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Syndicalism: the US and British experience

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From the editors

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This issue of the magazine has a change of style. Gone are the shorter briefings that tended to date quickly in a quarterly journal. In come a series of shorter articles on the NUT and the death of the pensions dispute, the decade of austerity in the making, a first look at Hollande in power and Obama's time in the White House. Let us know if you think the new format works.

We continue our theme on the problems of the British far left with a contribution from Simon Harvey on the debate about unity – why can't we construct a British Syriza? Of some relevance is the interview with a member of Syriza on the situation in Greece and the problems the left faces. This interview will go onto the Anticapitalist Initiative website (anticapitalists.org) where we hope to get some feedback from other members of Syriza in Britain.

A hundred years ago Britain was rocked by a series of mass strikes. Two articles in this issue examine the influence of syndicalism as a political current in these struggles as well as in the US with the growth of the Wobblies.

In the last journal we suggested there was a space for a new Marxist journal on the left. Since then we have had two meetings on the project, one in London and one in Manchester. If you are interested in participating contact us at the email address below.

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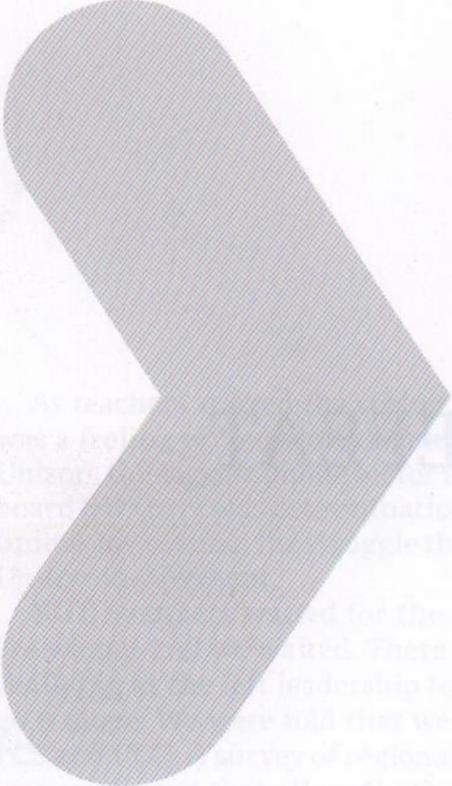
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In the years before the First World War syndicalism developed rapidly as an international force. In the US, the Wobblies represented mainstream syndicalism. In Britain, industrial unionism was born in a period of political crisis and mass industrial action. These two movements were not politically identical. Mark Hoskisson and Stuart King examine their histories and development one hundred years on and explain why they disappeared so quickly with the onset of war

TEACHERS AND THE PENSIONS DEFEAT

How did we end up here?

The NUT won its ballot for action over workload but, argues Eleanor Davies, it also signals the end of the pensions dispute

IT WAS 30 June 2011, a beautiful sunny day. Hundreds of thousands of teachers marched through London in high spirits with a spring in their step as they felt their power. For many of the younger members out that day it was their first strike ever. And they liked it. The academic year ended on a high.

It was the start of a campaign to defend teachers' pensions, widely believed to be the opening shot in a campaign to fight the government. OK there were weaknesses. The NAS/UWT did not join the strike. But with a left NUT leadership determined to defeat the ConDem coalition, there was nothing to stop the teachers rallying the other public sector unions in a mass campaign of action to turn back the cuts.

Teachers ended the academic year of 2011 ready for more. The big question was when? In September 2011 they returned to work to discover the good news that another strike had been called, and this time the union movement had responded to the call for action. The teachers would be joined by the public sector: Unison, Unite, PCS and the UCU. If there was a cloud in the sky, it was that the teachers would have to wait until 30 November.

When the date came three million workers heeded the united call by 29 public sector unions. The march in London was electric, as over two million public sector workers closed down their schools, council offices, job centres, immigration control, magistrates courts and hospitals. In Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester tens of thousands closed their city centres for the day. The smell of victory was in the air.

The government was fuming: 80% of schools shut, causing severe problems for employers as hundreds of thousands of working parents had to stay at home or make emergency arrangements for their kids. Border agency staff walked out, causing chaos at already understaffed

airports and ports. Town halls and some government departments ground to a halt for the day. It was a mighty show of working class strength, a warning shot to a shaky coalition. Followed up quickly by further two and three day actions and the threat of an all-out strike the government would have retreated.

Yet within days Unison were in negotiations with Danny Alexander to call off the action. As early as July 2011 Brendan Barber, the TUC General Secretary, had been in "constructive discussions" with the government to sell a deal. Dave Prentis, the Unison General Secretary, was desperate to end the action with virtually no concessions from the government.

Cabinet Office and Treasury officials then announced the agreement had been resolved with no new money beyond concessions set out before the strike. Brendan Barber did not consider further strikes a priority: "We have reached a stage where the emphasis in most cases is in giving active consideration to the new proposals that have emerged rather than considering the prospect of further industrial action."

In December Unison, GMB, and briefly Unite, signed a "heads of agreement" deal to end the action. The PCS rejected the deal out of hand and were initially excluded from further negotiations. Christine Blower, the NUT General Secretary, described the discussions as "fairly shambolic" and said only that the NUT would reserve its position for the moment.

So 2011 ended with a broad-based public sector fight back wrecked by trade union officials, but there was still hope that teachers could rally the PCS, Unite and UCU into a determined joint struggle to break the sell out by Dave Prentis and Brendan Barber. Determined action would have strengthened those in Unison actively trying to reverse the sell-out.

As teachers started the spring term in January there was a feeling of "out with the old and in with the new". Unison, the biggest public sector union, would not be on board but there was determination by the more militant unions to continue the struggle they had started without Unison involvement.

NUT members waited for the call from our leaders. We waited and we waited. There was all sorts of shilly-shallying as the left leadership told us that we couldn't go it alone. We were told that we had to wait for Unite, PCS and UCU. A survey of regional divisional secretaries was conducted that allegedly showed only London was ready to strike, this despite 73% indicating their support for further strike action "beginning with a national one day strike on 28 March."

Officials told members not to worry because this was a new strategy where regions outside of London would be taking action soon after London. On 28 March London members rallied to the call and carried out a successful strike despite the disappointment felt by many that we were doing it alone.

Then came 10 May. To the absolute surprise of many NUT members a public sector strike over pensions was called and we weren't involved! Even 32,000 police officers marched that day against cuts. Earlier, NUT conference at Easter had heard calls to join the 10 May strike action called by the PCS. The executive managed to head off these demands, instead passing a resolution promising further action in June. Yet with the conference over, the "left" dominated NUT executive meeting on 26 April voted 13 to 28 against taking action in June.

This time the excuse was the need to wait for joint action with the other teachers union NAS/UWT and a supposed lukewarm response from a "consultation" with Divisional Secretaries. Instead the NUT leadership announced this alliance as a massive step forward: they were going to ballot the membership, alongside the NAS/UWT on "workload". This was heralded as an historic step in uniting teachers. Quietly, in an aside, they said the still-live pension ballot would be dropped.

So here we are in October 2012. The pensions dispute is effectively over. The NUT won its ballot on taking action over workload (on a low turnout) as did the NAS/UWT. But what is the action? Currently the situation is that teachers are taking action "short of strike action" - such things as refusing to collect dinner money and put up posters and the like - actions to strike fear into the heart of any school head and government minister! Strike action is rumoured but such rumours have been whispered before without coming to fruition.

How did this debacle come about? In the NUT we supposedly had a left leadership with Christine Blower (Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Union), Alex Kenny and Kevin Courtney (Socialist Teachers Alliance) all in leading roles. Yet this leadership, by ending the strike action, have created a situation where pension contributions have already gone up, resulting in a considerable pay cut for teachers.

Members were so outraged at the demobilisation of the dispute that Liverpool NUT passed a motion of no confidence in the General Secretary, Christine Blower.

At the NUT Easter Conference two hastily arranged but well attended meetings voiced the frustration of rank and file teachers with the executive and demanded further national action. The second agreed to call a local associations national action conference (LANAC), which took place in Liverpool in June in the aftermath of the NUT leadership calling off action.

The biggest far left group, the SWP, took an ambivalent attitude towards this conference. They have been central to the Socialist Teachers Alliance (STA), a supposed radical teachers grouping that has in fact acted as footsoldiers

The purpose of a militant rank and file organisation is to change the union from the bottom up, basing itself on school groups and in the associations

to hoist left NUT members onto the executive. The decision to scale down action on the 28 March and to call off action for this term were made on the recommendation both of Christine Blower and the STA's Kevin Courtney, the Deputy General Secretary of the union. At NUT conference, leading members of the STA, such as Alex Kenny, argued and voted against taking action with other public sector unions on 10 May.

The SWP has clearly been reluctant to criticise their allies who are still feted as class struggle speakers, despite their role in the pensions sell out. Immediately the NUT leadership declared for the new ballot on workload, the SWP were happy to join the "forget the past, get on with the new ballot" brigade. They hailed the alliance with the NAS/UWT as some sort of step forward when in fact it effectively shackled the NUT to a completely non-militant union.

It's been a disaster. A defensive strike action that started with such hope and energy is now a fiasco. Teachers feel let down and demoralised by the lack of strategy from union officials. Our willingness to fight to defend our pensions has been sidelined by a left leadership without courage, conviction or principle.

We should learn the lessons. It is not enough to build "broad lefts" in unions whose sole objective is to put "left leaders" on the Executive. The purpose of a militant rank and file organisation is to change the union from the bottom up, basing itself on school groups and in the associations and building itself on militant actions. Leaders must be responsible to the members, committed to the rank and file policies and removed at the first sign of wavering or compromise.

This pension struggle, the first test of strength between the trade unions and Tory-led government, was sold out, not just by right wingers like Prentice and Barber but by the supposed "lefts" like Blower and Courtney. If we don't learn to control our leaders and rely on building rank and file militancy, we will lose more struggles in the years ahead.

Another decade of austerity and cuts?

With the Tory–Lib Dem coalition already planning a joint austerity package to extend beyond the next election, how should we respond to arguments from both Coalition and Labour that cuts will have to go on and on? Bill Jefferies says they are lying, both about the economy and the deficit.

THE TORY toffs and their Lib Dem lapdogs in the Coalition government claim that the only viable economic strategy for Britain after the credit crunch is austerity. Lots of it and for a long time.

The credit crunch supposedly marked the end of the boom. After 16 years of expansion, the recession means that from now on it will be 16 years of bust – for the workers anyway. The ConDem government says there is no other way, so it must be true.

Except that it isn't. It is economic doublespeak designed to camouflage their real programme. They call it the need to dramatically shrink the state; the real name for this policy is the destruction of public services. They say we can no longer afford such largesse as looking after the disabled, paying decent wages to public sector workers, retiring at 65. But a glance at the figures proves that the public school louts at Westminster are lying through their artificially whitened teeth.

The rich are doing better than ever. The Sunday Times 2012 UK Rich List revealed the 1,000 wealthiest UK residents are worth a combined £414bn, or around 40% of UK's entire national debt of £1,032bn. The list is based on identifiable wealth, land, property, assets such as art, racehorses and significant shares in publicly quoted companies. It does not include cash held at the bank, so the true level will be much higher. Meanwhile, according to a report by Deloitte, UK non-financial companies held cash reserves of £731.4bn at the end of 2011 – the highest level on record.



Marchers demonstrating against cuts to public sector pensions, 30 November 2011

It seems that some are coming through the recession quite well. No austerity for them. After a brief populist dig at the bankers to capture some headlines, the ConDem coalition soon targeted the familiar victims. Immigrants, disabled people, lazy public sector workers and the poor were to blame for the crisis after all. They are the drain on vital resources, so benefits, pensions, wages and jobs should be cut to “save Britain” from the curse of debt and from the legacy of the feckless Labour administration that supposedly ran up public debt by irresponsible public spending.

But the truth is very different. Gordon Brown’s Labour government bailed out the banks by nationalising the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) and Lloyds and providing up to £1tn in soft loans to the financial sector through the Bank of England Special Liquidity Scheme (SLS). Bankers’ bonuses were privatised, theirs to keep, while bankers’ losses were nationalised, for us to pick up the bill. When in January 2012 the SLS was wound up it transferred £2.3bn net profits to the Treasury! Of course in actually nationalising the banks partially or wholly, hundreds of millions more were paid out, now sitting as stakes in banks we have no control over.

Every month the UK authorities publish figures for public spending excluding the nationalised banks. This is designed to prove that the public debt is unaffordable, continuously rising as a proportion of GDP. Public sector net debt excluding the temporary effects of financial interventions was £1,032.4bn (65.7% of GDP) in July 2012. Including financial interventions it was £2,147.4bn (136.6% of GDP).

Except these debts are not all they seem. They are assets that make money. They are loans to businesses, mortgages and other financial instruments. As the banks have recovered over the last three years profits have increased and bad debts have been written off. Between July 2011 and July

2012 the public sector net debt including the nationalised banks fell by £92.3bn, from 147.4% of GDP to 136.6%. More significant is the effect these nationalised bank profits have on the government deficit – they reduce it.

Further, since the financial year 2009/10 the Bank of England has printed £320bn of debt, or Quantitative Easing (QE), that it has lent back to the government. So the government has been financing the deficit by borrowing off itself. This means that the UK actually has a lower annual

Public spending at 45% of GDP is absolutely within the standard range. So there can only be one conclusion from such facts – there is no fiscal crisis

borrowing requirement than Germany. Two thirds of new debt issued over the last three years has been paid for this way – by the government writing itself IOUs!

Add to this the fact that historically low interest rates mean that the amount of interest the government pays on that debt (3% in 2011) is lower than during every single year except one between 1940 and 1999.

Public spending at 45% of GDP is absolutely within the standard range. So there can only be one conclusion from such facts – there is no fiscal crisis and if there was one a wealth tax on the rich could easily plug the gap in the public finances.

So what measures could a government be taking if it wanted to stimulate the economy, put people back to work and increase tax revenues to reduce the deficit?

GDP measures the total economic output. If the

government decided to embark on an infrastructure programme, like building houses, railways or a new London airport, this would increase the size of GDP by the cost of the programme, less the proportion spent on imports. As this additional expenditure would stimulate further spending – the so-called multiplier effect – it would lower

The real alternative to this is not a limited Keynesian public investment programme as Ed Balls proposes, but a massive programme of public spending

the debt/GDP ratio, provided that multiplier was larger than the proportion of imports used up in production.

In other words it could potentially stimulate the economy. This is the thinking behind the Labour Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls' limited Keynesian alternative to the ConDem's threefold strategy of austerity, austerity, and austerity.

In normal times, if the government printed money, demand from foreign investors for the national currency would fall. As the nominal amount of money had increased without any increase in production, inflation would normally result. But this time around QE has not increased inflation significantly because investors consider a safe haven their first priority. Countries with significant balance of payments surpluses – like the oil exporters and China – are dependent on the few national governments with strong currencies like the UK and US.

The proportion of UK national debt owned by foreign investors has remained steady at around 30%, or £380bn, even as QE has dwarfed it. If new infrastructure schemes increased productivity by reducing business costs not only would they reduce the debt/GDP ratio but they would boost economic activity, wages and profits as well. So, by doing the opposite, slashing investment in infrastructure, the Tories have made the public sector debt ratio worse. They have increased unemployment, reduced company profits and lowered productivity by refusing to upgrade infrastructure. Why?

The ongoing series of public sectors cuts, privatisations and attacks are not a result of economic necessity and they are not a sign of ruling class economic weakness. Quite the opposite – they are a sign of the working class movement's political and organisational weakness.

Every crisis is an opportunity. The Tories did not intend for the credit crunch to happen, but now it has, they have seen an opportunity. The limited reforms by the last Labour government that put some money (nowhere near enough, but some) into the NHS, that tried to lower child poverty and increase educational opportunities, were too much of a drain on UK Inc's overall profits. The Tories deemed even those Labour reforms provided through the introduction of market or quasi-market measures excessive.

So, using the deficit as a smokescreen, they have launched their all out war on the entire concept of public service. If they shrink the state enough they will not necessarily reduce the deficit (especially as they will still have to borrow to meet the cost of their military expenditure – rising as they strive to maintain Britain's role as a top player at the imperialist table) but they will eradicate the drain on profits that the welfare state represents to them and their billionaire backers. And the attacks on private sector wages, pensions and jobs are the other side of the same attack – making sure money saved does not go into workers' pockets by another route.

All of the gains won by the working class in health, education and public service provision are now at stake. And every single worker, public and private, will be hit hard if these gains are destroyed. These gains were won by struggle. They were won by people prepared to fight and fight hard to end the misery caused to millions prior to the Second World War through the absence of such public provision.

Now they will have to be defended by struggle. The attacks being unleashed are closing care homes and children's centres, putting caring services like adventure playgrounds, one o'clock clubs, youth services, libraries, where they are not being shut, out to private tender. Schools are being softened up for full privatisation via academies and free schools. The NHS is broken up so profiteers can run ever larger bits of it. Social services are becoming a thing of the past and benefits are being cut to the bone.

The real alternative to this is not a limited Keynesian public investment programme as Ed Balls proposes, but a massive programme of public spending designed to rebuild, expand and improve public services. We need such a programme paid for by a massive tax on the rich – on their wealth, their investments and their cash piles. We need to seize back every public service that has been handed over to profiteers and place them in the hands of the workers and users, without giving a penny in compensation to the asset-strippers who took them from the state.

To make this programme a reality we need a labour movement prepared to fight. The TUC passed a motion in September agreeing to discuss the practicalities of a general strike. Yet at the same time the TUC has overseen the capitulation of the public sector unions over pensions, cuts and redundancies. The result of this has been to strengthen the determination of the government in the face of opposition weakness.

While this continues to happen the ConDem crew will carry on hurling their demolition ball at the public sector.

Which is why, at the rank and file level in the unions, in the communities being hit by the cuts and across the numerous local campaigns that come and go across the country, we need to build fighting unity. We must put solidarity back on the agenda, support every struggle until a victory is won and get rid of any leaders who refuse to back us in a fight to the death with the Coalition. That is the way to stop austerity.

To fight austerity we need a united left

If the Greek left can get together in Syriza, why can't the British?

Simon Hardy takes up this argument, examining the history of previous unity initiatives

THE URGENT need for unity on the radical left is something that has been eloquently put forward by Dan Hind on the Al-Jazeera website recently. Asking a very pertinent question as to whether there can be a Syriza-type organisation in Britain, Hind draws out some of the most important lessons of the Greek struggle and poses a challenge to the British left – can we break out of the ghetto as well?

To plot a possible trajectory we have to be clear of the political alignment that has emerged for the left under the centre right coalition government. While Ed Miliband's Labour Party might be surging ahead in the polls, the possibility of a Labour left revival is simply not on the cards. The Labour Party is hollowed out and bureaucratically controlled and all the best intentions and actions of the Labour left activists will not change that. The Labour left is reduced to the old argument that there is nothing credible outside the Labour Party. They mockingly point to all the twisted contortions of the far left in Britain in the last decade (Socialist Alliance, Scottish Socialist Party, Respect, TUSC, Left List, Respect Renewal, etc.) to forge a new unity and conclude that the Labour Party is the only show in town.

But this is not an argument made from the Labour left's strength, it is an argument about the radical left's weakness. They cannot point to any meaningful gains made by the Labour left in recent years because there haven't been any. Even the Labour Representation Committee, the only significant bastion of the socialist left in the party, has failed to grow. On the crucial issue of the coalition spending cuts they couldn't even get any commitment from their councillors to vote against local cuts budgets. Some have claimed that the Labour Party could act as a dented shield against the coalition onslaught. The truth is that the Labour Party is no shield at all.

The most significant recent press offensive by the Labour Party has been to force the government to re-examine the west coast mainline rail franchise deal, not to renationalise it but to try and keep Richard Branson's Virgin Trains on

the line – yet barely a peep about the privatisation of the NHS, including privatising the pharmacies some of which are being taken over by Branson's Virgin company.

The Labour left is generally principled on issues like privatisation and fighting austerity, but they are drowned out by the party apparatus which is overwhelmingly neo-liberal and anti-socialist. John McDonnell's failure to even get on the leadership ballot in 2010 speaks volumes. As does the obvious non-growth of the Labour left activist base. The magazine Labour Briefing, which recently became the official organ of the LRC, probably has a readership of around 500-600 people, smaller than some of the revolutionary left newspapers.

This is not to say that the Labour left has no role to play – far from it – they should just face reality squarely

The crisis is so acute that we have no time for people who spend their hours constructing excuses for fragmentation, isolation and weakness. They are the past

in the face and realise that reclaiming the Labour Party is a dead end project.

But there is some truth in their criticism of the revolutionary left. Even where we have built new organisations which looked like they were about to achieve lift off (Respect, SSP) they collapsed in ignominy, usually caused by ego clashes and the ridiculous control freakery by various organisations. Whilst some of us criticised the political basis of these projects, the reality is that the political weaknesses barely even had time to come to the surface – the inveterate problems of the far left ran these initiatives into the ground long before they even had a chance to be put to the test of any kind of political power.

So, a Labour left which can't get anywhere and a revolutionary left which can't get anywhere.

What lessons can we draw from these "realities"? Certainly pessimism, although understandable, would be the wrong conclusion. The lesson of Syriza shows what can be done if the left gets its act together, puts aside its own empire-building projects and tries to do something that might actually make a difference. We have to start from the objective situation and work backwards – the reality of the cuts and a potential lost decade to austerity needs to sharpen our minds and our resolve. Starting from the

Let's put it bluntly. British people generally don't vote for electoral coalitions – they are here today and gone tomorrow. People respect the concept of a party

necessity of a united, credible left we can work backwards to imagine the steps that we can take to get there.

I would go so far as to say that anyone at the present time who opposes attempts towards greater unity is, perhaps unconsciously, holding back the movement. The crisis is so acute and the tasks of the hour so urgent that we have no time for people who spend their hours constructing excuses for fragmentation, isolation and weakness. They are the past, and we desperately need a future.

Dan Hind is right and his voice joins a growing chorus of others who see the need for unity on the left. Does this mean every sect and group can just get together? No, of course real differences emerge. But there is so much that unites us in the current political context that it is criminal – absolutely criminal – that none of the larger groups are seriously talking about launching a new united organisation. The three way division of the anti-cuts movement is the bitter fruit of this backward attitude on the British left, a situation that should deservedly make us a laughing stock in other countries.

If the success of Syriza raises the benchmark for what the left can achieve then the natural next question is "how could we create an organisation like Syriza in Britain?"

I think this question should dominate the discussions on the left in the coming months. But let's be clear – I am not saying we should just transplant Syriza's programme and constitution and graft it onto the British left. Such an attempt would be artificial. An organisation like Syriza means a coalition of the radical left, united against austerity, united against privatisation, united in action and united in fighting social oppression.

The kind of programme that any new initiative adopts is largely the result of who is involved in it. Certainly it should have an anti-capitalist basis, though it can leave some of the bigger questions unresolved, at least initially. Let's focus on the goals that Hind identifies: "Campaign for an end to the country's predatory foreign policy, for the dismantling of the offshore network, for democratic control of the central banks, urgent action to address the

threat of catastrophic climate change, and reform of the national media regimes."

Each constituency does not need to dissolve itself; we just need to ensure checks and balances to prevent "swamping" of meetings. Each local unit of the organisation would retain certain autonomy whilst a national committee was permitted to adopt political lines, within the remits established at a conference. If an organisation or individual does not like any of the policies then they should have full freedom to speak their mind about it, whilst accepting that there is unity in the campaigns and actions the organisations agrees to pursue.

Everyone has to accept that they might be minoritised at some point. But they also have to understand that abandoning the organisation over a constitutional dispute or because of this or that policy means abandoning the vital struggle for building a credible radical left in this country. Do people want us to live in glorious isolation for another decade or more, as people's living standards plummet?

We also have to overcome the very real difference in size between constituent parts on the left. The SWP for instance is still the largest group on the radical left, although it is much smaller than it was when I joined the left in 2001. Members of the SWP argue that launching a new party is not practical because as they will numerically "dominate it" it would cause problems (as it has in the past). But there are a number of ways to overcome this, if there is a political will to make it happen. Changing the culture on the left also means changing how we "intervene" into campaigns or broad organisations, and taking a more open approach, transforming sects into networks and "giving of yourself" for the greater need of the new organisation, these can all be thoroughly healthy steps to take.

The danger is that the left attempts some kind of united initiative, but limits it to an electoral coalition – replicating the Socialist Alliance (1999-2004) but without the enthusiasm. Whilst a genuine socialist alliance would be a step forward from the current situation it will suffer the same crisis as the last version, where all the left groups did their campaigning work under their own banners but stood together only in the election.

Let's put it bluntly, British people generally don't vote for electoral coalitions – they are here today and gone tomorrow. People respect the concept of a party or at least something more tangible, which looks like it is going to last beyond the next internal spat. The Scottish Socialist Party was credible because it was united and forced the smaller groups involved to campaign as SSP activists first and foremost. Putting party before sect is essential to the success of any project, just as it was in the early days of the Labour Party or any of the communist parties internationally.

The Respect debacle shows the danger of personality politics (the "great man" view of politics where the entire project is hung around one person's neck). But its fragmentation also shows what happens when large constituent groups (in this case the SWP) act like control freaks and treat a coalition like their personal property. Although they blamed the disastrous outcome on John Rees, the fact is that the entire party was complicit in the mistakes that were made, both opportunism in political terms and

bad practice in the organisational centre of the party. It was a feeling of loss of control when Galloway started to criticise the SWP's handling of Respect that led the SWP leadership to "go nuclear" in the words of one protagonist.² Whilst we can be critical of the conduct of Galloway and some of his positions, the complaint about organisational manoeuvres and people swamping meetings is one that many on the left will be sadly familiar with. This kind of practice must stop.

The political problem with Respect was not so much its "liberal" programme – at the end of the day it was largely old Labour social democratic in much of what it said. The unstable core at the heart of it was the drive for electoral success with people who had no real interests in extra-parliamentary movements and struggles. A temporary alliance with careerists can come back to bite you, as it did for Respect in the east end of London, where Respect councillors jumped ship, first to the Tories and Liberal Democrats and then to Labour. This points up the importance of political movements on the streets and in the workplaces as being paramount, with elections as a subordinate part of that strategy. Moreover it means a much more democratic and accountable relationship between any elected representatives and the rank and file members, one where they are subordinated to the wider organisation and struggle, and not seen as its "leaders" merely because they have been elected to a position within the capitalist state. This is a point that Syriza will also have to debate out in the coming months.

Today the remains of the cycle of left unity initiatives exists in the form of the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), an electoral alliance between the SWP and the Socialist Party, as well as a handful of independents. But again TUSC only exists for elections and has no activist base. It seems doubtful that TUSC can be transformed into something better. Rather, it appears to be a marriage of convenience for the two bigger Trotskyist groups. Its last conference was attended by less than 60 people, despite the fact that the combined membership of the constituent groups must be over a thousand. Real decisions are of course taken by the SWP and SP party leaderships.

Whilst the past should not be forgotten, it can be forgiven, if people can prove their earnest support for a new initiative. Otherwise we are locked in a vicious circle with no way out.

Regardless of the subjective problems of the British left's sect-building ethos, there are two objective problems if we consider ourselves in relation to what the Greek left has achieved. The first is that Syriza's success is clearly the result of a country in complete meltdown. Wage cuts of 40% and closure of important services is at a qualitatively higher level than anything we have in Britain... so far. We shouldn't lose sight of the fact that only around 10% of the coalition's cuts have gone through, so worse is to come.

Secondly, Syriza was launched in 2004 and has had the best part of a decade to build up its support in elections before the explosion in 2012. In most elections they received around 5% of the vote, which to the British left would be nothing short of a breakthrough. Patience and a long term view of politics is essential to make such a project work.

But then maybe the British "explosion" will happen sooner since any new organisation built will be involved in tenacious struggle against austerity from day one.

We also could not limit ourselves to electoral politics, as Syriza seems to have an inclination to do. Whilst some of the more radical elements within the coalition are organising forums and initiatives outside of the parliamentary process, it is essential as part of our strategy to see elections as a subordinate part of the wider struggle, not the primary focus. If Syriza imagines that it can really reverse the austerity measures and revive Greece

'Campaigning for a united, radical left formation should be an essential part of the Anti-Capitalist Initiative's work in the coming months and years

only through governing the capitalist state they will be in for a rude awakening. When it comes to Greece's political and economic future, the European Central Bank and the leaders in France and Germany, not to mention the Greek capitalist class are all in a far more powerful position than the parliament in Athens – removing their support and control mechanisms would be a crucial task for any radical government.

Campaigning for a united, radical left formation in Britain should be an essential part of the Anticapitalist Initiative's (ACI) work in the coming months and years. Even more so, 2013 should be the year that serious steps are made to bring together a re-alignment on the left. We have had our fingers burnt in the past, but we cannot let past failures haunt us. If we fail to rise to the challenge then we will deserve the defeats inflicted on us by the ruling class. But the working class and the poor do not deserve them. It is not their fault the left is so weak – it is ours. Now we have to get our house in order so that we can create a movement that can fight austerity and challenge capitalism.

Simon Hardy is a supporter of the Anticapitalist Initiative and was a spokesperson for the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts during the student movement of 2010-11. He is one of the contributors of "It Started in Wisconsin: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the New Labor Protest" (Verso 2012)

ENDNOTES

1. Read Dan Hind's article here: aje.me/U51UOj. It subsequently drew a critical examination from SWP member Richard Seymour at his Lenin's Tomb blog www.leninology.com/2012/08/the-problem-of-left-unity.html
2. See www.socialistunity.com/galloway-on-respect and also www.redpepper.org.uk/Car-crash-on-the-left

THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE

Not much change and very little hope

George Binette measures Obama's four years against the promises made and the hopes placed in him by American workers

BARACK OBAMA may well be sworn in for a second term of office in January 2013, though the result remains anything but a foregone conclusion. While he holds a marginal lead in almost all opinion polls over his Republican opponent Mitt Romney, the peculiarly undemocratic nature of the US's electoral college system means that the result ultimately hinges on who garners the largest share of the popular vote in fewer than ten "swing" states.

The incumbent's slim advantage is not really testament to the popularity of the Obama brand. His vote is characterised as "soft", with supporters far less enthusiastic about President Obama than for the candidate of "hope and change" in 2008, and now less likely to vote than Romney backers.

Meanwhile, corporate America, which opened its cheque-books to Obama in 2008, has been far keener to toss tens of millions to Romney. In Romney, however, the Republicans have chosen a horribly gaffe-prone candidate, a practising Mormon and venture capitalist, who has largely failed to energise the increasingly dominant Tea Party right. Romney, whose personal wealth surpasses the combined total for the previous eight occupants of the White House, recently released tax returns confirming that he paid tax at a rate of barely 14%. This has reinforced the image of a man utterly out of touch with problems facing "ordinary" Americans amidst a poor economic recovery with national unemployment rates still topping 8%.

In unguarded remarks secretly recorded at a \$50,000 a plate fund-raising dinner, Romney failed to disguise his contempt for nearly half the US electorate:

"All right, there are 47% who are with [Obama], who are dependent upon government, who believe that they are victims, who believe the government has a responsibility to care for them, who believe that they are entitled to health care, to food, to housing, to you-name-it ... that that's an entitlement. And the government should give it

to them. And they will vote for this president no matter what... These are people who pay no income tax."

The Obama administration's most publicised and probably one most significant reform is the Affordable Care Act, (aka "Obamacare") which substantially expands the scope of federal government funded Medicaid coverage for poorer sections of the US population. It also mandates that the rest of society obtains private health insurance cover. In most respects it will not come into effect until 2014 or halfway through the next presidential term of office. But even this timid compromise, which will further line the pockets of the private healthcare companies, was too much for many Republicans to stomach. This is despite the fact that it is remarkably similar to a package agreed by Mitt Romney when he was Governor of Massachusetts. Obamacare barely survived a Supreme Court challenge this June when justices voted by a five to four margin that the legislation did not breach the Constitution.

Apparently, though, the party leadership does not consider Obamacare as a sufficient selling point for the party's base. "Osama Bin Laden is dead, General Motors is still alive", chanted Vice-President Joe Biden in a sorry attempt to whip up a crowd of union officials in Detroit at a Labor Day rally on the eve of the Democratic Party convention. According to the Guardian's Gary Younge, Biden tried the same line at a Texas fundraiser with marginally greater success. Evidently, the execution without trial of al-Qaeda's ailing founder by US Navy SEALs and a taxpayers' bailout of what had been the world's largest corporation, constitute the greatest achievements of the past four years!

In 2008 candidate Obama pledged unambiguously to close the internment and torture camp at Guantanamo Bay. Nearly four years later it remains open. During the Bush years hundreds of civilians are likely to have perished in air raids by computer operated drones. Since 2009

UNIONS

Chicago teachers' strike

ON 18 September some 800 members of the 29,000-strong Chicago Teachers' Union's House of Delegates (effectively a committee for school-based representatives) voted overwhelmingly to suspend their week-long strike action. The fate of the dispute now hinges on the outcome of a membership wide ballot on a deal reached between union negotiators and the management of the city's public (state) schools, backed by the Democratic mayor of America's third largest city, Rahm Emmanuel.

Whatever the eventual outcome, the lively seven day strike was itself a major headache for the Obama administration, highlighting the sharp fault lines that exist between the president and organised workers in the public sector.

The strike was by some measure the largest of its kind in a US school system and it came in a city which is Obama's adopted hometown and from where he launched his political career. Meanwhile, Emmanuel, who might

be seen as the American equivalent of the expletive spewing Malcolm Tucker, was Obama's chief of staff during the administration's first 18 months.

Obama's Education Secretary, Arne Duncan, was formerly head of the city's schools, where he aggressively promoted the launch of charter schools, broadly similar to academies in Britain. Some 50,000 or roughly one in every eight school pupils in Chicago not attending an explicitly private school is now in a charter, where the union is not recognised and pay is generally significantly lower and pupil selection is the norm.

In one of the more astute moves of their campaign, both Romney and his running-mate, Paul Ryan, a self-confessed fan of Ayn Rand, sponsor of legislation to slash government social welfare spending, grabbed the chance to line up in support of Emmanuel and attack the teachers and their union. They swiftly drew parallels with last year's battle in Ryan's home state of Wisconsin where Tea Party-backed governor Scott Walker has been attempting to

strip public sector unions of collective bargaining rights.

Meanwhile, Duncan and the president himself remained studiously neutral in official statements regarding the strike. At the dispute's heart, however, was a challenge to the administration's agenda for state education, which in several key respects is not terribly dissimilar from Michael Gove's and undoubtedly relies upon neutralising effective trade unionism among the nation's teachers in order to introduce an appraisal regime linked to pupils' standardised test scores.

While the Chicago Teachers' Union is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, whose national leadership has anxiously sought to harness members to Obama's re-election bandwagon, Chicago delegates to this summer's union convention refused to wear the obligatory pro-Obama t-shirts on the conference floor.

This symbolic defiance evidently infuriated AFT chief Randi Weingarten (salary and benefits package \$428,000/ £264,000), a bureaucrat who gave notably lukewarm support to September's Chicago walkout.

that drone-inflicted death toll is likely to have increased several times in raids authorised by Obama over Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen.

The last ditch attempt he promised to resolve the Palestinian question and "bring lasting peace to Middle East" never even got going, although it provided another nice little earner for Tony Blair. In practice Obama has grovelled before the ultra-Zionist American Israeli Political Action Committee even as Tel Aviv Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu snubs the US president and all but publicly endorses his Republican opponent.

Despite his unswerving defence of the "American Empire", including the continued prosecution of an ever more hopeless war and occupation in Afghanistan, Obama has more or less miraculously placated what had been a relatively large and visible anti-war movement during the Bush years, simply by fulfilling his promise to withdraw ground forces from Iraq by the close of 2010.

From the outset Obama has made clear whose side he is on with the economy. His key economic advisors, figures from Goldman-Sachs and the Bill Clinton administration, such as Larry Summers and Tim Geithner, were

also champions of banking and financial services deregulation in the 1990s. The candidate who had once promised to walk with workers on the picket line, soon made it plain that while there would be the occasional sop to organised labor, no radical reforms of anti-union laws

The candidate who once promised to walk with workers on the picket line, soon made it plain that no radical reforms would be implemented on his watch

would be implemented on his watch, even at a time when the Democrats commanded a more or less unassailable majority in both houses of Congress.

Of course, that majority was thoroughly swept away in the Republican gains in the November 2010 elections for all the seats in the House of Representatives and roughly



a third of the 100 places in the millionaires' club of the Senate. This change in party political control in the House has, of course, provided Obama an excuse for the administration's failure to translate much of his supporters' "hope" into progressive "change". On balance, however, four years of Obama in the White House has simply added credence to the late Gore Vidal's withering comment on the supposed two-party system in the US:

A still substantial union movement has actually re-emerged over the past decade as a critical source of both funds and foot-soldiers for Democratic candidates

"There is only one party in the United States, the Property Party ... and it has two right wings: Republican and Democrat. Republicans are a bit stupider, more rigid, more doctrinaire in their laissez-faire capitalism than the Democrats, who are cuter, prettier, a bit more corrupt - until recently ... and more willing than the Republicans to make small adjustments when the poor, the black, the anti-imperialists get out of hand. But, essentially, there is no difference between the two parties."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Vidal writing the above in the mid-1970s, after the leadership of the AFL-CIO had

effectively backed Richard Nixon's re-election, omitted the unions from the list of forces eliciting "small adjustments". A much reduced but still substantial union movement has actually re-emerged over the past decade as a critical source of both funds and foot-soldiers for Democratic candidates, not least Barack Obama in 2008. While disillusionment with Obama is widespread among union activists, occasionally mixed with considerable anger, union bureaucracies have largely remained loyal even in the face of wilful snubs by the Democratic Party leadership. For example in election year opting to hold its convention in the notorious "right-to-work" state of North Carolina, some of the toughest turf in the whole nation for union organising.

At the same, though, as most dramatically illustrated by the recent strike by Chicago's teachers [see box, p11], there are serious rumblings of discontent in labor's ranks with the continuing "barren marriage" (to borrow Mike Davis's phrase) between the unions and the Democrats.

While the impact of relatively localised battles is unlikely to be significant in the context of this November, they could be the harbinger of a more turbulent four years to come, particularly if the audacious creativity of an Occupy movement, that was far bigger and bolder in the US than its British counterpart, becomes fused with the potential power of a working class that remains organised in much of a public sector.

An organisation that is certain to face intensified attacks whether Obama or Romney emerges as the eventual winner.

Can the Greek left lead the workers to victory?

Last June the leftist Greek coalition Syriza gained nearly 27% of the vote, making it the second largest party in parliament. Permanent

Revolution interviewed Eugene Michail after a recent visit to Greece

PR: Greece has been in a five year depression; over a fifth of the working population is unemployed, real wages have been cut by 23%. But the EU austerity programme demands more, especially in public sector job losses. Where are the next front lines of struggle to appear, can these attacks be pushed through?

Eugene Michail: The new coalition government is definitely determined to push through a number of new austerity measures – mainly cuts and privatisations – as soon as possible. Even the establishment media agree that this is the last chance that the mainstream parties have to deal with the “crisis”. The politicians know this and they want to project themselves as efficient. They want to get on with the financial side of the job, so that they can then focus on containing the inevitable public anger and social collapse that will ensue. They calculate that for now and for some months to come they will face relatively limited opposition from the wider public.

For that they bank on the freshness of their electoral mandate (no matter how they obtained it) and the general exhaustion of the people after a year of radical activism that, in the eyes of many, has led to no tangible successes – the pro-austerity parties are still in power and the cuts keep on getting deeper and more painful. We cannot underestimate that there is a sense of a disillusionment in the left. At the same time the far right, which also adopts an anti-austerity rhetoric, keeps on establishing itself as a key player in the streets and in the parliament. Racist violence is on the rise and as a result the left is forced to split its attention, fighting against a neo-liberal establishment and a fascist para-state.

In these circumstances it is rather difficult to predict where the new struggles will emerge, and against whom they will be directed. The fault-lines in Greece are much more blurred now than they were in the summer of 2011. Until then the people were united against the political establishment. The establishment realised this, and bringing out a variety of old and tested ideological baggage has

managed to divide the people into many sub-groups. This makes ruling infinitely easier.

PR: There has been a kind of fragile stabilisation in Greece and the Eurozone since the election in June. But this is likely to end next month with Greece's renewed need for external funding and the Troika's demand for more cuts. Do you see the next phase of the crisis as decisive for Greece's membership of the eurozone?

EM: The next months will be decisive not just for the Greek membership of the eurozone but for the euro itself. The spectre of the “Grexit” has been haunting us for more than two years now. It is one of the existential-type dilem-

This is both a systemic and an artificial crisis. And it has been managed solely on the rhetoric of fear, in order to contain the exposure of the system

mas that the Greek and other European politicians and experts keep on projecting onto a Greek public that is now too scared to imagine life outside the euro.

The common perception is that exiting the euro means absolute disaster, Armageddon. They used to say that a return to the drachma would mean that incomes would drop by 30-50%. Now that Greece has been in recession for so long and national GDP has already fallen by almost 30%, they move a step up; they say now that an exit from the eurozone will bring the end of the state and all its protective mechanisms, which will be replaced by the mob. People, long deprived of any sort of alternative political thinking, believe this stuff. This is why they voted the way they did this past June. And this is why this dilemma is still

posed very frequently by commentators and politicians. The same applies to the wider European picture.

This is both a systemic and an artificial crisis. And it has been managed solely on the rhetoric of fear, in order to contain the exposure of the system and to augment the power of the manipulators. This is not to say that a Greek exit or a general collapse will not have very real effects. But most of them can or will come one way or another. What I am saying is that we should not allow ourselves to get trapped in false dilemmas, that distract us from the very real changes – negative and positive – that take place all around us.

PR: How do you assess Syriza's policies for managing the effect of a Greek exit from the euro?

EM: The success of Syriza offered to many Greeks, and to many leftists around the world, a much longed-for opportunity to smile and dream – a self-described radical leftist party, coming second in two consecutive general elections, reaching a percentage (27%) that has not been seen in Europe for many decades! Imagine if...!

Following such heights in popular enthusiasm, it is inevitable that lows will follow quickly. Syriza has not failed us there. Since June it has kept a very low profile, trying to present itself as a respectable, systemic alternative. Some supporters hope that this is just in order to attract more voters for the next elections, but most agree that this is a very conscious decision by a party that came out of the system and has only learned to dream and think within the system.

As for Syriza's policy on managing a Greek exit from the euro, there is none. Alekos Alavanos, the party's former

The movement of Aganaktismenoi last summer in Syntagma Square made a lot of people think that the moment had arrived for a radical new mass movement

leader who took it down the path of radicalism in the mid-2000s, challenged the current leadership last spring to accept that any alternative policy passes through a euro-exit. He asked them to be honest with the electorate and give them a sense of how such an exit would translate in people's lives. He was ignored.

Syriza does not talk about the drachma because it has itself accepted the "euro or chaos" position. It somehow hopes that the euro can be salvaged from the hands of the capitalists and be given to the socialists! It also hopes that more radical forces will soon emerge in the European south, and then they can all co-ordinate an attack against the neo-liberal north. What they do not realise is that such a scenario is highly unlikely to materialise, while at the same time the people in Greece – or at least the voters of Syriza – are much more open to new ideas and much more ready for new, and surely difficult, journeys that will take them away from the dead-ends of today. But if

Syriza does not offer an alternative type of politics it will soon sink back to the 4%, where it started.

PR: How do you assess the strength and confidence of the mass movements of resistance in Greece. Is there weariness or renewed vigour? Could you describe the state of the various components: trade unions, anarchists/anti-capitalist youth?

EM: At this moment it would be difficult to talk about a mass movement of resistance in Greece. A year ago, or six months ago there was some potential that all this anti-authority feeling could become something more coherent. However, exhaustion, fragmentation, and lack of large-scale initiatives have since then sapped away a lot of that energy.

The movement of Aganaktismenoi (Indignados) last summer in Syntagma Square made a lot of people think that possibly the moment had arrived for a radical new mass movement. A year on, most analysts agree that a section of the Aganaktismenoi of last summer became the voters of the far right Golden Dawn this summer! Another large section of the Aganaktismenoi invested their hopes in Syriza.

How this section of the society will behave in the future depends on what direction the party decides to follow in the coming months, social democratic or radical. If, as many fear, it decides to remain reformist then new energies will be unleashed, people moving by necessity to the extra-parliamentarian sphere.

On the outskirts of that sphere lies Antarsya, a small Trotskyist and left coalition that in the May elections received a respectable 3% of the votes. However, it is too closely associated both with the radical end of Syriza and the orthodox Stalinist KKE to pose as a serious alternative to already-tried schemes. If Syriza fails, then the resistance movement, I think, will move closer to anarchism, in the wider understanding of the term. A number of work and neighbourhood collectives that have blossomed in the last years point to that direction. But again, the problem here is the perennial issue of combining forces and agreeing on some basic common aims and means.

As for the black bloc anarchists, they do remain a substantial force in numbers, especially in the major urban centres, but very understandably their attention is split between the anti-austerity and the anti-fascist struggle. At the same time, the police state has clearly decided to attack them in full force. For now it does feel like activist anarchism is rather on the defensive.

PR: It was reported in the British media before the last election that Syriza, because it grew so quickly as an electoral force, lacked organised roots in many localities (i.e. no formal party cells, local agents, even formal members). Is Syriza building from the top-down? How many members does the coalition have and how do they hold their MPs to account?

EM: Syriza is indeed engaged in a countrywide effort to recruit and organise. It is partly for this reason that in the post-election months the party has kept a low profile, as it tries to mutate from a small coalition to a large-scale unitary body. It is organising meetings in towns and

neighbourhoods, inviting people to become members and to participate in the formulation of its political agenda.

To a certain extent this move makes sense, since as it stands now it is comprised of so many groups and sub-groupings, alliances and collaborations that it is difficult for them to stand in parliament with one voice. Of course, this pursuit of a common party line is anathema for many activists, and could prove the beginning of the end of the party's appeal.

PR: Syriza plans to hold a unity conference next year. Do you think this is a viable project?

EM: Of course it is a viable project. The electorate and politicians are used to the idea of articulating all their political energies through political parties. Take the concept of the party away and they are paralysed. Here comes another fake dilemma: party or anarchy. So, yes, the drive for unity is great and it will be most likely successful. The question is whether this is what the circumstances call for now. We are experiencing unique moments of real or potential rupture. I believe that there is a huge space between the concepts of the monolithic party and absolute anarchy, and we need to imaginatively inhabit it. Many activists feel the same.

PR: How do you assess the threat of the far right in Greece and its prospects for growth? What are its social roots?

EM: The electoral rise of the far right was very clearly cultivated by the establishment as it sought to counter-balance the rise of radical activism. A year ago people were thinking well out of the box. This was very unsettling for the mainstream parties that then united in November 2011 in the Papademos government, which also included members of the then dominant far right party of LAOS. They opened the door to extreme nationalists and junta apologists, who even became ministers. It was exactly at that point that the Golden Dawn jumped from 1-2% in the polls to 5-6%.

Although historical comparisons can be counter-productive, the situation in the last year does remind us of the period after the First World War, when the establishment in Italy and Germany supported the rise of fascism in order to fight off what felt at the time to be the tidal wave of communism. In this June's elections many voted for the mainstream parties because they accepted the view that Syriza and Golden Dawn represented the two opposing ends of extremism. Voting for Syriza – ran the argument – would push "ordinary" conservatives to vote for the fascists, and then all this would lead to a civil war.

Now, three months after the elections, the spectre of fascism has a rather different use. After a wave of very public Golden Dawn attacks on immigrants, the government has turned against the fascists, proclaiming its intention to place them under strict legal control, threatening it will make arrests etc. At the same time it is conducting massive anti-immigrant operations throughout Greece. Placing the Golden Dawn under nominal control makes the government look efficient, the guarantor of law and

Immigration is now the big issue in Greece, and it feels that anti-immigrant attacks have become trendy. Racism is the new fashion in the streets

order, at the same time that it actually accelerates its own economic and police violence, destroying lives, the economy, and the social state.

As for the future, the question is not whether the far right will succeed in becoming bigger than its masters; real power will not change hands. The most acute question is whether fascist activism and discourse becomes more widespread among the people of Greece. If this happens then Greek society will get distracted from the real struggles that should lie ahead – the establishment will win.

Unfortunately, the signs are worrying. Immigration is now the big issue in Greece, and it feels that anti-immigrant attacks have become trendy. Racism is the new fashion in the streets not just of Athens but in all Greek cities and the countryside. Even in Mykonos – the heart of bourgeois cosmopolitanism – there was an attack by blackshirts against a group of non-Greek workers.

For the left this means that at the height of the fight against austerity and the political establishment, there is now a new enemy in the streets and in the public sphere. It needs a lot of energy to be active on the radical left right now in Greece.

Dr Eugene Michail is researching and teaching on modern European history. His recent book (Continuum, 2011) is on British-Balkan contacts and images in the first half of the twentieth century. He is currently preparing an online project on the history of the Greek crisis.

No fight from Hollande

The defeat of Sarkozy in the presidential election was a vote by the French people against austerity and recession. Richard Price asks, has President Hollande lived up to this promise?

EVEN BEFORE François Hollande's first hundred days in office were completed in mid-August, Bill Clinton's adage that "it's the economy, stupid" was ringing loud and clear. During the presidential election campaign, Hollande had claimed he was the enemy of the world of finance and set out his stall offering an alternative to the dominant eurozone narrative of austerity and cuts. In that sense, Hollande's vote, together with that of his left wing rival, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, was a vote against the politics of austerity.

Of course, for those who read Hollande's programme and pronouncements carefully, it was apparent that he was attempting to implement a kind of third way "growth plus cuts" package, aiming to balance the budget at a somewhat slower pace, and to finance part of it through higher taxes on the very wealthy.

Even if Hollande promised rather more growth and rather fewer cuts than the Con-Dem coalition in Britain, the problem he faces is that France's economy is flat-lining, its trade deficit is close to record levels, unemployment is at a 13-year high and business confidence is low.

The first weeks of Hollande's government saw a series of eye-catching reforms announced, including a 75% tax rate for top earners, a cap on public sector chief executive pay, reductions in ministerial and presidential salaries, the reintroduction of retirement at 60 for workers with long service and the creation of a ministry of industrial renewal headed by "anti-globaliser" Arnaud Montebourg. The summer saw the introduction of Europe's first Tobin tax – a 0.2% tax on purchases of shares in any publicly traded company – although it is only expected to raise €500m in its first year.

The idea promoted by some on the left that this represents *no* alternative whatsoever to Sarkozy simply acts as a barrier to engaging with Hollande's base. Nevertheless, it is clear not only that many of these measures are largely symbolic, but that the hopes raised in May by the election of a Socialist Party government had already receded before most people had returned from the long summer break.

In July, car giant Peugeot Citroën (PSA) announced 8,000 job losses and the closure of its plant at Aulnay-sous-Bois in the north east suburbs of Paris, where one in eight of the population is already unemployed. This followed trading losses of €662m in the first six months of the year. In late August, the huge supermarket chain Carrefour announced 600 redundancies. August also saw French unemployment cross the three million mark – a figure last reached in 1996 and 1999. Early September saw the government step in to guarantee the €20bn debt of the failing banking group Crédit Immobilier de France (CIF), after the search for a buyer had failed. CIF has 2,500 employees and 300 branches, and controls 3.5% of the mortgage market. It is expected to be wound down, with the loss of most jobs.

The bail out for CIF – following on from that granted to the Franco-Belgian banking group Dexia in the fall out from the Eurozone crisis – is in marked contrast to the failure to act meaningfully in relation to the PSA crisis. Hollande and industry minister Arnaud Montebourg initially declared PSA's restructuring plan as "unacceptable".

But their response so far has amounted to announcing a nebulous car industry support plan and commissioning a report by senior civil servant Emmanuel Sartorius.

The report, delivered by Montebourg on 11 September, does not challenge the market logic of the restructuring, declaring: "The necessity, in principle, of a plan to reorganise industrial activities and to reduce staff is, unfortunately, incontestable. For the time being, PSA must urgently put the situation right." It criticises the decision to close the Aulnay-sous-Bois plant on the basis that PSA should have closed its Madrid plant instead!

But there is also an absence of clear leadership from the PSA trade unions and in particular the CGT, which has mainly confined itself to calling on the government to step in and the employers to reverse their policy, at the expense of putting forward a viable campaign of workers' resistance. Beyond a day of action involving demonstrations in several cities on 9 October no plan of action emerged from the CGT General Assembly on 11 September.

The political hazards of trying to drive down the middle of the road are becoming steadily more apparent, as Hollande comes under fire from both right and left. From the right have come scare stories that Hollande's wealth tax will herald an exodus of the rich and famous. On the left, Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the Front de Gauche, has squarely accused Hollande of a U-turn over the EU fiscal austerity pact, which he criticised on the campaign trail but now seeks to implement.

A poll carried out in August for the mainly Communist newspaper *l'Humanité* found that 72% of voters want a referendum on the fiscal pact, including 66% of Socialist voters and 75% of right wing voters. A poll published by *Le Parisien* on 9 September showed that 60% of voters are "relatively unhappy" with the president's performance, compared with 34% at the end of May.

For many, the Rubicon was crossed on 9 September when Hollande went on television to answer right wing press attacks on his indecisiveness. Claiming that the government was on track, he outlined spending plans based on a growth figure for 2013 revised down to 0.8%. These include not only €10bn to be raised by the 75% marginal tax rate on incomes over €1m and €10bn from higher taxes on businesses, but also €10bn of further public spending cuts. He did insist that there would be "no exceptions" to the wealth tax, in the face of claims from both the right wing daily *Le Figaro* and Mélenchon that he was about to water it down.

But whether even this revised package will hold together is doubtful, not least because there are expensive manifesto commitments to honour for 60,000 more teachers and 5,000 more police, as well as a €2.3bn plan unveiled in August to create 100,000 jobs for young people in 2013. Youth unemployment has steadily climbed, reaching 22.7% in the second quarter. If Hollande sticks to his target of reducing the state deficit next year to the Eurozone target of 3% of GDP, there may be even bigger cuts to come.

Le Figaro has claimed to detect an "openly ideological battle between François Hollande and Angela Merkel" but there is far more that unites them than divides them. Hollande will not risk France's primary relationship with Germany at the heart of the EU – a fact underlined when

the two met on 24 August and reiterated that Greece had to meet its commitments in relation to international bail-out funds.

Meanwhile fiscal orthodoxy has been mirrored by worrying echoes of Sarkozy-style crackdowns on ethnic minorities. Over the summer, Interior Minister Manuel Valls ordered the eviction of Roma communities near Paris, Lille and Lyon, evoking memories of the demolition of Roma sites by Sarkozy in 2010. At least this encountered some protests within Hollande's camp from Martine Aubry, the mayor of Lille, who Hollande defeated in the Socialist Party leadership contest, and Cécile Duflot, the Green

As far as a left fightback is concerned, much depends on whether the Front de Gauche can create a genuine united front of resistance to austerity

Party Housing Minister. Having deported 240 Roma to Romania, the government announced plans it claimed would help Roma access jobs in France.

Relations between the police and minority communities continue to deteriorate as little is done to address the problems of discrimination and economic hardship. On the night of 13-14 August there were serious clashes between the police and mainly north African youth in Fafet-Brossolette, a deprived northern suburb of Amiens, described by *l'Humanité* as "abandoned by the public authorities".

As far as a left fightback against cuts and redundancies is concerned, much depends on whether the Front de Gauche can build on the verbal fireworks of the Jean-Luc Mélenchon campaign and create a genuine united front of resistance to austerity. It received a small boost in July when it was joined by the Gauche Anticapitaliste tendency which split from the imploding Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste.

The real test is whether it can reach out to oppositionists within the Socialist Party, develop a trade union strategy beyond a friendly relationship with the leaders of the CGT and build bridges to France's oppressed minorities, who are almost entirely excluded from mainstream politics.

SYNDICALISM IN THE USA

Rise and fall of

IN AND around the revolutionary socialist left you often hear the term syndicalist used as a term of abuse. It is usually twinned with "deviation" just so that everyone knows it's a bad thing. Sadly this often puts paid to a rational appraisal of the contribution syndicalism has made to the class struggle over the years.

Yet a balanced assessment of some of the key syndicalist movements of the past reveals an incontestable fact – syndicalism provided the workers' movement with an armoury of trade union tactics. From the factory occupation through to the workers' defence guard, from the flying picket through to workers' control, from rank and file independence through to industrial unions it was syndicalism that forged these tactics. And syndicalism used them in mass struggles that shook the bosses' order.

Syndicalism believes that the trade union, organised on industrial – as opposed to craft – lines is the principal agent of change in society and that mass strikes are the principal means of overthrowing capitalism. But syndicalism comes in all shapes and sizes.

In the early part of the twentieth century different strands of the syndicalist movement struggled for leadership of the unions or struggled to build new unions. Their experiences and their arguments are well illustrated by the history of the IWW in the US.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the US was undergoing massive industrial expansion. Between 1899 and 1919 the total value of manufactured goods more than doubled. The population of the cities almost doubled over the same period. Alongside this economic growth the ranks of the working class swelled. Not only was there population growth but also between 1901 and 1915, 11.5 million migrants poured into the country creating a workforce that was both huge and hugely diverse.

The need for a militant fighting organisation based on class solidarity was clear. This was the time when the US ruling class grew into a corporate behemoth, poised to swallow the earth. It was the time when Esso, Ford, Vanderbilt, Rockefeller made their fortunes out of the rise of mass production. It was a time when strikers were killed by vigilantes while the state either turned a blind eye or joined in the shooting and lynching. As Cornelius Vanderbilt said, "Law! What do I care about the law? H'ain't I got the power?"

This was a time when, literally, blood ran out of the eyes of miners after a day's work. Children were worked to death. Profits were gouged out of the bodies of an ethni-

*In June 1905 at Brands Hall
Chicago the Industrial Workers
of the World – the IWW or
the Wobblies as they came to be
known – held their founding
convention with Big Bill Haywood
in the chair. Mark Hoskisson
argues that the history of the
Wobblies still has important
lessons for the workers'
struggle today*

cally divided working class. Yet the trade union movement was tiny and committed to class peace. In 1900 only 1.5 million workers, out of a workforce of 24 million, belonged to unions organised in the American Federation of Labour (AFL). The IWW later dubbed the AFL the American Separation of Labour, with good reason.

The AFL was led by Samuel Gompers. It was the prototype business union. Its full timers were actually called "business agents" mimicking the capitalists' own hierarchy. It was based entirely on skilled workers who took

the Wobblies

more pride in their craft than they did in their class. The fewer craftsmen available and organised the better, since that would drive up the price for their labour – or so the theory went. In practice the opposite happened as industrial processes bypassed the old crafts.

The AFL's entire structure was geared towards avoiding strikes. It existed as a base for Gompers' forelock tugging bureaucracy and as a glorified mutual insurance scheme for the tiny minority of the class within its ranks. It excluded blacks and most other non-white races. It largely excluded women and it spurned the unskilled. In other words the AFL pitted itself against the majority of the workforce instead of fighting to defend it.

The only exception to this within the AFL was the United Mine Workers, the UMW. But the UMW operated in the eastern coalfields. Out west things were different. And it was out west that the mainstay of the IWW in the first phase of its existence was forged, centred on the Western Federation of Miners (WFM).

This was the union of hard rock miners, the miners who blasted and then clawed copper, silver and iron out of the Western mountains. It was led by men like Big Bill Haywood and Vincent Saint John – men who had fought brutal strikes against the copper, gold and mineral barons out in the wild west, like Cripple Creek in Colorado where the bosses deployed over 1,200 armed thugs against the strikers. Pay rises might follow a strike, but only if the strikers had enough six-shooters to see off those gun thugs the bosses hired to kill them.

The racism, sexism, craftism and downright corruption that were embedded in the AFL – with the exception of the UMW – led the WFM to look for an alternative federation more in tune with its experience of fighting to the death with ruthless bosses. It found allies in the German dominated Brewery Workers Union and the English dominated Amalgamated Society of Engineers and split from the AFL to form the American Labour Union (the ALU)

The ALU recognised that the AFL was worse than useless, it was an obstacle, and the path of reform from within, which was initially tried, was doomed. So, led by the WFM, which had anything between fifty to a hundred thousand members, it united with socialists like Debs of the Socialist Party and Daniel De Leon of the Socialist Labor Party, and anarchists like Father Hagerty and Lucy Parsons, to convene the June 1905 "Continental Congress of the Working Class" – the founding congress of the IWW.

The congress was a carnival of working class resistance. It rejected craftism in favour of industrial unionism, racism in favour of organising every race and creed, and sexism by placing women at the forefront of its organisation. Indeed Lucy Parsons, a black woman, made a keynote speech spelling out that the occupation and sit down strike should become the weapons of the class struggle in the future.

The IWW's message was simple and direct. As the preamble to the constitution put it:

"The working class and the employing class have nothing in common... Instead of the conservative motto 'a fair day's wage for a fair day's work' we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, 'Abolition of the wage system'. It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism."

But behind this rousing form of words real tensions existed at the conference, tensions between different political ideologies and strategies. The groupings that came together inside the IWW were, in the main, grouped around four different political outlooks representing different strands of syndicalism.

The dominant wing was undoubtedly the industrial unionists led by Haywood and Saint John. Their outlook was summed up later in the *Industrial Worker* in August 1912:

"Railroad men: lose their cars for them!

"Telegraphers: Lose their messages for them!

"Expressmen: Lose their packages for them!

"Against the bludgeon of Industrial Despotism bring the silent might of the Industrial Democracy!"

The industrial unionists saw the union itself as the vehicle for society wide change – via the peaceful general strike. They regarded political work, electoral or not, as a diversion from building for the general strike that would one day bring about a society based on a co-operative of industrial enterprises run by the workers.

The socialists who were present at the founding of the IWW, and especially De Leon, had a very different perspective. They rejected the disdain for industrial struggle that was then common among Marxists but did not see industrial struggles and strikes as "schools for socialism". Rather they were seen as just a way of generating an audience for socialist ideas, not a means of translating those ideas into active political struggle by those on strike. Industrial action was subordinate to De Leon's goal of winning the masses over to socialist doctrine through abstract propaganda.



De Leon favoured a union that was little more than an industrial arm of his Socialist Labor Party, geared towards increasing its influence through support at elections. The Socialist Party of Debs favoured this approach too, but its reformist drift meant that it was initially more easy going than the "ragged trousered professor" De Leon. He ran the Socialist Labor Party on strict doctrinal lines, was permanently suspicious of the industrial unionists who he believed were enamoured of "beggars and thieves". And, worst of all, he had a fatalistic view of industrial action, believing that strikes for higher pay were of little consequence as they would just result in price rises.

The third main faction comprised the anarchists. They did not share the industrial unionists' view of how to change society, favouring instead an anarchist revolution. But they had no truck with De Leon's commitment to political action. They fought against any attempt by the IWW to implement the clause in the IWW's constitution that committed it to agitate "on the political, as well as on the industrial field" notwithstanding the safety net clause stating that this would be "without affiliation with any political party". They were for a "de-centralised" union and were far more oriented to the tramps and even criminals than the industrial unionists.

Finally, within the IWW, there were the moderates within the WFM, led by Charles O Sherman, the first and only ever president of the IWW. Sherman's term of office was short-lived. Within a year, backed by moderates within the WFM, he left the organisation taking all the moderates with him.

The promise of the 1905 convention seemed destined to remain unfulfilled. It sharpened tensions in the ranks between the groupings. Not long after the 1905 Convention Bill Haywood was framed for the murder of Frank Steuener, Idaho's state governor who had backed the bosses during a strike by the WFM. The frame up was so transparent that even Gompers and the AFL demanded

moderates, spurred on by Sherman, seized the chance to take control of the union. They quickly disaffiliated from the IWW and opened negotiations to re-enter the AFL and team up with the United Mineworkers.

Haywood's trial, however, kept the reputation of the IWW at the forefront of many militants' minds. The campaign to free him raised thousand of dollars. Demonstrations of hundreds of thousands were held. Agitation for a general strike led to it becoming a real possibility. And in the face of this the state backed down. Haywood, and two others charged with him, were freed. Haywood himself did not return to the forefront of the IWW after his release. But his ally, Vincent Saint John, having defeated De Leon, began to turn the union around.

From 1906 to 1912 - even prior to the split with De Leon - many of the tactics that made the Wobblies famous were deployed by its agitators across the mines, mills, fields, forests and factories of the US. In the Goldfield Nevada strikes of 1906, faced with backsliding by the WFM moderates, they put workers' control of production at the forefront of their campaign. Saint John said of the strike in Nevada:

"No committee was ever sent to the employers. The unions adopted the wage scales and regulated the hours. The secretary posted the same on a bulletin board outside the union hall, and it was the LAW. The employers were forced to come and see the committee."

At the General Electric plant in Shenectady in 1906 the IWW led the first recorded occupation, lasting 65 hours. In 1909 in the face of violence by the bosses' thugs and state troopers the IWW issued a simple statement during a strike at the Pressed Steel plant at McKees rock in Pennsylvania: "For every striker's life you take a trooper's life will be taken."

During the same strike 60 workers agreed to scab. The minute they were inside they revealed themselves as Wobblies and persuaded every scab to join the strike. Victory soon followed, boosting the prestige of the Wobblies in the eyes of militant workers throughout the land.

But despite the ingenuity of their tactics and the colourful characters in their ranks, like Joe Hill who put their message to music, the IWW did not become a mass organisation. In essence it was a cadre organisation, moving from town to town, spreading the revolutionary unionist gospel through propaganda. De Leon saw this as a turn away from politics and a turn towards the hobo. To an extent he was right and Saint John did steer the organisation west after the split.

The political justification for this came from the anarchists who were backing Saint John. One article in the IWW paper "Solidarity" in 1908 commented on the "Blanket and Bindle Stiffs" of the west that these rootless wanderers embodied "the very spirit of the IWW. His cheerful cynicism, his frank and outspoken contempt for most of the conventions of bourgeois society ... make him an admirable exemplar of the iconoclastic doctrines of revolutionary unionism. His anomalous position, half industrial slave, half vagabond adventurer, leaves him infinitely less servile than his fellow worker in the East."

On the back of this outlook the Wobblies themselves shifted from industrial action to a form of political action

Despite their ingenuity and the colourful characters in their ranks, like Joe Hill who put their message to music, the IWW did not become a mass organisation

Haywood's release. But in the three years that the case took to come to trial - with Bill in prison - the IWW rotted on the vine.

By 1908 a conflict between the industrial unionists like Vincent Saint John and the socialists like Daniel De Leon blew up. For their own reasons the anarchists sided with Saint John. At the 1908 Convention the IWW deleted the clause in its constitution about political action. It was now only committed to industrial action. De Leon and the SLP walked out. Though the industrial unionists won, their victory came at a heavy price. The IWW's mass membership lay almost exclusively with the WFM. With Haywood in prison and the IWW busy tearing itself apart the WFM



Big Bill Haywood



Frank Little



Elizabeth Gurley Flynn addressing a demonstration



Joe Hill

– the free speech fights – which were well suited to the more chaotic lifestyle of the westerners. The free speech fights, which began in 1909 in Spokane, Fresno, Missoula, and many other towns, were inspiring. Charismatic leaders would turn up to hammer home the IWW’s message – which was put into verse:

*We meet today in freedom’s cause
And raise our voices high
We’ll join our hands in union strong
To battle or to die*

The local state, usually in alliance with proto-fascist “Citizens organisation”, would arrest these soap-boxers. The IWW would then supply a mile long queue of agitators to take their place until every jail in town was full of cheerful, singing Wobblies. Frank Little, one of the great Wobbly organisers, who described himself as “half red indian, half white but all IWW”, got thirty days for reading the declaration of independence during a free speech fight.

In Spokane the state seemed less wised up to the intentions of the anarchist influenced leader, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. The jury said, after she had been arrested for chaining herself to a lamp-post during a free speech fight:

“If you think this jury or any jury is going to send that pretty Irish girl to jail merely for being big-hearted and idealistic, to mix with all those whores and crooks down at the pen, you’ve got another guess coming.”

Against this background some of the great IWW songs emerged. Joe Hill, later framed and executed by the state, was a master of the art of making agitation sing, while Bruce “Utah” Phillips summed up the Wobblies’ musical

philosophy: “We liked to steal the old Christian hymns because everyone knew the tune. We just changed the words so they made more sense.”

While much of this was splendid publicity for the Wobblies they never grew as a result of it. They were not following either their strikes or their free speech fights with solid organising amongst the masses. The anarchists did not want to do this. For them the IWW was a vehicle for anarchist propaganda and they were hostile to the idea of a centralised union capable of drawing in non-anarchist workers.

In 1910 their drive to de-centralise the organisation completely, leaving them free to do as they pleased where they pleased, led to another major feud in the Wobblies. The anarchist de-centralisers now came up against the industrial unionist centralisers.

This dispute coincided with the return of Big Bill Haywood from a European tour. Together with Saint John he led a fight to build a proper mass membership centralised union. Haywood had developed his understanding of industrial unionism through discussions with European syndicalists and debates with both the reformists of the Socialist Party – who counterposed electoral work to industrial struggle – and the anarchist influenced de-centralisers.

Industrial unionism is fundamentally a belief that industrial action by the workers united in a single union, could abolish capitalism. You don’t need a party and you don’t need a programme, you just need a union and you just need a general strike. Once again the idea was best expressed in verse:

Our history / Syndicalism

*If the workers took a notion
They could stop all speeding trains;
Every ship upon the ocean
They can tie with mighty chains
Every wheel in the creation
Every mine and every mill
Fleets and armies of the nation
Will at their command stand still.*

But to achieve this your organisation has to be solid. It has to be built to last. And it needs a mass membership. Industrial unionism was fused with sound organisational principles and Haywood and Saint John decided the time was ripe to push for both against the de-centralisers. Their message was simple – it emphasised co-ordinated workers' action over abstract anarchist propaganda and activities that left nothing behind beyond a memory.

The Saint and Haywood won out. They set out to build a real mass union. And in 1912, at the Lawrence textile strike in Massachusetts their vision for the Wobblies came to life. Thousands of workers, speaking around sixty different languages, were organised by the IWW into a mass strike against wage cuts.

The strike saw the IWW at its best. Mass pickets and mass demonstrations, songs, the shipping of strikers' children to revolutionary foster parents in New York City (and the state clubbing those children on their way to the station) galvanised the entire labour movement to rally to Lawrence. The strike was won and Haywood and the industrial unionists won outright control of the union.

Their tactics were second to none. But having won control of the union the IWW leadership did not take the next step and create a mass self-reliant membership from the ranks of the working class. To a large extent Haywood and Saint John retained a "cadre" view of the organisation. Roll in the members but retain control in the hands of trusted industrial unionists. This actually substituted a small cadre group at the top of the IWW for both a mass trade union embracing workers of many different political persuasions and a revolutionary party openly trying to win those workers over to its programme.

Or rather it blurred the line between the two, both in the way the IWW organised and in the way the leaders fought for their broader ideas. The leaders' ideas on politics

were kept largely private and each individual strike was the thing in itself. Once it was over the leaders would move on to a new strike, often leaving little behind – the IWW membership in Lawrence collapsed after the strike had been won.

The problem with this approach was starkly revealed a year later during the Paterson Silk workers' strike in New Jersey. The struggle was no less heroic than Lawrence. It even saw a play of the strike, with a cast of thousands of strikers, performed in New York on the suggestion of a young IWW sympathiser – John Reed. But it went down

to defeat, and the IWW suffered with it, losing members and influence.

This defeat prompted a major debate in the IWW with some members expressing the view that the IWW was in danger of becoming a sort of travelling stage show, touring strikes but not taking the general movement forward. This view was strongly argued by Ben Williams, the editor of the IWW's paper "Solidarity":

"At present we are to the labour movement what the high-diver is to the circus. A sensation, marvellous and ever thrilling. We give them thrills. We do hair raising stunts and send the crowd home to wait impatiently for the next sensationalist to come along. As far as making industrial unionism fit the everyday life of the workers we have failed miserably."

An IWW field organiser was even more forthright:

"A spontaneous strike is a spontaneous tragedy unless there is strong local organisation on the spot."

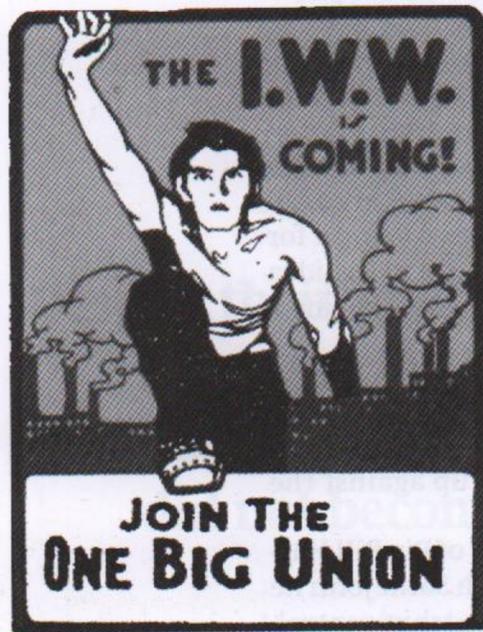
The debate prompted the IWW to change its orientation – but not its industrial unionist creed. In 1914 Saint John retired to go gold prospecting. Bill Haywood became the general secretary and moved from New York to Chicago. But Haywood decided that industrial centres – with a stable working class – were immune to the industrial unionist doctrine. The answer was to turn west yet again, to the migrant workers who travelled the west and mid-west following the harvests for working, riding the freight trains with their IWW red card as protection.

The results of this turn were very good. Two significant mass unions, the Brotherhood of Timber Workers (which was about 50% black) and the Agricultural Workers Organisation both joined the IWW and were engaged in remarkable organising drives across the west. But the turn was based on the idea that these workers – the footloose "bindlestiffs" and the rootless hobos – were a vanguard, superior to the industrial working class in the great cities of the US. As one IWW wit commented, Jesus himself was "the hobo carpenter from Nazareth". The song, "Hallelujah I'm a bum" became a firm favourite in the Little Red Song Book.

Haywood had decided the only way to beat Gompers was by ignoring the factory workers and "reaching down into the gutters" to the itinerant workers. It was a return to his own early ideals shaped in the west. It was a return to "Hobohemia". But, "professional unionism" – stable organisations for the itinerants aimed at winning moderate but important reforms such as a minimum wage and an end to the rule of the "company store" – was allied to pure industrial unionist ideals, the industrial society of workers' control. It was an uncomfortable and untenable alliance because it was not an open alliance openly won by the industrial unionists in front of the masses.

The politics of the minority at the top were divorced from the actual day-to-day business of the IWW. It was one thing to the workers and quite another to the leaders. Politics and economics were fatally separated. And the onset of war drove this point home.

At the point where it could have mounted a serious challenge to the AFL the IWW collapsed. Its unions shrank. Its members became disoriented and it found itself attacked on all sides. The reason was that it had debarred itself – as a



result of its own doctrinal commitment to pure industrial unionism – from being able to give a clear political answer to the big political question everyone was talking about between 1914 and 1916 – the war and the US’s entry into it. What should the workers’ do? Haywood’s own answer summed up the organisation’s problem:

“The fight of the IWW is one of the economic field and it is not for me, a man who could not be drafted for war, to tell others that they should go to war, or tell them that they should not go.”

Of course the IWW were opposed to the war. But they had no answer to what should be done – politically – by the working class to oppose it. They could not do this because it would threaten to blow their organisation apart. That was the price for not relating their politics to the everyday struggles of the workers that they led. The furthest the IWW went was pacifist opposition to the war, again expressed in a classic song:

*I love my flag I do, I do
Which floats upon the breeze
I also love my arms and legs
And neck, and nose and knees
One little shell might spoil them all
Or give them such a twist
They would be of no use to me
I guess I won't enlist*

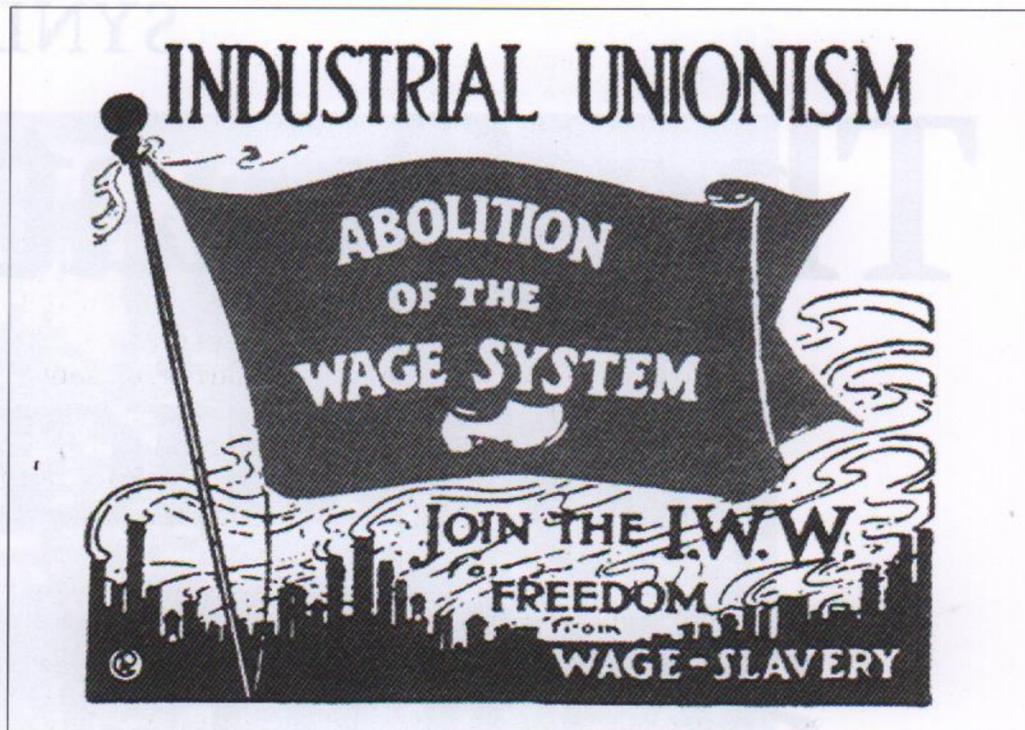
But the IWW leaders offered no explanation of the cause of war and no political course of action that could mobilise workers against it, let alone direct them towards revolution. They were found wanting because they had embraced the idea of the vanguard (themselves) but had separated that idea from the notion of a party committed to openly winning over the entire working class to their own revolutionary outlook.

The state seized the opportunity that US entry into the war offered to move against an organisation that it regarded as both “undesirable” and “un-American”. Despite the IWW not breaking any laws, raids were launched against all their offices. Their members were rounded up. Many were killed by reactionary gangs. And the entire leadership was arrested and put on trial for treachery. When the trials came in 1918 Haywood and the other leaders were all given jail sentences, some of them for twenty years.

They reacted with typical good humour – Ben Fletcher, a black defendant, commented to Judge Landis that he had “used bad grammar in the trial – his sentences were too long”. This even caused the judge to laugh. But humour was not enough. This was not a re-run of the free speech fights. It was an attempt by the state to smash an organisation. That organisation’s lack of a coherent political answer to the imperialist war – and its inability to win mass support for its strategic goals inside the working class – deprived it of the ability to fight back. It was smashed and never recovered. Frank Little was lynched. Big Bill and the Saint were chained together and shipped to Leavenworth for a twenty-year stretch (though Haywood eventually made it to the Soviet Union).

After that the IWW went into sharp decline, with anarchists taking over its leadership, and by 1924 splits had turned it into a rump organisation.

The failure came because the IWW was a vanguard



carrying out a propagandist role but it was separated from the masses, in front of which it tried to play out a straightforward trade union role. The industrial unionists underestimated the importance of politics to the economic struggle. They did not understand the relationship between the two.

But despite that failure the IWW’s tactics, its indomitable spirit, its courage and humour in the face of the class enemy and its advocacy of industrial unionism – workers’ control, rank and file organisation, a fight against craftism, racism and sexism, militant class struggle action – all mark it down as a revolutionary movement.

Its spirit was summed up when, after the 1918 trial one of the defendants who was given twenty years, Ashleigh a close friend of the Saint, said:

“When the verdict came we bore ourselves proudly as kings in the exalted dignity of a cause that knows no defeat – the cause of the working class. Just think of labor, powerful, yet blind, stumbling, fumbling, hesitating – yet slowly awakening to its historic mission: that of fighting on the world-wide arena of the class struggle, for the freedom of the whole world.”

They are our Wobblies. And always will be.

BOOKS YOU COULD READ ON THE WOBBLIES

Wobblies! A graphic history of the Industrial Workers of the World edited by Paul Buhle and Nicole Schulman, Verso 2005

Solidarity Forever: The IWW an oral history of the Wobblies, edited by Stewart Bird, Dan Georgakas, Deborah Shaffer, Lawrence and Wishart 1985

Big Bill Haywood, by Melvyn Dubofsky, Manchester University Press, 1987

The Living Spirit of the Wobblies, by Len De Caux, International Publishers, 1978

The Wobblies, The Story of Syndicalism in the United States, by Patrick Renshaw, Anchor Books, 1967

The Industrial Workers of the World by Phillip S Foner, (Vol. 4 of History of the Labor Movement in the United States) International Publishers, 1980

SYNDICALISM IN BRITAIN

The Great Unrest: syndicalism in action 1910-1914

*In the years before the
First World War Britain was
rocked by mass strikes, some of
insurrectionary proportions.
Stuart King examines the role and
influence of British syndicalism
in these mighty struggles*

BRITISH SYNDICALISM almost became a mass force in the huge strike wave that swept Britain before the First World War. It could not have had a better opportunity to convince the working class of its strategy and programme for revolution.

The early decades of the 20th century saw millions of days lost in strikes, with workers often taking militant direct action to prevent scabbing and force a halt to production. Mass demonstrations and meetings, a huge growth in membership of trade unions, a mass militant movement for votes for women, as well as a growing socialist movement open to new ideas and actions, all provided fertile ground for new revolutionary ideas.

Yet the syndicalists, despite being influential in the growing trade union movement and often becoming leading figures in the strikes, failed to break out from being small propaganda societies. As a result syndicalism failed to become a real factor in turning a pre-revolutionary upsurge into an anti-capitalist revolution. The reasons were complex and, examining them today, a hundred years later, provides some valuable lessons for revolutionaries trying to transform the trade unions and build a new revolutionary working class movement.

Britain before the war

Industry in Britain in the early 20th century was going through considerable economic and structural changes. After recovery from the great depression of 1873-96, real wages had started falling again – by as much as 10% between 1900 and 1912. Increasing international competition from Germany and the US meant the employers could not increase prices and therefore resisted wage demands. At the same time



The 1911 Llanelli railway strike

the sharp contrast between working class living standards and the conspicuous luxury consumption of the Edwardian rentiers and manufacturers was becoming ever more glaring.

This was also a period of growing centralisation of capital, with amalgamation into ever larger units of production. This undermined local, sectional and craft-based trade union organisation, and showed its inadequacy in the face of a determined employer onslaught. As a result, the amalgamation of small trade unions and the development of industrial unionism, uniting all workers in the same industry irrespective of craft and job, was seen as a way of consolidating labour's strength against the concentration of capitalist power. In developing this argument as their own, the syndicalists were cutting with the grain of development.

This was also a period where the Liberal government of the time pursued a policy of incorporating the national and regional trade union leaders into the collective bargaining and conciliation machinery as a means of preventing strike action and co-opting a growing layer of trade union officials. This in turn led to growing resentment at the local level about the remoteness of national officials from the issues facing workers on the ground and their increasing closeness to government and employers.

All this took place in a period of massive growth in the trade unions, which trebled in membership between 1888 and 1910. Growth continued upwards in the years before the war: a membership of 2.5 million in 1909 leapt to 4 million by 1914, with the biggest gains being made amongst unskilled workers. The number of strikes increased in proportion, between 2.5 and 3 million strike days were recorded per year between 1900 and 1909 (1908 alone hit 10.7 million

days). And in the four years 1910-14 – “the great unrest” – it averaged 10 million a year. And these were often very violent, even insurrectionary strikes, very different to the more orderly “new unionism” of the late 1880s and 90s.

Active militants who wished to change society in a socialist direction had a number of groups to join at the turn of the century: the Independent Labour Party (ILP) the Social Democratic Federation (SDF)¹, the Fabian Society or the Clarion Group. All these groups believed the new “socialist commonwealth” would be established by political rather than industrial action.

Indeed, many MPs were seen as having gone over to the ‘other side’, where they preached conciliation and moderation to the workers

Fundamental change bringing about a new social order would involve winning a majority in parliament and transferring the majority of the means of production to public ownership. The socialist state would run industries, banks and large farms by appointing managers or converting some production to co-operatives. This necessarily led socialists to make their primary activity the building up of socialist parties to stand in elections. It was this “parliamentary orthodoxy” that the syndicalists were to challenge.

In this period the Labour Party was making considerable gains in parliament; socialist and Labour representation had jumped from two MPs in 1900 to

30 in 1906. Yet there was growing disillusionment amongst workers with the results: these gains had not changed workers' conditions one iota. Indeed, many MPs were seen as having gone over to the "other side", where they preached conciliation and moderation to the workers. Despite being an independent group in parliament (unlike the Lib-Lab MPs supported by the Liberal Party) the Labour MPs were seen as being far too close to the Liberal government of Asquith and Lloyd George.

A variegated syndicalism

The syndicalism that developed in Britain during this period was not a unified political current. One early trend developed from a split in the SDF in 1903 – the Socialist Labour Party (SLP). It was a largely Scottish based organisation that had developed as an opposition within the SDF, opposing the growing opportunism of the Hyndman grouping in the leadership.² The SLP in Britain mirrored the politics of the De Leonite SLP in the US. They did not call themselves syndicalists but rather "industrial unionists". Their common ground with the syndicalists was a belief that industrial unionism, workers' direct action and the mass general strike were key aspects of the struggle for socialism, to which the electoral struggle should be subordinated.

For De Leon the party's role was to politically educate the workers so their power of numbers could win political power at the ballot box, something that could only be achieved by the industrial unions

When Mann arrived back in Britain in May 1910 he threw himself into the rising industrial struggle and into syndicalist organising

threatening or calling a general strike, a "general lockout of the capitalist class". The political party's job was essentially negative and destructive, taking power as the industrial unions took hold of the economy, the party would then "adjourn themselves on the spot, sine die", disbanding the state organs and handing power to the industrial unions and their executive board. Nationalisation by the state was seen as just another form of exploitation and was therefore opposed.³

The SLP in Britain mirrored these policies. They were a small, centralised propaganda group who sold Marxist pamphlets and made industrial unionist propaganda. They formed the British Advocates of Industrial Unionism (BAIU) to mirror the IWW of the US. Its purpose was to persuade the trade unions to dissolve in favour of all grade revolutionary industrial unions. The SLP paper, *The Socialist*, declared, "the hope of the British proletariat lies in the decay and death of trade unionism ... the death of the Labour

Party and the birth of industrial unionism."⁴ This sectarian position towards the trade unions virtually guaranteed that the SLP and its trade union arm would remain a small and isolated sect.

This sectarianism did not stop the SLP having some influence in popularising industrial unionism in the trade union movement, even if the workers they influenced did not join the SLP or its trade union organisation. But its rigid discipline and refusal to tolerate difference also led to splits, one of which included E J B Allen, who led an anti-political action, anarcho-syndicalist influenced breakaway, forming the Industrial League, which became affiliated with the US IWW. The league was just one of several small syndicalist groups coming into existence, many of them locally based.⁵

During the period of the "great unrest" the SLP/BAIU began to move from propaganda to militant action. The BAIU recruited members in the Argyle and in Albion Motor Works in Scotland (later strong centres of the Clyde Shop Stewards in the First World War) and recruited 4,000 of 11,000 workers in the US owned Singer factory. By 1910 the Advocates felt strong enough to become a re-organised Industrial Workers of Great Britain (IWGB), which sought to recruit as a revolutionary union rather than remain just a propaganda society for industrial unionism. It even slightly modified its original intransigence on working in the existing unions, allowing this until such time as enough members were recruited to form new revolutionary ones.

Success at Singer was short-lived however as the bosses provoked a strike and a lock-out in March 1911. It ended after three weeks with a drift back to work and the sacking of IWGB leaders. The skilled toolmakers belonging to the ASE worked throughout the strike and there was little support from other unions.⁶

Like the other syndicalist organisations, the SLP/IWGB declined as the great wave of industrial unrest ended with the onset of war in 1914. Its sectarianism led many like Neil Maclean, its first national secretary, to leave it for organisations like the ILP. In 1913 the General Secretary of the IWGB recognised its weakness declaring they had "failed to attract to our organisation even workers who believed in industrial unionism".⁷

Tom Mann and the ISEL

Far more important to the development of syndicalist influence in Britain was the return from Australia in 1910 of Tom Mann. Mann, despite being away from the country for almost ten years, was still well known and influential in the British trade union movement. Previously in Britain he had been a prominent leader in new unionism and the London dock strike of 1889, as well as being a leading SDF member for a time and national secretary of the ILP shortly after its formation in 1894.

In Australia he had become a leading socialist and

trade union organiser and his experiences, particularly around a major mining strike at Broken Hill, had made him a fierce convert to the need for industrial unionism and syndicalism. He had found a striking similarity in the development of his own ideas and those put forward in the writings of De Leon and in particularly those of James Connolly, then organising in the US with the IWW in America.

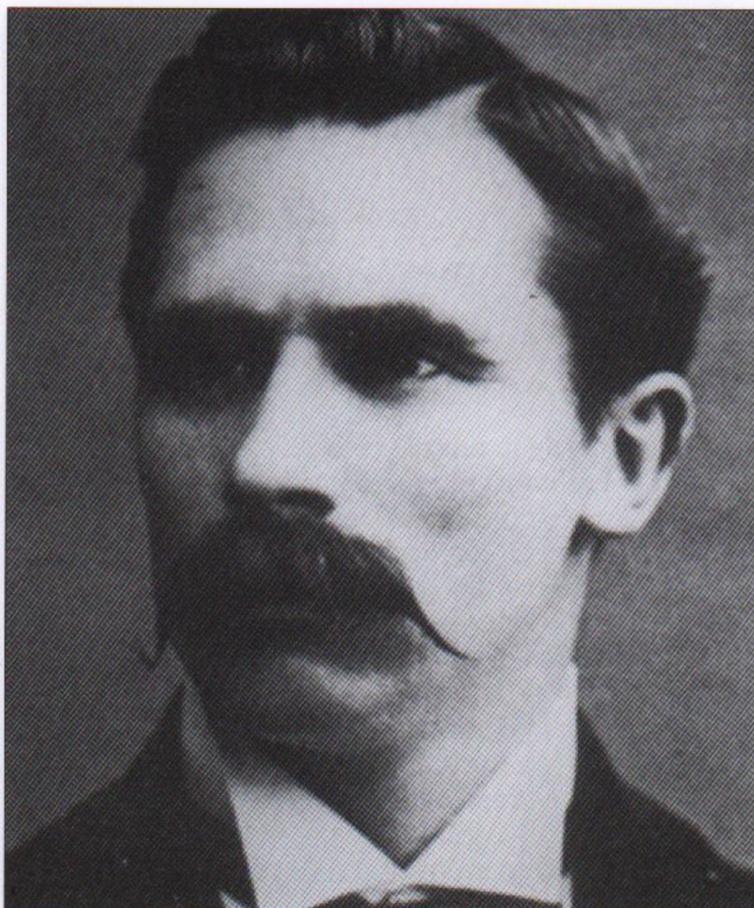
In 1904 he was organising with railworkers in the state-owned railways in Victoria and saw first hand how the state managers were no better than the capitalists in obstructing workers' interests. He concluded, according to a later article, that nationalisation was no solution to the workers' struggles and that it resulted only in domination by a "bureaucracy, acting entirely in the interests of the capitalist class".⁸

In the Broken Hill mining strike of 1908 the role of the South Australian Labour-Liberal coalition government was even more devastating, using arbitration and conciliation tactics to demobilise the workers, who were locked out following a 12.5% wage cut. The government finally called in troops to protect imported scabs and break the union action, leaving many strikers unemployed and their leaders imprisoned. Mann reacted by denouncing "political methods" (i.e. reformist conciliation) and "state socialism". He also pointed out the role that trade union sectionalism had played in contributing to the defeat, with trade unionised railway workers bringing armed police and troops to the areas by train, even while their unions were contributing to the strike fund.⁹

When Mann arrived back in Britain in May 1910 he threw himself into the rising industrial struggle and into syndicalist organising. He was met by Guy Bowman, at that time a leading member of the London SDF. Bowman had syndicalist leanings and close contacts with the French syndicalists of the CGT, the major French union organisation. Apparently Mann's first words to Bowman when he arrived were "lets go and see the men of direct action" by which he meant the leaders of the CGT. He and Bowman set off for France at the end of May where Mann learned how the syndicalists functioned within the CGT. They returned to Britain intending to adapt this form of syndicalism to working within the trade unions to transform them.¹⁰

Mann also rejoined the SDF when he returned to Britain and went on a speaking tour for the federation talking about his experiences in Australia and the need for industrial unionism. This did not go down well with the leadership of the SDF and Mann's membership turned out to be short-lived.

A speech at a Blackburn SDF public meeting was typical of his critique of the SDF and other socialist parties and their obsession with parliamentary politics. He declared that the increasing numbers of Labour and socialist members of parliament had done "very little" to improve the lot of the working class. He continued "Many had during recent years become so thoroughly



Tom Mann

absorbed in parliamentary work that they had paid no attention to the industrial side." He suggested that significant change through parliament could only come when it was preceded by thorough-going industrial organisation.¹¹ This contrasted with the SDF's official line, which was – in the middle of the great strike wave – "Striking is of little use unless it is backed up by straight political action."

After the SDF disassociated itself from Tom Mann's views and publicly attack industrial unionism, Mann resigned in May 1911. In his resignation letter he denounced the "fictitious importance" that workers had been encourage to give to parliamentary action and said "I declare in favour of direct industrial organisation, not as a means but as *the* means whereby

For the syndicalists the power to change society lay with the workers organised into industrial unions in the mines, factories and workplaces

the workers can ultimately overthrow the capitalist system and become the actual controllers of their industrial and social destiny."¹²

In these arguments Tom Mann was putting forward some of the key tenets of British syndicalism as it was developing under his leadership. The first was to emphasise the unimportance of parliamentary forms of action compared to trade union and industrial action. For the syndicalists the power to change society lay with the workers organised into industrial unions in the mines, factories and workplaces. The task was to work within the existing unions, to restructure and transform them into fighting organisations that united all workers in the industry – industrial unions built on solidarity and action that would always strike alongside their fellow workers whatever their dispute. The crucial tactic in the final struggle with the bosses was the general strike designed to bring the country to a halt, to lock out the capitalists, so that power would

pass over into the hands of the industrial unions. It was these bodies, organised together, not nationalised industries or state appointed managers, which would run a socialist commonwealth.

Tom Mann's resignation from the SDF made little difference to his work. Alongside his activity in the SDF, Mann had been co-editing the monthly paper, *The Industrial Syndicalist*, with Guy Bowman, the first issue of which appeared in July 1910. The paper presented the case for industrial unionism and syndicalism to a broad audience, but concentrated on developments and arguments with militants and leaders in key trade unions such as the transport workers, miners and railway workers. *The Industrial Syndicalist* took the form of a series of pamphlets rather than an agitational newspaper.

Immediately on Mann's return to Britain he set about reactivating his contacts from his "new unionism" days of the 1890s, including the Workers Union which he had helped set up in 1898 and which aimed specifically at the unorganised workers. He worked closely with Ben Tillett, leader of the London dockers, and through the *Industrial Syndicalist* and his speaking tours developed a wide range of trade union contacts sympathetic to the paper's ideas.

By the end of 1910 Mann and Bowman were ready to bring these contacts together in a new organisation, to be called the Industrial Syndicalist Education League (ISEL). A major step was a conference in Manchester in December 1910. The two day conference attracted 200 delegates from 85 trade union branches and trades

transform the existing unions or even oust the entrenched leaders.

A further argument took place over the role of political action. Many of the delegates present were members of existing socialist organisations like the ILP and the SDF and saw the need for socialist representation in parliament. Others, particularly the anarcho-syndicalists, wanted a clear statement committing the ISEL to opposing all involvements with electoral politics, local or national. The position taken by the conference, motivated by Mann, avoided the issue, saying the ISEL would not involve itself in parliamentary politics but individual members and groups in the ISEL could do what they pleased. Summing up, Mann declared "if the resolution were adopted the League would be neither Labour Party nor SDP, anarchist or any other body that was 'anti'. Each would have the right to retain his own political views." However while individuals were allowed to participate in municipal and parliamentary politics the line of the ISEL in its papers was clearly anti-parliamentary.

The ISEL developed in this way as a loose united front of different forces broadly committed to industrial unionism, which were allowed to argue their own positions in papers and pamphlets. It saw itself as a federative and educational body making propaganda for industrial unionism and syndicalism and established close links with the Plebs League, developed by Noah Ablett, and the dissident students at Ruskin College. It was a federative body with no central discipline or politics apart from the general principles adopted at conferences and outlined in its papers – the *Industrial Syndicalist* and later *The Syndicalist*. Although the Manchester conference elected a committee of 18 to run the Manchester ISEL, it does not seem to have taken any directing role nationally which was meant to be part of its remit. The ISEL movement, promising a series of local conferences before a founding AGM, continued to be led by a small group of committed syndicalists in London, which included Mann, Bowman and E J B Allen.

This "boring within" the unions approach contrasted with that of the SLP/IWGB and the Industrial League, both of which sought to build a cadre-based revolutionary organisations, alongside new unions that were revolutionary from the outset. Mann believed that it was necessary to go through a whole educational phase, making propaganda for industrial unionism and revolutionary syndicalism and winning over the mass of trade unionists to such a policy. He outlined this approach after the great Liverpool transport strikes "Would that the workers were reasonably prepared to overthrow the wretched system that compels us to work for the profit of the ruling class ... but we know the workers are not ready to do this, and we must therefore fall back on something less ambitious for the time being."¹⁵

This something "less ambitious" was a drive to federate and amalgamate the trade unions as a stage towards getting the genuine industrial unions that would turn them into real fighting organisations.

The ISEL developed in this way as a loose united front of different forces broadly committed to industrial unionism, which were allowed to argue their own positions

councils in the Manchester area and another 20 trade union branches and syndicalist organisations from the rest of Britain. Well known figures present, apart from Mann and Bowman, included Jim Larkin, who had recently founded the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGU), Noah Ablett who represented an important group of Welsh miners and Albert Purcell, president of Manchester and Salford Trades Council, who chaired the meeting.¹³

One of the contentious areas of debate was the proposal to work with and in the existing unions. While it was made clear that the existing unions were "utterly incapable of effectively fighting the capitalist class and securing freedom of the workers", the resolution stated the aim was to work within them "with a view to merging all existing unions into one compact organisation for each industry".¹⁴ This idea was opposed by some members of the Industrial League and others, who argued that it was impossible to

The problem with this “stages” approach, as many of the syndicalists and SLP pointed out, was that it attempted to unite with trade union leaders who had very different aims to revolutionary syndicalism. Trade union leaders such as Tillet and Purcell certainly recognised the importance of amalgamation and constructing industrial-based unions that could deliver effective strike action, solidarity and a common front against the centralised bosses, but they did not see this as part of a revolutionary strategy. Far from it, they were committed to working alongside the socialist reformists in parliament.

These considerable differences inside the ISEL were, however, to be put on the backburner because soon after the Manchester conference the nascent syndicalist movement was immersed in the mass strike wave that swept the country in 1911-12.

The Miners’ Next Step

While 1910 had seen major strikes and lock-outs, 1911 saw a dramatic rise in militancy and determination to improve wages and conditions as well as establish union recognition and bargaining rights.

At the end of 1910 a major unofficial strike broke out in South Wales at the Cambrian Combine collieries located in the Rhondda Valley. The strikes were over declining wages and conditions, which had deteriorated constantly since 1907 due to geological problems. By November 1910, 30,000 miners were on strike. At least three leaders of the Cambrian Combine Strike Committee were committed syndicalists, Noah Ablett, WH Mainwearing and Noah Rees. The strike was as much against the conciliationist policies of the leaders of the South Wales Miners Federation (SWMF), who denounced the strike, as against the mine owners.

The SWMF President, Vice-President and General Secretary were all Lib-Lab MPs who had sat on a conciliation board with the employers since 1903. In April 1910 they had signed a five year agreement with the employers that took no account of the declining real incomes of miners who worked in difficult pits and seams and whose incomes depended on the amount of coal dug.

By November the strike involved not only mass picketing but interception of trains carrying strike-breakers, sabotage and attacks on the pumps and powerhouses of still working collieries. Troops and London police were despatched, by Home Secretary Winston Churchill, to quell the disturbances and, in a riot at Tonypany, one miner died and almost 500 were injured. Mass meetings were held all over South Wales in support of the strikers. Tom Mann spoke at many and was joined by Big Bill Haywood, then visiting Europe, and Madame Sorgue from the French syndicalist movement.

Although the strike continued into August 1911 the workers were forced to return on the owners’ terms. But the strike, and the attitude of the SWMF leadership, left a lasting legacy. In early 1911 both Noah Ablett and Noah Rees were elected onto the executive



Ben Tillet

of the union and in March they launched a syndicalist-led rank and file organisation, the Unofficial Reform Committee (URC).

It was this body that produced one of the most influential documents of British syndicalism, a pamphlet called *The Miners’ Next Step*.¹⁶ Probably authored by the two Noah’s, Mainwearing and Will Hay, it was a genuinely collective document which had circulated around delegate meetings of miners for amendment.

The pamphlet was, first of all, a call to radically transform the SWMF along industrial unionist lines. But it was also circulated throughout the Miners’ Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) and supplemented by a national coalfields’ speaking tour, where the

The Miners’ Next Step did not take up an anti-parliamentary stance. Rather it argued for MPs to be placed under the control of the union as direct delegates

pamphlet sold in its hundreds. Its ultimate objective was to construct “One organisation to cover the whole of coal, ore, slate, stone, clay, salt, mining or quarrying industry of Great Britain, with one central executive.”

The pamphlet begins with a critique of the union leadership, tracing their conciliatory politics back to their position of “trade unionists by trade” and that their profession “demands certain privileges”. They don’t, however, root these privileges in their material position as a trade union bureaucracy brokering deals between capital and labour, as later revolutionaries did. Rather it is located in the prestige that attaches to leadership positions and their desire to keep control over the members. It was a position not dissimilar to the “leadership corrupts” argument put forward by the German, Robert Michels.¹⁷

However their solution to the problem of bureaucracy was absolutely right. It consisted of assuming direct control of the union by the rank and

file through a series of changes to the union – placing supreme control for new policies and tactics in the hands of the local lodges (branches), making the executive responsible to the members through annual election, barring union officials or “agents” from standing for the executive (“the executive becomes unofficial” as they put it), limiting national officers terms to two years, making MPs ineligible to serve and the calling of regular lodge conferences to determine policy. All this went alongside centralising the union’s leadership to deliver solidarity strike action to help win local disputes. This was summed up in the slogans “Decentralising for negotiating. Centralising for fighting.”¹⁸

Unlike the ISEL, The Miners’ Next Step did not take up an anti-parliamentary stance. Rather it argued for MPs to be placed under the control of the union as direct delegates. It said that “political action must go on side by side with industrial action”. In this it was closer to the syndicalism of James Connolly rather than that of Tom Mann.

The pamphlet came out against nationalisation of the mines, a proposal being pressed by mining and Labour MPs in parliament, declaring that while the URC’s aim was to get rid of the employers, nationalisation of the mines “Did not lead in this direction, but simply makes a National Trust with all the force of government behind it” – with the former bondholding coal owners continuing to milk profits from the industry.

Like syndicalism in general in this period, the miners had not developed the demands for nationalisation without compensation linked to

Liverpool was at a standstill and the strike committee started issuing union permits that allowed employers to move essential food stocks and goods

placing the industry under the control of the workers. Rather The Miners’ Next Step rejected “state nationalisation” arguing their objective was for “every industry thoroughly organised, in the first place to fight, to gain control of, and then to administer, that industry”. All industries were to be controlled by a “central production board” which would “ascertain the needs of the people”.

There was no mention of whether the miners would “own” their industry, something that syndicalism again was ambivalent about. Nor did the general strike figure as a tactic to take over from the employers but this was, after all, a pamphlet aimed at transforming the SWMF. Its “immediate steps” included the demand for a seven hour day and a national minimum wage of eight shillings a day – a minimum wage demand that was to be central to the 1912 national miners strike.

The Liverpool transport and dock strikes

The miners’ strikes were followed almost immediately by an outbreak of strikes in the major ports, strikes that took place in the middle of one of the hottest summers on record.¹⁹ Between June and July 1911 strikes broke out in Hull, Liverpool, Manchester and Goole. Some of these were official and related to union drives for recognition. Havelock Wilson’s National Sailors’ and Fireman’s Union (NSFU) was involved, as was the new National Transport Workers Federation (NTWF) involving Ben Tillet and Tom Mann. Mann moved to Liverpool for the duration of the strikes, joining the strike committee and bringing out a new syndicalist influenced paper, The Transport Worker, which quickly gained a circulation of 20,000.

The strikes quickly rejected the officials’ control and spread to many sections of workers involved around the docks. Even Mann was heckled and shouted down on Merseyside by workers opposed to a call for a return to work pending negotiations. In fact the negotiations resulted in the Devonport Agreement giving significant wage increases to most groups of waterfront workers.

Yet the deal was again rejected by Liverpool Dockers at mass meetings, much to Tillet’s disgust. Strikes spread to Southampton and then the London docks, where workers excluded from the deal demanded similar pay rises. In the face of a growing strike the employers conceded the London pay rises.

But in August in Merseyside the strike was spreading and turning into a general strike – by the middle of the month it was estimated that 70,000 workers were out. Strikes by Merseyside railway workers connected to the docks were beginning to spread throughout the railway network in the north and west. Again the falling real wages, opposition to the conciliatory methods of the union leaderships and discontent with the paternalist discipline imposed on “railway servants” were the main issues.

Liverpool was at a standstill and the strike committee started issuing union permits that allowed employers to move essential food stocks and goods. Mann was declared “the Liverpool Dictator” by the popular press. The Lord Mayor demanded action from the government, telling the Prime Minister that “a revolution was in progress” in Liverpool. The government responded by sending in 3,000 troops, several hundred police and anchoring Naval Gunboats in the Mersey.

The scene was set for a major confrontation. On Sunday 13 August a peaceful demonstration in support of the strike organised by Mann and the NTWF, estimated at 80,000 strong, including women and children, was attacked and dispersed by police and troops. Two strikers were shot dead and hundreds injured as troops and police attempted to drive the demonstration off the streets. There were mass arrests and street fighting continued all day, especially in the working class districts of Liverpool. Two days later a

group of workers ambushed a prison van taking arrested strikers to Walton jail, two of them were shot dead.

The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS) had at first tried to get workers back to work but as unofficial action spread from Merseyside to Manchester, Hull, Bristol, Swansea and other areas it was forced to call the first general strike of all railway workers. At this the government stepped in, immediately offering a Royal Commission on the railworkers' grievances.

The national strike went ahead on the 18 August but was quickly called off when the ASRS leaders accepted the government's offer. Even so, up and down the country the railworkers' strike took militant and violent forms – signal boxes were stormed and Chesterfield Station amongst others was set ablaze. In Llanelly in Wales troops opened fire killing two and followed up with a bayonet charge that injured many more. Merseyside finally drifted back to work by the end of August, the month that turned out to be the highpoint of militant struggle in the Great Unrest.

The political context of the 1910-11 strike upsurge should not be ignored. There was an ongoing, deep political crisis at the heart of the ruling class, with the British landed classes, based in the House of Lords, trying to use their control of that chamber to obstruct the Liberal government, backed by the Labour Party and Irish Nationalists, in control of the House of Commons.

The House of Lords had rejected Lloyd George's budget of 1909 because it had the temerity to increase death duties, introduce a land value duty and increase the rate of taxation for those with incomes of over £3,000 a year. It took two elections in 1910, in January and December, which included massive populist campaigns based around "Lords against the people", before the "die hards" in the Lords gave way.

Other political issues were also to the fore. The Tories tried to fight the second election almost entirely around their bitter opposition to Irish Home Rule, which was being proposed by the Liberal government to placate the Irish Nationalists. Meanwhile the suffragettes had launched their mighty mass movement of civil disobedience and demonstrations in favour of votes for women, a campaign that by 1912 had taken the form of window smashing, arson and the blowing up of MPs houses.

And while the Liberals were sending gunboats to the Mersey, the Kaiser was sending a gunboat to Morocco challenging French and British power in north Africa – the so-called Agadir crisis, which at one point threatened to transform into the opening skirmish of the First World War.

On all these political issues the syndicalists of the ISEL, their papers and journals, were completely silent. They had nothing to say because of their "anti-political" stance. Thus they left the political field free on these issues to the reformist socialists and failed to have anything to say on the burning political issues of the



Soliders marching in Liverpool on 14 June 1911

day – Ireland, votes for women, and the drive towards imperialist war. It was an economic approach which was to fatally weaken syndicalism.

Employers fight back

The dramatic events of 1911 were followed swiftly by a national miners' strike focusing around the demand for a minimum wage, a strike that lasted from

A series of monster demonstrations from the east end into central London took place, involving up to 100,000 workers and their families

February to April 1912. Again the government intervened to head off the action, passing a Minimum Wage Act covering the mines, but without setting an actual figure! The minimum wage was to be set by local boards made up of coal owners and union officials with an independent arbitrator as chair. The miners of the MFGB rejected the proposal by 244,000 to 201,000 in a national ballot but the union leaders ignored it and settled. Despite some areas like Yorkshire and Durham staying out, there was a gradual drift back to work.

A second port-wide transport strike in London in June-July 1912 showed the employers were no longer in the mood to make concessions. Called by the NTWF to deal with casual work and as an attempt to extend union control over hiring, the employers, organised in the Shipping Federation, were determined to smash the strike. There was violent conflict between strikers and

scabs with some on both sides armed with revolvers. A serious gun battle took place when strikers stormed the steamship City of Colombo at Victoria Docks.²⁰ A series of monster demonstrations from the east end into central London took place, involving up to 100,000 workers and their families. Nevertheless, the strike went down to a serious defeat as the workers were driven back to work on, enduring growing hardship.

An even mightier struggle took place in Dublin, starting in the autumn of 1913 when the Dublin Employers Federation took on Jim Larkin's syndicalist-led ITWU, determined to smash it once and for all. A five month lockout of over 25,000 union members led to huge demonstrations and battles with troops on the streets. By the time the lockout ended in defeat for the workers, 656 workers had been jailed and five killed.

Despite attempts by several thousand railworkers in England to block goods going to Ireland, the British trade union leaders managed to keep support at the level of material donations and prevent unofficial action. One dock union leader in London explained how "We have had to rearrange the whole of our paid officials in London ... with the express purpose of preventing any disorganised moves ... we have so far been able to hold our men in check."²¹

Syndicalism reorganises – and falls apart

Convinced syndicalist militants often played leading roles in the mass strikes in 1911 and 1912, at local and sometimes, like Tom Mann, at a national level. But they were a tiny force of perhaps of no more than two or three hundred militants grouped loosely around the ISEL, in a strike wave that involved hundreds of thousands.

One lesson that was drawn from the actions of the miners and railway workers' leaders was how difficult it was to remove an entrenched bureaucracy in the unions

The Trade Union Congress of 1912 was one test of the measure of syndicalist policy influence on the national trade union movement after two years of intense activity. The TUC's Parliamentary Committee put down a resolution reaffirming the necessity of political action as a direct challenge to syndicalist policy. The resolution was passed by 1,693,000 to 48,000 votes. At the same conference an amendment was moved deleting any TUC commitment to industrial unionism, this was passed by 1,123,000 votes to 573,000.

By 1912 the ISEL had launched a new national paper, *The Syndicalist*, "edited under the auspices of the ISEL" by Guy Bowman. It was more of a real newspaper than the *Industrial Syndicalist*, with articles from strikes

and actions around the country and the development of syndicalist propaganda linked to specific struggles like the miners' strike. The paper's circulation never exceeded 20,000, yet for their size the syndicalists were influential, not just on trade unionists but on the entire socialist left.

However, by the middle of 1913 ISEL was fragmenting and its key leaders effectively going their separate ways. One reason was, no doubt, the defeats suffered on the London waterfront and in the miners' strike of 1912. Another was the repression meted out by the armed state to the Liverpool and other strikers.

One lesson that was drawn from the actions of the miners and railway workers' leaders was how difficult it was, even with solid rank and file organisation like the miners' Unofficial Reform Committee, to remove an entrenched bureaucracy in the unions. This strengthened those in the ISEL who doubted the strategy of "boring from within" and wanted a sharper demarcation between revolutionary unionism, syndicalism, and the existing trade union leaders, however sympathetic they were to industrial unionism: Guy Bowman was one of these.

Another political problem that syndicalism had to face was the armed might of the state and its ability to crush strike actions that threatened major disruption to the capitalist system. This was a problem they had tended to cover over with the use of the "Revolutionary general strike!" slogan, often suggesting that a complete general strike across all industries would somehow result in the bosses giving up and industry falling into the hands of the workers. The lesson of 1911, with bitter clashes between strikers and scabs and the use of troops to attack strikers, showed it was not going to be that easy or that peaceful.

The syndicalist response was an attempt to use anti-militarist agitation by leafleting soldiers. The first issue of *The Syndicalist* carried a reprinted "Don't shoot" leaflet, which had been used in the 1911 disputes aimed at rank and file soldiers. As a result Tom Mann, Guy Bowman and the two printers were all tried for sedition in 1912 and sentenced to several years in prison with hard labour. These sentences were commuted to months in prison after a massive campaign throughout the labour movement, involving Labour MPs and a Free Speech Campaign.²²

Apart from one article that advised workers not to buy arms and instead suggested conscription would soon place arms and training in the hands of workers, this was as far as *The Syndicalist* went in addressing the question of how to defend workers and confront the state in a revolutionary situation.²³ This was because syndicalism never seriously worked out a strategy for insurrection and the political seizure of state power, a strategy that its anti-political stance made impossible.

After 1912 the ISEL's strategy went in two increasingly divergent directions. Conferences in London and Manchester held in November 1912, claiming to represent 150,000 workers, adopted several resolutions.²⁴ One set of resolutions called for the

or revolutionary grounds: the syndicalists were silent. Ben Tillet became an ardent supporter of the war.

A joint board of the TUC, the General Federation of Trade Unions and the Labour Party declared, "That an immediate effort be made to terminate all existing disputes, whether strikes or lockouts". Between January and July 1914 there had been over 9 million strike days, from August to December it collapsed to just one

In short, the failure of British syndicalism to become a mass force in the momentous struggles before the First World War lie in its politics, or rather its "anti-politics"

million. It would be left to a new movement, emerging out of shop stewards wartime struggles, to take forward some of the ideas of the pre-war syndicalists.

Why did syndicalism fail?

The major component of British syndicalism, represented by Tom Mann and the ISEL, never managed to overcome the political differences within the organisation. As long as it remained a federative and amorphous organisation it held together. The strains of playing a leading part in the revolutionary events of 1911-12 and its inability to develop a political strategy to challenge capitalism was a blow from which it did not recover.

The attempt to tighten its organisation and make it more politically homogenous after 1912 just blew it apart into its constituent elements. One side reasserted its anarcho-syndicalist roots and went off into advocating revolutionary general strikes, direct action and sabotage in a period of defensive struggles and defeats, thus isolating itself from the movement.

Meanwhile the other, led by Tom Mann, adapted to the militant, but not revolutionary, industrial unionist movement via the IDL. For this grouping the general strike as revolution and the need for the workers to take over society, became a future goal, one to make propaganda and education for, not something linked to the immediate struggles.

In short, the failure of British syndicalism to become a mass force in the momentous struggles before the First World War lie in its politics, or rather its "anti-politics". Certainly its anti-parliamentarianism cut it off from an important area of political work, both locally and nationally, but it was its anti-political stand that meant it could never become a leader of all the exploited and oppressed in capitalist society – the women suffering from political disenfranchisement and social oppression, the Irish fighting for home rule and liberation – as well as the bulk of working class fighters.

Syndicalism's attitude to the state and government, downplaying their importance and refusing to develop a strategy to seize and neutralise the state as an organ of class rule and force, left it largely disarmed when it came to developing tactics to counter army and police repression. Nor could it develop consistent anti-war and anti-imperialist propaganda, something that failed it in the lead up to war. All this meant it was unable to develop a coherent revolutionary organisation able to marry the heroic struggles of the workers to a strategy to overthrow capitalism.

In JT Murphy's words, its attitudes to politics and leadership "diffused the energies of the revolutionaries and made their movement into a ferment rather than an organised force fighting for a new leadership."²⁷

None of this means that British syndicalism wasn't an important step in the class struggle. On the contrary, its ideas about industrial unionism took roots in the workers' movement. Its programmes for placing unions firmly under the control of their members were to arm many future rank and file groupings, such as the Minority Movements of the 1920s. Its drive to overcome sectionalism in the trade union movement and for unity and solidarity between workers in struggle, produced new and powerful national unions, like the National Union of Railwaymen, and helped to form the Triple Alliance of Miners, Railwaymen and Transport Workers.

Most importantly of all, it established the idea that real power in society potentially lay in the mines, factories and workplaces, not in the parliamentary talking shops. It was here in the working class that economic and political power and control had to reside if socialism was really to mean the rule of the vast majority.

BOOKS YOU COULD READ ON SYNDICALISM

British Syndicalism 1900-1914, Bob Holton, Pluto Press 1976

Syndicalism and Radical Unionism, Socialist History 37, 2010

Preparing for Power, J T Murphy, Pluto Press 1972

The Miners' Next Step, Pluto Press 1973 – or on the internet

Socialism Made Easy, James Connolly Selected Writings, Pelican Books 1973

Tom Mann's Memoirs, MacGibbon and Kee 1967

ENDNOTES

1. The SDF, founded in 1884, was Britain's first social democratic organisation claiming a Marxist heritage. The Labour Representation Committee founded in 1900, which was later to become the Labour Party, was a federation of socialist groups, socialist societies and the trades unions – it did not allow individual membership until 1918.
2. The opposition, led by GS Yates, JC Matheson and James Connolly came together at the Paris Second International Congress in 1900. GS Yates, along with De Leon, opposed Kautsky's resolution that avoided condemning the entry of the French socialist Millerand into a bourgeois cabinet. Hyndman and the SDF delegation supported it. A bitter debate ensued at the following SDF conference in 1901 where the opposition were dubbed "impossibilists" and roundly defeated. They went on to found the SLP. See Walter Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-1921*, London 1969, pp 13-20 for an account of the opposition and its policies.
3. This political perspective can be found in *Socialist Reconstruction of Society*, De Leon, July 1905 (www.deleonism.org/srs.htm) and in *Socialism Made Easy*, James Connolly, Chicago 1908, particularly the sections on Trade Unionism and Constructive Socialism, and *The Future of Labour*.
4. *The Shop Stewards' Movement and Workers' Control 1910-22*, Branco Pribicevic, Basil Blackwell 1959 p15
5. Allen himself also opposed the sectarian excesses of the dual unionism policy of the SLP, a position that led him in the direction of the other wing of syndicalism led by Tom Mann.
6. *Ibid* p 73 and Pribicevic op cit p13
7. Pribicevic p15. In 1918 the SLP was involved in the unity negotiations to form the British Communist Party but its leadership objected to the BSP plan to affiliate to the Labour Party. As a result it split, with most of its dynamic leader/workers joining the newly formed CP in 1920 – this included people like JT Murphy, Tom Bell, William Paul, Arthur MacManus. The SLP staggered on for a few years as a tiny sect before disappearing.
8. Quoted in *British Syndicalism 1900-1914*, Bob Holton, Pluto Press 1976 p 54
9. For an account of the dispute and its impact on his political views see Tom Mann's *Memoirs*, Ch 14, Macgibbon and Kee 1967.
10. See Geoff Brown, *Introduction to The Industrial Syndicalist*, Spokesman Books, 1974. Apparently they also met and developed lasting links with Pierre Monatte and Alfred Rosmer, editors of two influential French syndicalist newspapers. Like Mann and many other influential syndicalists they were to later join the Red International of Labour Unions and the Communist International in the early 1920s.
11. Report in *Justice*, the SDF newspaper, quoted in Geof Brown op cit p10
12. *Justice*, 11 May, 1911
13. The SLP boycotted the conference and then denounced it in its press, while the British IWW representative stood up and told the conference a new organisation was not needed as syndicalism in Britain was represented by the tiny Industrial League.
14. All quotes are from the verbatim report of the conference that appeared in the Dec 1910 issue of the *Industrial Syndicalist*, p159, Spokesman 1974 op cit
15. *Transport Worker* Feb 1912, quoted in Holton op cit p 57
16. *The Miners Next Step* available from National Library of Wales at www.llgc.org.uk/ymgyrchu/Llafur/1926/MNS.htm
17. Robert Michels developed his theory of the iron law of oligarchy in organisations with his book *Political Parties* 1911. He was a German sociologist with syndicalist leanings and the book was influential in anarcho-syndicalist circles.
18. This is very different to the impression JT Murphy gives of the URC's proposals in *Preparing for Power* (Pluto Press, 1972) on p97. Here referring to syndicalists in South Wales he says "this is nothing compared to the damage they wrought with the theory they advanced in relation to leadership" and then goes on to misquote the pamphlet as suggesting the SWMF executive should be "deprived of all executive power", further accusing them of "complete abandonment of all responsibility of leaders to lead".
19. One prominent liberal historian even suggested that a summer that produced regular days in the high 90s was one of the factors that "quickened the pulse of revolt" and made the town populations "psychologically not normal"! England 1970-1914, Sir Robert Ensor, *Oxford History of England* 1936, p 442. Ensor was a Labour councillor on the LCC at one point.
20. See Holton op cit p123
21. Quoted in Holton op cit p193
22. Fred Crowsley, a syndicalist railwayman, was less fortunate and spent some considerable time in jail for distributing the leaflet outside Aldershot barracks to soldiers.
23. *The Syndicalist*, Dec 1912
24. An amendment calling for solidarity on "the political and industrial field" was ruled out of order by Guy Bowman on the grounds that it raised the question of parliamentary politics, which was not what the conference was about!
25. *The Syndicalist*, Dec 1912
26. The December 1913 issue had its first ever comment on the suffragette movement in the form of an open letter which told them that revolutionists did not attach much "importance to the vote" and suggested that instead of burning empty houses and the contents of letter boxes they should turn their rage on the exploiters, female as well as male. The next issue referred to Christabel Pankhurst as a "sex-mad spinster" encouraging a revolt against the male sex!
27. JT Murphy op cit p 97



Tony Cliff: my party, right or wrong

TONY CLIFF - A MARXIST FOR HIS TIME

Ian Birchall

Bookmarks / 2011 / £16.99

WHEN TONY Cliff's funeral was held on 19 April 2000, some 3,000 marched to Golders Green Crematorium. Many did not belong to the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) that Cliff had founded and remained a key figure in right up to his death. This was indicative of the mark that Cliff made on Marxist politics, both in Britain and internationally.

There is a marked contrast with the fate of Gerry Healy, his main political rival over many of the years covered by this book. Healy died in relative obscurity and most obituaries, in the bourgeois and left press, especially from those who had known him, were derisive and hostile. Cliff's obituaries, including those by comrades he had split from, were generally favourable.

When I attended the SWP's Marxism 2012, the packed lecture theatres, with many in the audience too young to have ever heard Cliff speak, showed that he had left a considerable legacy.

Birchall notes that of "the three historic leaders of British Trotskyism since the 1940s", Healy, Cliff and Ted Grant, Cliff was the only one who was not expelled by his own organisation (p 489). He credits Cliff with holding the organisation together in times of crisis caused by major developments in the class struggle, such as the miners' strikes of 1972 and 1973-74, and 1984-85.

Yet there were aspects of the Marxism Festival that reminded me of downsides to Cliff's political record. Missing from Marxism 2012 were names that until recently represented a major section of the SWP leadership. Lindsey German,

John Rees, Chris Bambery ... like many before them either expelled or pushed into a position where they felt they had no option but to leave. Prominent names from the years of Cliff's leadership who met such a fate include Roger Protz, Jim Higgins, Granville Williams, John Palmer, Paul Mackney, Ted Crawford, Richard Kirkwood - the list could go on.

Ian Birchall is a member who survived Cliff's purges, despite sometimes finding himself in the opposition camp. He mentions this in a footnote on Page 406 in the context of the expulsion of leading members in December 1975 who went on to form the Workers' League. Birchall comments: "The fact that Cliff's SWP survived, while the Workers' League was short-lived, seems to confirm the choice of those who, like myself, chose to stay with Cliff."

He does, however, criticise Cliff for claiming that "hardly any" of those expelled remained "active politically". Birchall (p 410) cites Cliff as warning a member who

aspects of Cliff's leadership. This is a large work - 559 pages of main text, with over 100 pages of notes. Birchall appears to have taken seven years to write it. There are minor errors, but the research is impressive.

Birchall begins with Cliff's early life in Palestine, and takes us through his split with the Fourth International, his leadership of the Socialist Review Group (SRG), which became the International Socialists (IS) and then the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). One major weakness in Cliff's character, mentioned throughout the book, was that he could be a "shockingly bad judge of character" (Introduction, p vii) which meant that "he had a tendency to 'fall in love' with young comrades, to make favourites of those he saw having a positive role," but also to be "unduly harsh with those he saw as an obstacle to the progress of the organisation." (p 359)

Birchall returns to this point on his final page (p 559), noting that Cliff would pick up comrades as favourites and drop them again (an experience that was hurtful for many). He suggests that by 1982 Cliff had developed a degree of self-criticism and had "learnt from his earlier tendency to drop allies brutally".

Birchall likes to find excuses for Cliff's negative attributes, but at

Cliff argued on behalf of the RCP against the International Secretariat of the Fourth International's economic perspectives, as presented by E Germain (Ernest Mandel)

threatened to leave that "it's cold out there", and it seems disturbing that Cliff could take pleasure in the thought that those he defeated in inner-party struggles would abandon active politics.

Birchall's experience of the negative side of Cliff's methods of dealing with opposition has helped him to avoid sycophantic adulation, and the book is critical of some

least he is aware of them. He suggests that in the 1950s and 1960s Cliff was guilty of a "determinism" that he later broke from. He acknowledges changes in Cliff's political position, but often justifies them as the response to changed conditions.

On Cliff's early life, Birchall notes the interesting decision by Ygael Gluckstein at the age of 13 to

change his forename to "Ygal", from a name meaning "he will be redeemed" to "he will redeem". In later life, however, Cliff used the original form of "Ygael Gluckstein", when he used his real name, as with his work *Mao's China* (1957).

Birchall is mildly critical of the articles Cliff wrote for the Fourth International's New International journal under the name "L Rock". As Rock he argued that Jewish immigration to Palestine would bring about industrialisation and a working class of both Jewish and Arab workers. With the benefit of hindsight, his position seems seriously flawed, and his position was criticised from within the FI (see pp 43-45). Birchall shows that Cliff amended his position even while still in Palestine.

It is however from his arrival in Britain in 1946 that Cliff began to develop the positions that would guide his future followers. Cliff was denied citizenship and the right to stay in Britain, which meant that he had to live in Ireland from 1947 to 1952, but he managed to travel to Britain to attend meetings. This was the period when Cliff began to develop his "troika" of theories – that Stalinist Russia was state capitalist, that the world had entered an era of the "permanent war economy" and later, with the triumph of Stalinist parties in much of Asia, that this was the age of "deflected permanent revolution".

Cliff's document on "state capitalism", which was essentially the text of his *Stalinist Russia: a Marxist analysis*, was written in Ireland and posted one chapter at a time to his partner, Chanie Rosenberg, for typing. It was circulated by the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) as an internal document in 1948.

Birchall shows that Cliff argued on behalf of the RCP against the International Secretariat of the Fourth International's economic perspectives, as presented by E Germain (Ernest Mandel). Germain denied the possibility of an economic boom in Britain. Birchall suggests that the fact that the RCP had a small base in the

working class helped it to reject this plainly wrong perspective.

The RCP dissolved in 1949 and the following year the Socialist Review Group was formed. Michael Kidron, whom Birchall quaintly introduces to his narrative as "Chanie's younger brother Mike"

Linked to this is the weakness of Cliff's position at this time on the need to build a party. This was exemplified in Cliff's 1959 work *Rosa Luxemburg*

(p 68) became involved from the beginning of 1954.

Kidron and Cliff between them developed the theory of the "permanent war economy" or, as Kidron preferred it, the "permanent arms economy". Birchall understates how, until the early 1970s at least, this theory was widely regarded as a refutation of Lenin's theory of imperialism. This was more explicit in the writings of Kidron than of Cliff, for example, in Kidron's article "Imperialism, highest stage but one". This article first appeared in *International Socialism* (1st series) No. 9 Summer 1962, and was reprinted in No. 61 (June 1973), as well appearing in a number of IS pamphlets, for instance, Cliff and Kidron on *Imperialism* published by Cambridge International Socialists.

I myself wrote a defence of Lenin's theory of imperialism in the *IS Internal Bulletin* around 1970 against an article by Jim Higgins which echoed Kidron's position. Birchall, however, focuses only on Cliff's rejection of Lenin's theory of the "labour aristocracy". In doing so, he is in line with the current SWP orthodoxy as represented by Alex Callinicos in his lecture on *Imperialism at Marxism 2012*. Callinicos defended Lenin's theory except for the concept of the labour aristocracy, which he described as "crap". The old IS position was a denial that imperialism still existed, and that has changed fundamentally.

While Cliff was correct in rejecting the claim by many on the left that capitalism was not in a period of boom in the late 1940s and 1950s, he tended to draw what Birchall calls a "determinist" conclusion, i.e. that there could therefore be no prospect of

revolution. Birchall argues that Cliff later overcame this position, but underestimates its political consequences. When the working class of Hungary rose against Stalinism in 1956, it was the Group led by Healy that recruited the disillusioned ex-Stalinists, and founded the Socialist Labour League (SLL).

The Socialist Review position was essentially that the working class would not become revolutionary while the boom lasted. This is set out most clearly by Duncan Hallas in his critique of the SLL ("Building the Leadership", *International Socialism* 40, Oct/Nov 1969). Hallas argues that the RCP majority, correctly anticipating economic upswing, "failed until 1949 to draw the conclusion that an independent revolutionary party could not be built in the period." This ignores the subjective factor – the consciousness of the working class. Birchall later in his book quotes Cliff as opposing such a "deterministic" relationship between economic circumstances and class consciousness, but Hallas was simply defending the SRG/IS approach.

IS/SWP leaders have generally argued that the reason why the Healy grouping made big gains after Hungary and the SRG did not was that the Healy grouping was larger. Birchall (p 171) adds a second reason – that the Healy grouping had access to copies of Trotsky's *Revolution Betrayed* and that



“the argument that Russia was a ‘degenerate workers’ state’ was probably easier to accept for those who had spent years defending Stalinism.”

Birchall's second reason is bizarre from a defender of Cliff's "state capitalist" position. "State capitalism" proved no barrier to recruitment in later years. A more obvious reason is that a group that had decided that a revolutionary party could not be built was in no

that an extension of shop stewards' organisations "will automatically lead to the development of a socialist movement." Birch stated that: "There needs to be politics – working class politics."

Birchall acknowledges that: "The formulation which would be almost a cliché in Cliff's post-1968 writings – the need for a revolutionary party – was absent from the argument." Birchall defends the book on the grounds that the London SSDC was

Party leader, who became Prime Minister in 1976 and it was Soares who "was able to roll back, slowly but ruthlessly, the gains of the revolutionary period." (p 383)

The absorption of the British trade union leadership in the Social Contract of the Labour Government confirmed the strength of reformism, although rank and file militancy did bring about strikes in 1978-79. Cliff however showed that in this period there had been more defeats than in the early 1970s. Birchall states that it was "perhaps with a self-critical recollection of the Incomes Policy book" that Cliff warned in 1979: "Alas, there is no automatic transition from economic to political struggle."

Cliff's "party-building" often took bureaucratic forms. Birchall himself refers to the creation of a new Executive Committee in 1973, consisting entirely of London-based full-timers, as a "coup". Although he claims the disputes of 1973-75, ending with the expulsion of many of his former allies, "were about real issues of party-building." (p 359)

Earlier in 1975, at the annual conference, Cliff had pushed through a motion for the National Committee (NC) which had met monthly to be abolished, and replaced by a Central Committee (CC) that initially had six members, five of them full-timers. Birchall's defence of this move, that the control supposedly exercised by the NC over the EC had been a "fiction", and that the EC in fact "could generally manipulate" the NC, seems cynical. (pp 378-9)

Birchall also draws attention to an element of sexism in Cliff's earlier writings. This could occur in the jokes in some of his speeches, but also reflected an assumption of a working class that was predominantly male. Although The Employers' Offensive noted the importance of the Ford sewing machinists' 1968 strike against sex discrimination, it also included the sexist analogy in advising on negotiations that "the girl who starts from saying No gets a higher price for her virtue than the girl who talks money at the outset."

Cliff's "party-building" often took bureaucratic forms. Birchall himself refers to the creation of a new Executive Committee in 1973 as a "coup"

position to recruit workers who had moved from Stalinism to a revolutionary outlook.

Linked to this is the weakness of Cliff's position at this time on the need to build a party. This was exemplified in Cliff's 1959 work Rosa Luxemburg. Birchall anticipates comments that might be made by readers with long memories, and does not deny that Cliff made alterations to the second edition of Rosa Luxemburg, published ten years later. Birchall argues that the changes did not mark a major change in Cliff's position. He admits to Cliff having denied at a public meeting that he made alterations to the book, but insists that there was "no intention to deceive". (pp302-304)

More problematic was the book Cliff wrote together with Colin Barker in 1966, Incomes Policy, Legislation and Shop Stewards. This work was published by the London Industrial Shop Stewards Defence Committee (SSDC). It had an introduction by Reg Birch, a leading left figure in the AEU and at the time still a member of the Communist Party (he was expelled from the CP in 1968, and became openly Maoist).

Birch's introduction praised the book but criticised it on the grounds that he could not accept

a "united front body", and that to have presented a political strategy "too specifically" would have caused divisions.

But Birchall's following argument, that "the politicisation of the struggle would result from the intervention of the state in trade union struggles" (p 264) does not make sense. Cliff himself came to recognise that the class struggle had to be a political struggle. The state will always intervene in the class struggle on the side of capital. In any case, the "incomes policy" referred to was precisely a political intervention by the then Labour government.

Similar criticism could also be made of Cliff's 1970 book, The Employers' Offensive: productivity deals and how to fight them. Here the section on "politics" was a page and a half at the end of the book.

Another weakness which Cliff seemed to overcome in the 1970s, connected to his previously downplaying of the need for a party, was to underestimate the influence of reformism. This, Birchall shows, became clear during the Portuguese revolution of 1975-76. Contrary to the IS ideology of preceding years about "the shift in the locus of reformism" from social democratic parties to trade unions, it was Soares, the Portuguese Socialist

Birchall believes that the experience of the Trico and Grunwick strikes of 1976 (the latter continued to 1978), where the workers were mainly women, changed Cliff's attitude. The Grunwick and Garners Steak House (1978-79) strikes were also by workers largely from ethnic minorities, and Birchall shows that Cliff came to criticise the white, male, skilled worker image of the working class.

Birchall reports on the battle Cliff waged in 1978 against the production of *Women's Voice* journal, and against the creation of semi-autonomous *Women's Voice* groups. The SWP finally closed down *Women's Voice* in 1982. In 1984 Cliff produced a polemic, *Class Struggle and Women's Liberation*, whose attack on Sylvia Pankhurst and other suffragettes Birchall describes as "extremely negative" and defends only as "an example of the 'stick-bending' in which he often indulged." (p 469)

Perhaps this issue was one of

Cliff's greatest weaknesses. Birchall has produced a useful and reasonably balanced account of a revolutionary who had many faults, but was at least sometimes capable of rectifying them in the light of experience. His exploration of Cliff's changes of position – "zigzags" perhaps – as regards the role of the revolutionary party in relation to the mass struggle of the working class, is in itself of value to all Marxists. All of this is apart from the very human elements of this book. And while inevitably the question of "line" predominates throughout the personal insights also makes it well worth reading.

Jim Smith

Jim Smith first met members of the International Socialist in 1964, as a member of the Young Socialists in Glasgow. He was aged 17 when he first heard Cliff speak. He joined the IS at the beginning of 1968, founding the Edinburgh branch. He was expelled in 1974 as a member of the "Left Opposition" in IS.

villages, as examples of this anti-democratic state. Indeed no new Arab towns have been built since 1948 despite the growth in population of this community.

Shenhav is, of course, right in his excoriation of hypocritical Zionist leftists such as novelist Amos Oz, whose racism towards the Arab Jew is little different from his view of Israel as an outpost of western civilisation. Shenhav likewise sees through the hypocrisy of the Zionist "left" which barred Arabs from its Kibbutz settlements (whilst proclaiming their adherence to socialism!) and which spearheaded the expulsions and massacres of 1948. All this whilst they expressed their devotion to secularism. A secularism that rested on Biblical and Jewish theology and mythology, not least that of the Promised Land.

Shenhav notes that even the most left wing of the Zionist movement, Mapam and Hashomer Hatzair, appropriated Palestinian land without qualms. Shenhav points to the Labour Zionist origins of the settlements in the Jordan Valley, the West Bank and the Golan Heights.

If this was all that the book consisted of then Shenhav would have written yet another tome on the question of Palestine/Israel. It would have been neither remarkable nor original but simply an addition to an already crowded market. But where Shenhav abandons reality for utopia, his words not mine, is in his belief that a section of the settlers can be won to a joint struggle with the Palestinians. That they contain a democratic left.

This idea stems from Shenhav's analysis that the oppression of the Misrahi Jews, the Jews from the Arab lands, who came to Israel after 1948, is almost as bad as that of the Palestinians. Thus he argues that the Misrahi are potential partners of the Palestinians as they both suffer from Ashkenazi racism. But whereas the Misrahi were marginalised up till 1967, the settlements opened up a new space for them in the Territories. They were the bulwark of the Zionist and

Palestine – no future for two states

BEYOND THE TWO STATE SOLUTION
Yehouda Shenhav
2012 / Polity Press / £14.99

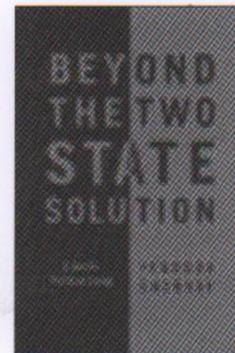
THE ARGUMENT in this book is simple. A two state solution is dead and its failure lies in the inability to comprehend that the Palestinian catastrophe didn't begin in 1967 with the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip but in 1948. The Green Line, the borders of Israel and the West Bank/Jordan from 1948 to 1967, are also dead.

A two state solution is an impediment to a peaceful solution, not least because it rests on the assumption that the problem started in 1967 rather than with the Nakba in 1948. It was the expulsion of Palestinians and their resulting dispossession that was the real

problem. But the Labour Zionists were deaf to this. To them, the first two decades of the Israeli state were the good years.

Shenhav is scornful of those, largely left Zionists, who proclaim that Israel can be both a Jewish and democratic state. The Jewish component will always win out over the democratic part in a Jewish State. As Rabbi Meir Kahane of Kach used to put it, you can either have a democratic state or a Jewish state but you cannot have both unless you are prepared to accept that Israel may no longer be a Jewish state.

Shenhav cites the Judaisation of the Galilee and the massive confiscation of Arab land within Israel, coupled with the non-recognition of over 100 Arab-Israeli





religious right, the ultra-defenders of Zionist privilege and land grabs. Shenhav ignores the fact that they are the equivalent of the poor whites in the US during segregation with their attachment to racism. He plays down the rabid nationalism of the settlements and their messianic dreams of conquest.

Shenhav is fond of attacking the Zionist left and arguing that the differences between right and left are almost immaterial, but nowhere does he ever define "left" and "right", because it is not an original discovery. Matzpen worked this one out in the early 1960s. The Zionist "left" believed in Jewish exclusivism even more than its right wing counterpart. Histadrut, the Zionist "trade union", campaigned from its inception in 1920 for Jewish-only labour at a time when their right wing opponents were happy to see Arabs employed (because it was more profitable to their petit bourgeois base).

Today the differences between the Zionist left and right are largely based around whether there should be a Palestinian statelet on the West Bank and whether to base this on the 1948 lines. Both wings of the Zionist movement accept that Jews and Arabs can't mix - one wishes to corral them in a separate reservation, the other wants to expel them over the Jordan. But even here the dividing line isn't exact.

Although Shenhav accepts that Zionism is a settler movement and Israel a settler society, he doesn't have any analysis of why Israel has developed as it has and why Zionism contained within it, from its inception, the barbaric racism and potentially genocidal manifestations that are on display today. Instead he looks for a "just attempt to solve the problems faced by Jews in Europe". In fact the founding of the Zionist state was the most reactionary "solution" to anti-Semitism - a solution that accepted the main theses of Zionism and merely inverted them.

Shenhav's problem is that he has no understanding of class as the basic dividing line in society and as

the divider between left and right. Socialism is a word unknown to him. He sees virtue in a different form of division and separation, believing that a single state can contain such a configuration.

Shenhav recognises, in theory, the right of return of the Palestinian refugees. But on one condition, that the wrongs of the settlers are not undone. To him there is a "basic law that no wrong will be amended by the creation of another wrong." But is it wrong that the settlers of Hebron are forcibly removed from the centre of Hebron where they have terrorised the local population? Or that Kiryat Arba is uprooted or that the majority of settlements are dismantled or forcibly integrated? And why should the Kibbutzim, those Jewish-only settlements, not be forced to integrate with those they expelled? Because at the end of the day Shenhav argues that "the demand for an exclusive space with Jewish characteristics is legitimate". He argues that his model of a shared sovereignty would "preserve the existing model of the Jewish state."

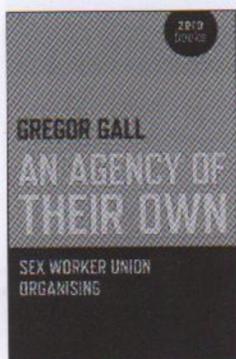
What we are facing is not Shenhav's utopia of a local autonomy within a wider shared sovereignty (in reality it would be much like Belfast with its "peace walls" dividing each community)

but a situation where the Palestinians of the West Bank face transfer and forcible dispossession. As Shenhav notes, when the West Bank and Gaza were conquered, future Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir remarked that the dowry came with an unwanted bride - the Palestinians. Yigal Allon, of the leftist Ahdut Ha'avodah, noted how he could never forgive Ben-Gurion for not finishing what he had started (i.e. the complete removal of the Arabs of Palestine from Israel).

Yet Shenhav's concept of sovereignty becomes "a multifaceted concept rather than a stable, unitary category. Sovereignty is a porous, discontinuous spatial and temporal practice covering vague regions." In short a mystification of the mind. He speaks of a "fragmented model" in which the space is divided into "smaller national spaces and into religious and secular communities, canton/federation-like."

Like many academics, Shenhav's ideological constructs fall at their first test, reality. Deservedly so, because if they came to pass they would result in a New Zionism under a different name. This book, though interesting in parts, is in the end a product of someone who cannot let go of his own privilege.

Tony Greenstein



Sex workers must organise too!

AN AGENCY OF THEIR OWN - SEX WORKER UNION ORGANISING
Gregor Gall

Zero Books / 2012 / £9.99

IS SEX worker unionisation "a leftist fantasy" as stated by Donna Hughes, a US Women's Studies Professor in 2004? No it isn't, argues Gregor Gall, in his new book on the subject, a follow up to his longer Sex Worker Union Organizing: An International Study, (2006, Palgrave).

In the new book Gall illustrates the fact that, far from being a fantasy, sex workers have in fact been organising since at least the 1880s when the Illinois Women's Alliance was established in Chicago in response to police harassment. In the same city in 1905, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) took the position that prostitutes were as entitled to join their project for "one big union" as any other worker. The IWW also seem to have been influential in the New Orleans

prostitute walkout of 1907. This strike over an increase in rents was won as a result of the picketing of brothels to stop customers entering. In the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s various other initiatives to organise sex workers arose. For example the American Guild of Variety Artists (AGVA) represented burlesque artistes and dancers, and Gall suggests that even the famous Gypsy Rose Lee was involved in organising erotic dancers in 50s.

It wasn't until the 1980s that attempts to organise sex workers became more widespread. Gall, a former member of the Socialist Workers' Party and Scottish Socialist Party and a lecturer in Industrial Relations, writes convincingly and humanely about the obstacles faced by this diverse group of workers (including street walkers, escorts, lap dancers, chat-line workers, porn stars and others). He documents the slowly changing social attitudes that present windows of opportunity for sex worker organisation.

Illegality and social stigmatisation have resulted in many sex workers enduring appalling working conditions. In 1993, topless dancers were organising in San Diego along with bartenders, DJs, and bouncers over pay and conditions. The dancers not only had to pay stage fees per hour to work, they were also required to tip other staff and had to buy their dancing costumes from the club – some nights this meant they could owe the club money. The US Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees union (HERE), initially sceptical of organising in the sector, nonetheless represented the dancers and after a year of struggle negotiated a bargaining contract. However, the club then fired the lead organiser and raised the hourly fee charge by 1100% and, not surprisingly, the workers later derecognised the union. This sort of story is repeated many times in the book.

Many struggles in the past and today involve issues wider than pay and hours; workers dispute managers' power over selecting staff in relation to specific physical

attributes such as breast size, rules around touching, being covertly filmed, coercion to have sex with owners, the right to refuse customers, being made to clean premises and do laundry without pay and the right to insist on safe sex and health checks (e.g. HIV testing for porn actors). Embryonic attempts at organisation have very often been met with virulent hostility by owners, operators and producers. Many sex workers around the world who have had the

Hungary, Australia and New Zealand. In part this is because many brothels have shut down or gone underground. Giving prostitution legal toleration by the state may have been a step towards less stigmatisation of the industry and its workers, but the associated regulation has often included registration of workers and businesses. This is often unpopular with workers and businesses who may lose anonymity and income as they are required to pay tax and

Legalisation has not been the boon some expected, partly because “sex worker groups did not have the upper hand in deciding upon the form of legalisation”

temerity to try and organise have been victimised, sacked, blacklisted, harassed, intimidated and subjected to drugging, violence and even murder.

It is clear from the many examples Gall has gathered together for the book that sex workers need to organise just as much if not more so than other workers, yet he concludes that unionisation among sex workers has been “slow, fitful and fragile ... despite many notable, heroic and continuing attempts”.

He suggests that there are three elements involved in this: firstly, when unions are established, after initial successes they tend to enter a period of disintegration or collapse; secondly, the objective situation means that the pressure to organise reasserts itself and new initiatives occur; and finally, the organisations, sharing the stigma of their members and failing to become a core part of mainstream trade unions, turn to political lobbying more akin to identity politics.

“Firstly, they disintegrate and collapse or keep failing to make sufficient progress”, he reports. This occurs even countries where prostitution has been legalised such as Germany, the Netherlands,

comply with health and safety and labour laws.

Legalisation has not been the boon some expected, partly because “sex worker groups did not have the upper hand in deciding upon the form of legalisation”. This picture is varied, with legislation in New Zealand, for example, being far more influenced by concerns about workers' rights and safety, while in other countries it has been more to do with excluding migrants from the industry and raising taxes from the large businesses involved. The problems underscore the sex workers' own calls for decriminalisation rather than legalisation (and registration).

The lack of progress to stable union organisation is not the end of the story. “Secondly”, Gall continues, “despite such failings ... the underlying impulse for social justice keeps compelling sex workers to try again”. Gall cites examples from countries as diverse as Argentina, Turkey, India and Canada, and argues that the “issue is really about what is the most appropriate type of labour unionism for the industry”. Sex workers' anger at working conditions and exploitation leads to a hope for change, which in turn leads to the impulse for collective



organisation. But they are often negotiating directly with an operator or indeed a customer, or working in a small business where they may feel greater solidarity with the owner, who also faces stigma and harassment, than they do with the “respectable” trade union movement.

Others may bemoan their conditions but consider themselves entrepreneurs rather than workers in need of organisation. Gall recounts struggles in a number of

industry regulation particularly because the sex industry is more subject to state regulation than most others”. Other unions organise in similar conditions – for instance the Writers Guild of America or Equity in the UK – and have become occupational unions, “representing a distinct profession, exercising extra workplace influence by establishing a form of industry regulation”.

However, mainstream unions have often been dismissive if not

some early successes at unionising lap dancing clubs, with the International Union of Sex Workers which works with the GMB also being an aspirational title rather than a reality.

However Gall is very clear that initiatives such as those led by the IUSW and GMB are extremely laudable. “Sex worker unions have tried to square the circle of creating influence over the determination of workplace conditions of employment in the sex industry while having little in the way of worksite presence, influence and rights... [they] have had to create their own unions in the face of disinterest, hostility and ridicule from existing unions. This is a double testament to the strength of the activists’ belief in the potency of labour unionism because establishing the structure of a union at the same time as recruiting and organising sex workers is a Herculean task”.

But Gall puts most emphasis on the progress that has been made as a result of all the attempts to organise in one key area – the recognition that sex work is indeed work, and that sex workers therefore have the right to be accepted as workers with workers’ rights.

Gall calls this the “sex work discourse” that he argues has become increasingly more accepted by sex workers themselves and their supporters since the 1970s as a reaction to misogyny and violence but also as a counter to radical feminist ideas that sex work is inherently oppressive to women. The discourse as set out by Gall is that sex work is a type of labour that, while also involving physical skills and labour, is primarily emotional in character like other service industry jobs. The increasing prevalence of the discourse from the 1970s on is evidence for Gall of the political awakening of sex workers who can no longer be seen as “quintessentially downtrodden”. It is also about recognising that the global sex industry is large and growing, has lots of different forms and employs hundreds of thousands

Sex work is a type of labour that, while also involving physical skills and labour, is primarily emotional in character like other service industry jobs

countries over the issue employment status. Owners often prefer to keep workers as self-employed, thereby excusing themselves of any responsibilities while still insisting on strict conditions of attendance and performance. One famous case in the UK saw a lapdancer win her case against Stringfellows for unfair dismissal; she proved that she was treated as an employee with set shifts and barred from working elsewhere. Arguing for the right to be recognised as employed is often an early battle when workers are beginning to organise a union.

Gall argues that unionisation on the basis of occupational identity is most appropriate “because it is the form most suited to dealing with sex workers either being self-employed or working alone or in small numbers in many small establishments”. He argues that the most promising attempts to organise have been where “both [mainstream] unions and sex worker union activists have sought to create a form of unionism that is appropriate for transient workforces who work in a multiplicity of small and challenging work locations... trying to establish favourable regimes of

downright hostile to the attempts of sex workers to organise. Gall sees this as stemming from a range of factors – the perceived and actual problems of trying to organise a diverse and stigmatised group of workers, the enduring male dominance of many unions and the resultant sexism, but also resistance from radical feminist influenced women activists who see sex work as an inherently oppressive situation that cannot be regarded as work. Such opposition therefore often includes women’s committees of the unions, and in countries such as South Africa there is an obstructive influence of Christian or other religious “morality”.

These experiences lead to the third element of Gall’s summing up, where sex work proto-unions end up acting in the same way as prostitutes’ rights groups as a result of loss of initial momentum and when mainstream union support does not fully materialise or ebbs away. The focus then becomes political lobbying, calls for legal reform, provision of training, individual assistance for workers on health issues, criminal offences, and business matters such as dealing with tax returns. In the UK, the GMB’s Adult Entertainment Branch fits this category, despite

of workers. Gall goes on to argue that sex work "can be socially useful and can provide job satisfaction, personal fulfillment, empowerment and self-actualisation, where becoming a sex worker can be a genuine life choice". This is an assertion that still remains controversial, especially among some women labour movement activists, but the stories and examples Gall relates are illuminating and born of, and engendering respect for, the workers themselves.

There have been some notable successes: there is the Lusty Lady a unionised workers' cooperative peep show in San Francisco, there are unionised lap dancing bars in the UK, there was a prostitutes' strike in Bolivia in 2007 against

police harassment and there are examples of innovative and creative forms of fighting back such as "no pink" actions where dancers collectively refuse to show their genitals, as well as pickets of workplaces using amusing slogans such as "2, 4, 6, 8 - don't come here to masturbate". In terms of a way forward, having read this book, the radical feminist solution of abolition is clearly not only fanciful but dangerous and counter-productive. Rather than forcing sex work back or further underground, instead socialists should work to promote solidarity in the labour movement or as Gall would put it, advocate for our fellow workers' right to organise - the sex work discourse.

Alison Higgins

field. The lasting effect on the losers in a civil war is fear of another.

The aim of this enormous and unwieldy book (over 700 pages long) by the British historian Paul Preston, the most prominent historian of the civil war in Spain,¹ is to establish that the violence unleashed by a coalition of right wing Nationalist forces during the Spanish civil war and beyond, was systematic and planned. It was, he plausibly argues, "planned terror", aimed at wiping out all opponents, in particular workers' organisations, and repressing the rural poor. Preston's cautious estimate of 200,000 deaths as a result of Nationalist terror is undoubtedly an underestimate. Given the lack of records and details of deaths, the exact figure will never be known. The book contains a wealth of factual details and as a result is sometimes hard to follow.

The Nationalist coalition, that included the monarchist Carlist party, the Catholic Church and the fascist Falange party, was led by military generals who believed they were combating a Jewish-Masonic-Bolshevik conspiracy to destroy the Spanish state. The Nationalist slogan against this was "Religion, Fatherland, Family, Order, Work, Property". Their intention was to turn the clock back, to restore semi-feudal values and regain economic control for the large landowners, the church and employers through a dictatorship led by the military. Women and workers were to have no rights, the Catholic Church was to be given a monopoly of education and religious practice and regional nationalisms were going to be repressed. To implement this plan in a country torn by class divisions and revolutionary conflict would, in their view, necessitate terror.

The social and political situation in Spain before the civil war was turbulent. Industry was relatively small, mainly located in the north. Land was divided into massive estates, often owned by absentee landowners. In the south, landowners regarded landless labourers as sub-human and had no interest in ensuring they had work

The Spanish Civil War: Franco's grim legacy

THE SPANISH HOLOCAUST: INQUISITION AND EXTERMINATION IN 20TH CENTURY SPAIN

Paul Preston

2012 / Harper Press / £30

THE SPANISH civil war raged from 1936 to 1939. It pitted a democratic Republican government against a military revolt led by General Francisco Franco and his supporting Nationalist and fascist forces, a coalition militarily backed by both Hitler and Mussolini.

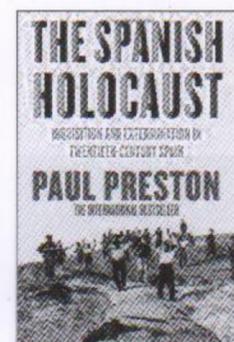
The war is well known in Britain through stories about the International Brigades, volunteers from across Europe who fought - and often died - for the Republican side. Exhibitions, films and books dedicated to the Brigades are however, invariably long on individual heroism and short on political analysis.

There is still a belief promoted by the conservative media that the Franco regime was a relatively benign dictatorship, lasting as it did

for more than 35 years until Franco's death in 1975. Paul Preston's book sets out to destroy this myth and establish definitively that the violence perpetrated by the Francoists amounts to a virtual holocaust.

In Spain, there has been a long pact of silence around the war, enforced by the "democratic agreement" that ensured the transition from dictatorship to democracy in the 1980s. This silence was underwritten by the lasting effects of the terror unleashed during the war, a terror that was followed by mass starvation and extensive corruption. This has left a lasting void of memory. Only now, 70 years on, with most of the central protagonists dead, is this void beginning to open.

For years the "disappeared" were not even mentioned in Spain and it was illegal to excavate their unmarked graves. Occasionally in remote villages a bunch of flowers would appear overnight in a lonely





- they often bred fighting bulls, instead of growing crops. Labourers were hired on a seasonal or daily basis, were always hungry and very often starved. Disease was endemic.

Rapid economic growth in the early twentieth century created a small industrial bourgeoisie, trade unions and left wing parties. A recession after the First World War led to cuts and lay-offs, followed by strikes and rural uprisings in the south. Landowners developed a bitter hatred for the landless

General Mola, one of the leaders of the coup, made his intentions clear: "I want to defeat them, to impose my, and your will upon them and to annihilate them"

labourers as a result of these uprisings. By the end of 1933, 12% of the workforce was unemployed. Successive elections between 1931 and 1936 created a series of unstable coalition governments that quickly dissolved.

During this period strikes created gains for workers and the rural poor. Left wing parties grew strong, including the anarchist trade union, the Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) and its activist wing the Federacion Anarquista Iberica, the Stalinised Communist Party, under the direction of the USSR and the POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista), a small revolutionary party whose leader was Andre Nin.² In 1936 between May and October, 508 strikes took place. In the Asturias, a mining area, Franco led a violent military repression to put down a general strike, honing the methods of terror he would use in the war.

Preston devotes long sections of the book to the formation of each government and the conflicts and alliances between the political parties, including the creation of the 1936 Popular Front government, a coalition of two republican parties and the Socialists and the Communist

Party. He doesn't spell out his political position but it is clear his sympathies lie with the Republic, while he views revolutionaries as "extremists". Fortunately this bias doesn't reflect on his meticulous research.

Preston catalogues the way the Nationalists implemented their plan to destroy the Republic. On 18 July 1936, a few months after the elections which brought the Popular Front to power, a small group of right wing nationalist

army officers led a rebellion, which started in Spanish Morocco and spread to garrisons throughout Spain. First they killed the officers who opposed the coup. Next they killed the ones who wouldn't join it. Three days later they announced the creation of a "government", the Junta de Defensa Nacional. The civil war had begun.

As it progressed, General Franco took charge, unifying the different right wing and nationalist factions. His intentions were clear. According to Preston he was "more concerned with a total purge of all conquered territory than with a quick victory." Rather than take Madrid, for example, when he had the chance to ensure a quick victory to end the war, he attacked Toledo near Madrid, where 800 people were executed and thrown into mass graves. This rhythm of killing was maintained for months. In Badajoz hundreds of people were slaughtered in the bullring. In Asturias, the mining area, a third of those killed were miners, often shot and dropped into mine shafts. Slave labour battalions were established and these continued long after the war ended.

Preston notes that from the start the Nationalists saw themselves as the legitimate government and the

elected Republican government "rebels" that had to be removed. The Nationalist army consisted of regular soldiers loyal to the generals, the Spanish colonial army, and significantly numbers of Moroccan troops and other mercenaries. They were supplemented by the Civil Guard, a paramilitary force that operated throughout the country that was used to police and repress the rural poor. In Badajoz they manned the firing squads. Preston doesn't analyse the continuing role of this paramilitary force after the war and even after the transition to democracy; it was never purged.

The progression of the Nationalists into republican areas of Spain was systematic. The aim was to leave occupied areas leaderless and terrorised so they could move on to occupy new territory. General Mola, one of the leaders of the coup, made his intentions clear: "I want to defeat them, to impose my, and your will upon them and to annihilate them." As soon as they overran and occupied new territories they imposed martial law, then carried out terror. They saved their worst excesses for civilians and torture was endemic.

The Nationalists imprisoned, tortured and killed trade unionists, left leaders and their supporters, women activists, school teachers, intellectuals, homosexuals, landless peasants, new-born babies and pregnant women. Women were raped, had their heads shaved and were forcibly fed castor oil to soil themselves, before being paraded publicly through the streets. In areas controlled by General Mola executions were carried out in public and spectators were given hot chocolate and doughnuts.

Because so many deaths were not documented, with bodies thrown into ditches, dismembered, or buried in communal, unmarked graves, definitive statistics of deaths of prisoners and civilians in the war are patchy. Not until 1985 were steps taken to preserve documents. By then mass destruction of archives had taken place. For example, the entire archive of the

fascist Falange party was destroyed to avoid future criminal investigations.

Neither did the terror finish when the war ended – martial law continued until 1948.

Concentration camps were open prisons but there was nowhere to go. With the borders closed the whole country was a prison, where workers and rural labourers had little to eat. In 1949 Gerald Brenan in a trip through Spain encountered starving people dressed only in blankets, others living on 100 grams of bread a day and a litre of olive oil a month.³

This history was repressed in post-war Spain. As Preston notes, “The defeated had no public right to historical memory and were in a kind of internal exile.” Events of the civil war were systematically falsified in the media and in schools. Thousands of children taken from their imprisoned mothers were put in Catholic orphanages and fed the official false narrative. When history is falsified and open discussion outlawed under the threat of violence, silence is the best policy.

It was only in 2000, 70 years after the war ended, that the grandchildren of victims began a movement to uncover the real events of the war. Finally, in 2007, under the Zapatero government the Ley de memoria histórica [the Historical Memory Law] was passed. This law acknowledged the existence of mass graves, began the process of identifying their locations, and made it permissible to recover bodies. The descendants of perpetrators have reacted to this law with near hysteria and so far not many graves have been opened.

Preston’s book has not convinced everyone. Reviewers in the right wing press have tried to gloss over the terror and find justifications for ignoring it. Jeremy Treglow, reviewing Preston’s book in the British Daily Telegraph, is clearly annoyed: “Spain’s transition in the 1970s from dictatorship to democratic monarchy, though perilous, was extremely well managed and has so far proved durable. One of the most impressive

things about it was a general refusal to dwell on the past.”⁴

Stanley Payne’s review in the Wall Street Journal questions the validity of Preston’s research, dismisses the violence carried out by the “Spanish conservatives”, preferring to devote most of the review to praising Preston’s criticisms of the Republicans.⁵

In fact Preston’s book does history and the labour movement a service in bringing to our attention how the toxic legacy of Francoism is still felt in the social political landscape of Spain, 35 years after his death. It is time to uncover the past and finally bury Francoism.

Jill Daniels

ENDNOTES

1. Preston is seen in Spain as the foremost historian of the Spanish civil war. He has written nine previous books on the subject.
2. Nin was assassinated during the war

on the orders of Aleksandr Orlov, chief of the Russian Intelligence service (NVKD) in Spain. The assassination of Nin, whose body has never been discovered, is described in detail in the book, including, for the first time, the pinpointing of the location of his grave.

3. Gerald Brenan, *The Face of Spain*, Penguin Books reprinted 1987. John Wolf in the forward correctly describes Franco’s actions as, “what, if we had been looking, we would have called genocide, or at best a white terror.”

4. www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/historybookreviews/9103580/The-Spanish-Holocaust-by-Paul-Preston-review.html 28 February 2012.

5. online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303302504577325594229771470.html 13 April 2012.

Jill Daniels is a filmmaker and senior lecturer in film and video at East London University. Her documentary film about the Spanish Civil War Not Reconciled (2009) is available on her website www.jilldanielsfilms.com

A new movement of rebellion and dissent

RIOT CITY: PROTEST AND REBELLION IN THE CAPITAL

Clive Bloom

Palgrave Macmillan / 2012 / £9.99

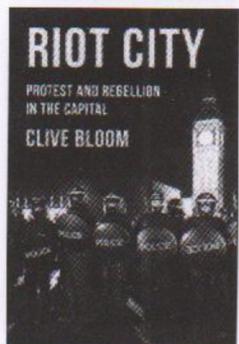
CLIVE BLOOM’S latest book *Riot City: Protest and Rebellion in the Capital* is a companion to *Violent London: 2000 Years of Riots, Rebels and Revolts* (2010). It is a solid introduction to current debates, realities and thinking around mass disorder. It cuts through the right wing rubbish from the media and the government with a wealth of evidence and history.

The papers and news commonly transmit images of burning and looting involving disenfranchised youth from across the world. Never mind their motives, the government of the day and the media portray such property destruction or even organised self-

defence as simple criminality.

The recent riots in estates and cities across the England after the shooting of Mark Duggan by the police were reported in the same fashion. Duggan’s death and the police murderers were quickly pushed from the headlines as young people took to the streets to rage against the police and a society where the odds are stacked crushingly against them.

Going further back from the riots Bloom points out in the book that over the last period the police and the government have been caught out. When they hiked up fees and abolished EMAs they expected the NUS to keep student discontent under wraps. After initial hesitation when faced with student direct action they responded with the further militarisation of the police and punitive sentences for those





involved. Michael Gove suggested that getting ex-soldiers into the classroom would sort things out. Theresa May even authorised the use of “non-lethal” baton rounds, plastic bullets that have killed dozens of times over the years in the north of Ireland.

Like other recent works, such as Paul Mason’s *Why it’s kicking off everywhere?* and Alan Badiou’s *The Rebirth of History*, Bloom notes the arrival of a new movement with diverse tactics and an almost

The internet was their preferred planning tool, although the anti-capitalist movement began earlier, with young activists trying to think and act in a different way to the traditional partyist left. The 1985 Bonn demonstration against the G7, the 1994 Zapatista uprising and Seattle in 1999 created an international network that linked Indian farmers and Brazilian landless peasants with European and North American activists called the People’s Global Action Network.

Muslims. The real left has always stood against anti-semitism – it would be strange if it stood idly by whilst another minority is made scapegoats by the state and the far right.

Bloom suggests that the rise in student fees was an inevitability that the government had ignored for so long that “economic circumstances” meant that the state “could no longer run the system without either raising general taxation or charging fees” (p 55) – a curious observation given the recent £1tn bail out of the financial sector in the UK. So there is plenty of money around for the banks or a new generation of trident missiles but not for education?

Bloom highlights the role of CCTV and “total policing”; those involved in “riots” find themselves arrested weeks and even months afterwards. The police control the images released, so it appears that those fighting the police are nothing but violent criminals. This goes hand in hand with infiltration of activist groups organised by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). Officers act as agent provocateurs, engage in dishonest relationships with individual activists and even rape by deception. The assembled evidence on infiltration and surveillance in Riot City shows the police are no neutral arbiters but the violent arm of the ruling class who engage in campaigns to criminalise political opposition.

One of the book’s strengths is Bloom’s use of the Guardian/LSE study into the riots last year. But in the last chapter Bloom weaves a somewhat chaotic tapestry of evidence around recent disorder in London and its historical significance – from the Bawdy House riots of 1668, the Gordon Riots of 1780 to the school boy strikes of 1889. Bloom recognises that riots have been part of political life in the capital and in British political life for centuries. The only real break from rioting came with the rise of the Labour Party and with the concentration on getting change through Parliament.

The assembled evidence on infiltration and surveillance in Riot City shows the police are no neutral arbiters but the violent arm of the ruling class

unanimous rejection of parliamentary reformism. This is the anti-capitalist movement which grew from the anti-globalisation movement between 1999 and 2005, driving the mass protests at Seattle, Melbourne, Prague, Montreal, Gothenburg and Genoa. At the political level it created social forums that debated an array of politics, groups and agendas on what kind of world we are fighting for.

Bloom places these new movements as part of a historical resistance that included the October Revolution but have appeared in different guises and under many different banners, even as the system they resist is profoundly unchanging. He makes the millennium a starting point for this new movement even though there was a variety of extra-parliamentary movements and actions in the 1990s.

In the UK for example there was mass opposition to the poll tax, as well as Reclaim the Streets and anti-road protests. On June 18 1999, “J18”, 6000 protesters descended on the City of London for a “Carnival Against Capitalism” and protesters came within touching distance of the trading floor at the LIFFE building.

Meanwhile the rich were busy getting richer. A review in *The Scotsman* (11.08.12) perfectly characterised the rage and injustice, pointing out that whilst the poor are quickly brought before the courts for even the most minor offences, the rich are “immune from the punishment of the poor.” The sentence of six months for the theft of a bottle of water contrasted, the article noted, with the lack of punishment for the theft of public money by MPs for flat screen televisions, new cars and homes.

Riot City contains some peculiar statements that are presented as post-modern common sense. For example, when discussing the ideological breakdown of those who have taken to the streets over the last decade, Bloom claims that “the old ideological divisions of left and right have almost entirely broken down, as has the division between fascists and those fighting fascism.” (p 49) Bloom’s “proof” is that the left supports the struggle for Palestinian national liberation while the far right EDL flies the flag of Israel.

But this is not an example of an end to left and right; the European far right has opportunistically moved on from campaigns against Jews to demonising and terrorising

Following the broken promises of old Labour and the right wing authoritarian agenda of New Labour, this is something the working class, especially the youth, has abandoned en masse. We are now back to riots as an outlet for rage and as an opportunity for the voiceless to make a point, whether through sacking the Conservative Party HQ or rioting against a police murder.

While Bloom's main point is to use his analysis to argue the need for reforms to policing, prisons and judiciary, Riot City does show that

the student demonstrations and the riots against police violence over the last two years are the result of deep injustices in society. Our task is not to advise on how to control or dampen down the rage of the working class youth but to bring it to bear in an organised way on a system that robs them of real control over their lives.

Chris Strafford

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now located externally, in the face-off between class blocs, but internally; in the psychology of the worker, who, as a worker, is interested in old-style class conflict, but as someone with a pension fund, is also interested in maximising the yield from his or her investments. There is no longer an identifiable external enemy."

This suggestion that workers are in thrall to capitalism through their pensions is a very strange argument when one considers that just three million people rely on private pensions. And the recent mass struggle of public sector workers in defence of their pensions certainly mobilised against "an identifiable external enemy".

So what is Fisher's alternative? It seems it is about time the left ceased "its ambitions to the establishing of a big state". Rather "the goal of a genuinely new left should be not to take over the state but to subordinate the state to the general will". Like a Supernanny the left should send Gove, Cameron and MI5 to the naughty step until they learn how to behave!

While "anything is possible", some things are ruled out. There must be no more discussions around Kronstadt and the NEP, no more gestures around Palestine, no more strikes, or work to rules. Rather, we need to get rid of business ontology, but without strikes or campaigns.

Mark Fisher's Capitalist Realism is stuck in a paradox – it accepts the very limits of the capitalist realism it purports to be against. What it boils down to is that capitalist ideology is all pervasive, the working class is dead, we might say that anything is possible, but in practice we can't do much and what little we think we can do, we can't do.

Some alternative!

Bill Jefferies

Captured by the realism he wants to end

CAPITALIST REALISM: IS THERE NO ALTERNATIVE?

Mark Fisher

Zero Books / 2009 / £7.99

"CAPITALIST REALISM" is a collection of pieces originally written for Mark Fisher's K-punk blog. Almost a stream of consciousness, its central idea is that it "easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism". This is capitalist realism, "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it".

Fisher draws on a range of cultural influences – from Spinoza to Lacan (the quasi-Freudian psychoanalyst who distinguished reality from the real) Deleuze and Guattari (quasi-Kantian philosophers who refused to distinguish the subject from the object) Hardt and Negri (quasi-Marxist philosophers who assert that immaterial labour defines the contemporary west) and Marx himself – to develop his argument.

There is no class struggle here, no working class as the agent of social change. If there is an

alternative to capitalism it is hard to find.

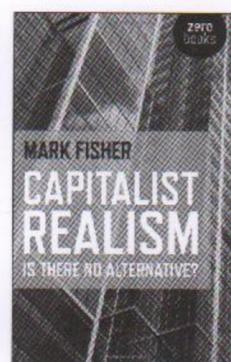
Fisher writes as an individual and these are his private thoughts made public. He has no systematic world view and it is paradoxically very post-modern, at home with the very same capitalist realism he aims to critique. The range of theoretical influences and ideas conflict, contrast and contradict each other to produce a melange of his very own.

Fisher's ideas follow the contemporary fashion of radical philosophy: the style is obfuscatory and oblique:

"What must be discovered is a way out of the motivation/demotivation binary, so that disidentification from the control program registers as something other than defected apathy."

Fisher believes modern students are too bored to read; hospitals do unnecessary operations; unions should give up on wage struggles; the fight against privatisation is a defence of the past; resistance to the new is not a cause the left should rally around and George Soros and Bill Gates are liberal communists.

As a result of neo-liberalism Fisher suggests: "Antagonism is not





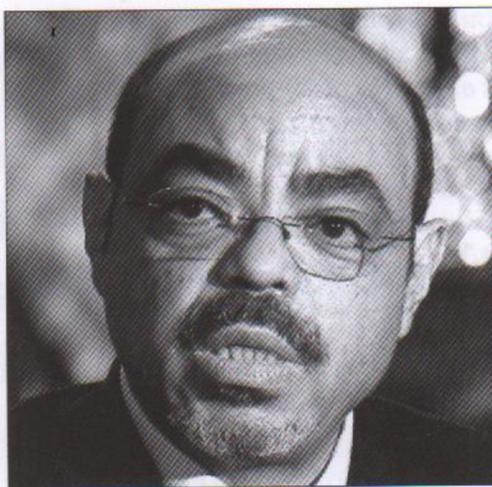
Meles Zenawi 1955-2011

The revolution betrayed twice

MELES ZENAWI the Prime Minister of Ethiopia died in August 2012 aged 57. During his career Zenawi morphed from a gifted Marxist student leader, liberation fighter and guerrilla tactician, into a brutal dictator and IMF stooge. His story encapsulates the tragedy of a revolution betrayed, not once, but twice.

Meles was born Legesse Zenawi in the town of Adwa in Tigray province, northern Ethiopia. Adwa holds a special place in Ethiopian national mythology, in 1896 Ethiopian forces led by Menelik defeated the Italians there. This was the first time an indigenous African army had defeated European colonialists. It ended the attempted Italian conquest of Ethiopia and confined them to the coastal area of Eritrea.

The young Legesse was from a relatively privileged background. He graduated from the elite



spread through the country and a general strike had brought Addis to a standstill. In Jimma, a large city in the heart of the coffee belt, an insurrection had overthrown the administration and a popular assembly ruled the city. Peasants were occupying and redistributing the land and there were the beginnings of revolt in the army,

The revolution was to be limited to a bourgeois democratic stage, with the government overseeing a long period of capitalist development

Wingate High School and went to university in Addis Ababa to study medicine. He dropped out in 1974 to become a founding member of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), a self-proclaimed Marxist organisation.

Ethiopia in 1974 was in the grip of a revolution against the last emperor, Haile Selassie, who had governed over a semi-feudal state since 1930. Famine and revolt

with officers and ordinary soldiers refusing to obey orders.

A revolt by middle ranking army officers resulted in a new provisional government, the Derg (or "committee" in Amharic), in September 1974. It assumed power in the name of the revolution. The officers were intent on limiting the revolution to a campaign against the feudal regime. They banned strikes, demonstrations and other

protests. The US continued to provide military aid to the new regime and for a time Ethiopia was second only to apartheid South Africa as a recipient of US military aid.

But in 1976, under the command of Mengistu, the Derg accepted Soviet military aid to defeat a Somali invasion. Military pragmatism joined with the dictatorship's political objectives, to disorientate and destroy the revolution and bring it under control. In 1977 Mengistu launched the Key Shibbir "Red Terror".

One hundred thousand mainly young activists were unleashed to liquidate opponents of the Derg in the name of Marxist-Leninism. As a result a whole generation of Marxists and socialists were wiped out. Some abandoned the struggle, some survived in prison and some escaped to the countryside.

The locus of struggle turned to Tigray and Eritrea, which had been incorporated into the Ethiopian empire by the United Nations after the Second World War. In both parts of the country minorities, their culture and language, were ruthlessly suppressed both by the Selassie regime and now by the Derg.

By the mid-1980s Mengistu was prosecuting a ruthless civil war against the insurgency, razing forests and forcibly relocating thousands of peasants from their land. The resulting famine killed over a million people. What was portrayed to the outside world as a natural calamity was in fact an act of war.

There is scant information about Zenawi during these years. He took on a party name of Meles as a tribute to a fellow Tigrayan Marxist student Meles, Tekle executed by the military in 1975. In the 1980s he led the Marxist Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT). He became the leader of the TPLF in 1989 by which time the majority of TPLF leaders were members of the MLLT.

But the MLLT model of liberation, like the Derg before it, was derived from Stalinism; the revolution was to be limited to a bourgeois democratic stage, with the

government overseeing a long period of capitalist development.

The party and state model was also drawn from Stalinism; decisions were made on behalf of the masses by the party not by the masses themselves. The TPLF was lauded by many in the 1980s for encouraging mass participation in the areas it controlled and for steering an independent course from the USSR (not surprising given the Soviets were supporting and arming Mengistu's drive to crush the Tigrean and Eritrean national struggles). But these mass meetings had no power. They were consultative, a method of winning support without any influence on the TPLF.¹ Decision making remained firmly within the Meles military clique.

The tragic consequences of this became apparent when the TPLF fighters entered Addis Ababa to assume power in 1991. Meles declared,

"We are not a Marxist-Leninist organisation. We do have Marxists in our movement. I acknowledge that I myself was a convinced Marxist when I was a student in the early 1970s and our movement was inspired by Marxism. But we learned that Marxism was not a good formula for resistance to the Derg and our fight for the future of Ethiopia"².

Nevertheless the first four years of the Meles-led interim government was a time of some optimism. Civil society was rebuilt and a genuinely independent trade union movement and militancy re-emerged and formed the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions. One by one, however, they were purged by the government, which arrested activists, froze bank accounts, disrupted meetings and seized equipment and offices for new "normalised" i.e. pro-government union staff.

The government tried this approach with the Ethiopian Teachers Association, setting up its own rival organisation with the same name. However, despite its deputy general secretary Asefa Maru being murdered in the street and its president, Dr Taye,

languishing in prison for six years the union continued to function.

In other areas Meles showed a similar ruthless determination, the Oromo Liberation Front was banned, demonstrators were gunned down and the Ogaden area bordering Somalia was repressed, with many thousands forced from their homes. A study by Norwegian election observers found widespread election abuse, with ballots interfered with and opposition politicians jailed during the elections. Aid was denied to

used as a last resort to maintain power. Finally, Meles showed a complete and willing subservience to imperialism. He offered the US overflight permission in its war on Iraq and sent tens of thousands of troops into Somalia to remove a pro-Islamic government the US state department wanted rid of, opening up a whole new phase of civil war in the country.

Since his death state TV has been in a frenzy of mourning. Freedom fighters and socialists have no reason to join them. Meles and the

Meles used divide and rule tactics, fear, bribes and a network of informers to back up brute force used as a last resort to maintain power

rural areas that did not vote for Meles. In a country which was over 80% rural, with many regions permanently on the edge of famine, this alone guaranteed success in elections.

In 2005 when Meles stole the second election, a general strike in Addis Ababa was violently put down, with many thousands shot and up to 40,000 held in impromptu imprisonment camps, often football stadiums. The Addis Ababa municipal council was suspended, opposition politicians imprisoned, journalists jailed or murdered. As a result in 2010 Meles "won" the next election with over 99% of the vote!

Despite growth rates of between 8-11% between 2004-11 the urban workers remain poor. The rural masses are still in extreme poverty despite some improvements in electricity, the availability of clean water and education. Most live short lives stunted by malnutrition, disease and hopelessness.

Under Mengistu oppositionists were massacred and all independent civil society organisations suppressed. In contrast, Meles used divide and rule tactics, fear, bribes and a network of informers to back up brute force

TPLF once represented a dream of freedom. That dream was crushed. There is much we can also learn from the heroic and as yet unfinished struggles of Ethiopians continuing to fight for freedom and equality.

Jason Travis

ENDNOTES

1. *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front, 1975-1991*, John Young (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

2. *Famine and Foreigners: Ethiopia since Live Aid*, Peter Gill (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010)



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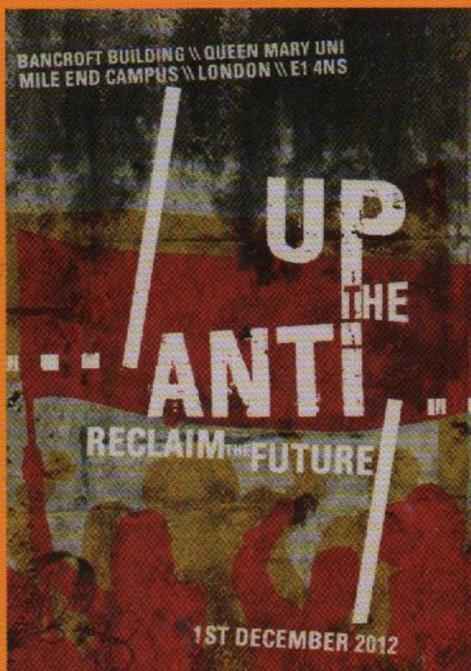
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