which also included a handsome £550 contribution from comrade TM. Then there were a number of donations made via our website (we had 14,852 visitors last week, by the way), not to mention the regular gifts to the *Weekly Worker* that landed in the *WW* bank account. As I say, it all counts.

A central part of this year's SO has been the drive to win new or increased standing orders for our paper. We set ourselves the aim of raising an extra £300 a month in regular donations. And we are very near that target now, following new monthly pledges from SP (£15 on top of his existing £5), LC (a new standing order of £12), AD and DO (£5 more each) FC (£2) and JB (£1). The extra monthly income for the paper now stands at an impressive £263 - we are almost there (although it has to be said that we still need to ensure that all of those pledges are translated into hard cash).

Now we are on the last leg we have to ensure that we complete the course - another £750 right now, plus an extra £40 per month for the *Weekly Worker*. And, of course, come along to CU yourself. Not only can we promise stimulating and controversial debate, but an opportunity to relax among comrades … and help us meet those targets ●

Mark Fischer

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Become a **Communist Party** member

Name _____

Address _____

_____

_____

Town/city _____

Postcode _____

Telephone _____ **Age** _____

Email _____ **Date** _____

Return to: Membership, CPGB, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX

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