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What sort of unity?

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How should the left react to the financial crisis? Should we, asks James Turley, suspend our polemics against other left groups in order to forge a more effective response?

It perhaps says something about the parlous state of today's far left that it takes a catastrophic crisis - either, in boom times, its promise or, currently, its reality - to relieve the pallor of despondency.

It is easy, given the failures of the last few years - decades, even - to hope that the changed situation will sweep away all the obstacles that have been keeping us from our goal - the Labour Party, the appearance of inevitability of bourgeois rule and 'the sects' (that is, all left groups apart from one's own).

A peculiarly concentrated version of this appeared in the *Weekly Worker's* letters page a few weeks ago, when the Radical Anthropology Group's Chris Knight outlined a programme which, he no doubt imagined, is as close as possible to 'existing' consciousness as possible ([October 9](#)). Apart from leading him into some very dubious territory indeed (he called for the prosecution of various state functionaries for treason) he even predicted a date for the revolution - Halloween 2008.

But there is no sign of an outbreak of working class consciousness (although, as I write, October 31 has not yet arrived). No group has found its immaculate perspectives translated into sudden and astonishing growth. The 'Party news' section of the snoozeworthy *The Socialist*, the Socialist Party in England and Wales weekly, reports paper sales on stalls in the low double figures - as it always does. The Socialist Workers Party has no doubt picked up a few recruits at freshers fairs - but it always has ... and it remains an organisation whose secondary cadre is in general decay after a period of disasters. The small, marginal groups remain small and marginal.

In reality, the crisis has had precisely the opposite effect on the left to what it has expected. The apparent urgency of the situation has typically justified a retreat from any examination of programme - a matter which, of course, has never been much of a priority, particularly for the likes of the SWP.

The even greater imperative to 'get out there and do something' has all but scuppered the possibility that SWP members will attempt to hold their leaders to account over the Respect disaster. John Rees and Lindsey German, the architects of the shambolic 'electoral turn' that saw the party giving uncritical electoral support to basically anti-socialist Bengali businessmen, have been quietly retired by the *apparat* seemingly without a peep from the rank and file. They,

Fighting Fund Proves us right

For a second successive month, we have failed to reach our £1,000 target - this time by quite some distance. October's fighting fund raised only £803.

This is by far the biggest deficit we have had in a single month since we changed our printing arrangements and were forced to double our target. It is now essential that we make up for lost ground in the last two months of the year.

Special thanks this week go to comrade SR, a long-time supporter who has come up with a very handsome £50 donation. Then there was £40 from comrade TT, £25 from LH, £20 from KB, plus a tenner each from DS and CK. On top of which, the *Weekly Worker* bank statement shows that extra standing order donations were received from GD (£20) and DO (£10). All in all, our total went up by £185 over the last seven days.

In truth we should never fail to make our monthly target - what with the thousands of comrades who read us every week (last week there were 17,090 online readers). But too few of them use our PayPal facility and help us out.

So should the *Weekly Worker* charge for access to its articles like the *Morning Star*? Well, in fact I hear the *Star* has given up the idea as a bad job. From January internet access to its pages will be free, I am told. It has only around 300 online subscribers, mostly overseas

after all, have leaflets to hand out.

What about programme?

It is precisely the repressed matter of *programme* which the Communist Party hopes to restore to the left's agenda. In times of capitalist crisis this becomes *more* important, not less.

What, then, to make of Mark Lewis's long letter to the *Weekly Worker* last week (October 23)? According to him, the recent and ongoing dispute between our organisation and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty has seen both our groups "collectively disappearing up each other's backsides". Does anyone really care "who invited whom to debate first" (perhaps he should ask the AWL, who continue to insist on making stuff up on this score which then has to be laboriously corrected)?

Meanwhile, he tells us: "Outside your ivory tower, thousands of workers are losing their homes and jobs." The comrade predicts "mergers and alliances" across the left, thanks to the dire need for working class solidarity. In such a situation, we in the CPGB will only "damage" such striving for unity. Instead, he suggests, we should support a laundry list of organisations - SWP, SPEW, the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain - "no matter how much it sticks in your craw".

His tone is more one of frustration than outright opposition, and indeed the content of his objections is worth examining, precisely because this is a very common sentiment among 'outsiders' with regard to the left - particularly at the moment: 'Sure, capitalism's falling to pieces, but look at you people! All you do is squabble endlessly. Can't you get together against the main enemy?'

Undoubtedly such comments often express a healthy desire to achieve effectiveness. But this apparently common-sensical approach falls apart when we examine the content of what 'getting together' would mean. Are we to support the SWP People before Profit Charter, whose ambition extends to "wage rises no lower than the rate of inflation" and a minimum wage of £8 an hour? (see *Socialist Worker* July 19).

More ominously, a likely consequence of the current crisis is a rise in support for the far right. In facing down this threat, are we to support Unite Against Fascism, which calls for state bans in the name of common British decency, the Dunkirk spirit and all that - to say nothing of alliances on this score with figures from all the main bourgeois parties who are currently presiding over the job cuts and foreclosures which comrade Lewis claims we have not noticed?

Are we to support the CPB, when its response to the crisis has been - surprise, surprise - orthodox Keynesianism? In one particularly revolting article, CPB economics 'expert' Gerry Jones goes so far as to map out "Britain's path to success" (*Morning Star* October 19)!

If comrade Lewis has bothered to read our own perspectives on the coming recession (his letter gives the impression that, in spite of himself, he has been skipping straight to the dirt on Sean Matgamna), he will know that we think it likely that capitalism will swing back - is already swinging back - towards protectionism and the hardening of blocs and borders.

Keynesianism has been a vital support to that strategy in the past. Gerry Jones, to the extent he is ever visible in the bourgeois body politic, will end up looking like the outlier for Labour soft lefts he is, just as sundry leftists ended up providing cover for the 'new deal' in America in the 1930s.

The AWL

(although a good deal more than that pay £1 for a single day), and this brings in far less income than was originally anticipated.

But our own approach has been totally different from the start. Our aim has never been to put cash first, but to *get our message across*. Even if reading our paper online had been a money-spinner, we would not have gone for it, since we know it would have *reduced* our readership.

We concentrate on producing the paper and rely on our readers and supporters to contribute what we need in order to do so. It may not have worked out these last two months, but we are certain that, in the long run, this is by far and away the best approach.

But now we need you to prove we are right!

Robbie Rix

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The 1930s brings us back to the AWL. After all, the most infamous consequence of the shift towards Keynesianism in that decade, explicit and *de facto*, is called World War II.

Hitler aped many of the features of Roosevelt's 'new deal', but could only ultimately finance this by gearing up for war. This was equally true of Roosevelt himself. The 'new deal' was very much about putting America on a war footing, as much as it was about relieving the tumultuous social crisis.

Thus the possibility of war gets more real, in our time, every day. And if war breaks out it will be necessary for the socialist movement to respond in a timely, effective and politically principled manner. The presence of AWL's social-imperialist politics within that movement can pass, in peacetime (relatively speaking, as there is never total peace under capitalism), for a local infection which we might choose to ignore in order to combat more pressing illnesses.

This is not peacetime, however - presently our own state is engaged in imperialist occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and, via sanctions, fighting 'soft war' against Iran (not so soft for the Iranian masses, of course), with a view to a possible full military attack in the near future. The AWL refuses to clearly oppose the first two adventures, since it believes they help 'protect the labour movement' from the 'clerical fascists'.

Furthermore, its leader, Sean Matgamna, has said that it is perfectly rational for the Israeli state (dependent in all military respects on the US) to pre-emptively bomb Iran to stop the "homicidal religious lunatics" in Tehran acquiring nuclear weapons - after all, these lunatics "might see a nuclear armageddon, involving a retaliatory Israeli nuclear strike against Iran in the way a god-crazed suicide bomber sees blowing himself to pieces" (*Solidarity* July 24). The AWL's national council has since voted to reject the use of the word 'oppose' in a resolution on a possible Israeli strike.

With the threat of war looming, such sentiments amount to *sabotage* of the anti-war effort. We cannot but see these ideas for what they are - a *cancer*. Treatment of cancer has never been an easy, pretty or enjoyable process - but it needs to be done, and since the SWP *et al* are engaged in ploughing their sectarian furrows, the job falls to us.

Comrade Lewis suggests we dedicate our paper exclusively to Marxist analysis of the crisis. But Marxist analysis is not an end in itself - it is supposed to guide effective action. I would love our disagreements with other groups to be over trivial matters that we could resolve easily, but in reality our analysis leads us to oppose the politics of the groups he says we should support. This is because these groups' grasp of Marxism is entirely tenuous.

I suggest he writes a letter to the SWP demanding an end to its sub-populist opportunism, to the CPB concerning its nationalist Keynesianism, and the AWL over its ghastly social-imperialism - it is they who need to be prescribed some Marxist analysis, not us.

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