

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article3513>



Book review

Daniel Bensaïd: Repeated disappointments

- Reviews section -

Publication date: Wednesday 6 August 2014

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

Last week it was reported that British gross domestic product had finally recovered to the level attained in 2008 before the financial crisis. So the ‘longest recession for 100 years’ is officially over.

Of course, most of us will not feel much benefit from this: median real wages are officially down by 8.5% since 2009. [2] This has saved people with mortgages from repossession - and, more importantly for capital, banks from ‘realising’ paper losses. But it has pushed sections of middle class ‘savers’ towards landlordism, and the young into a private rented sector characterised by increasingly extortionate rents. The Office for National Statistics figures for real wages thus understate the decline, since the deflator ONS used is the consumer price index (CPI), which excludes housing costs.

Since the beginning of the crisis, and more confidently since the formation of the Con-Dem coalition government in 2010, the left has been expecting crisis and ‘austerity’ to lead to a mass fightback in the form of industrial action, street action and so on. This is true not only of the far left, but also of the electoral calculations and policy choices of the Labour leadership round Ed Miliband and Ed Balls. Four years later, the fightback has not materialised: there have been some large one-day protest actions, most recently on July 10, but no more; and Labour remains stuck in the polls in the 30-40% range and not that far ahead of the Tories.

Even Alex Callinicos of the Socialist Workers Party has been led to a sort of recognition of the problem: as he wrote in his June *International Socialism* article, ‘Thunder on the left’,

The paradox of the present situation is that capital is weak - but the radical left is much weaker. Alternatively, capital is economically weak, but much stronger politically, less because of mass ideological commitment to the system than because of the weakness of credible anti-capitalist alternatives. [3]

All this may seem an odd way to introduce a review of the English translation of the late Daniel Bensaïd’s book of reminiscences and meditations on his life of activism and leftwing writing. But it is appropriate, because the disappointment of today’s left over the failure of the crisis of 2008-09 and its aftermath to “offer a more favourable terrain for the anti-capitalist left to put forward alternative perspectives” (Callinicos) is only the most recent of a series of disappointments of the left’s perspectives since the high-water mark of the fall of Saigon in 1975 and Portuguese revolution in 1976.

Bensaïd was immediately involved when “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, But to be young was very heaven!” [4] in May 1968 in France. Unlike William Wordsworth’s abandonment of liberalism in the 1800s (and unlike a good many other 68ers) he remained committed to the far left and its perspectives down to his death in 2010, through most of this series of disappointments. He did not live long enough to see the latest version in France, the disappointment in 2011-12 of the failure of the project of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste, in which he was a participant (the book was published in French some years earlier, in 2004). His life therefore poses - and he poses himself in the book - the question of how to respond to these repeated disappointments.

The book’s title in French is *Une lente impatience*, a paradoxical expression which is not well translated by *An impatient life*. *Impatience* in French is something of what translators call a ‘false friend’, since it has a range of broader overtones than ‘impatience’ in English - notably, and probably intended here, ‘unwillingness to put up with’ something (here, the current social order). *Lente* means, of course, ‘slow’. *Une lente impatience* is paradoxical, where *An impatient life* suggests a man always in a hurry. Bensaïd, in contrast, comments (on his and

his comrades' ideas in late 1968): "History was breathing down our necks. The time of slow impatience had not yet arrived" (p64, emphasis added).

Une lente impatience also has another, political, undertone lacking in *An impatient life*. This is an indirect, implicit engagement with the arguments of Henri Weber, Bensaïd's close comrade in the *Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire* in 1968, *Ligue Communiste* and early *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* (editor of the weekly *Rouge* until it went daily in 1976). Weber left the LCR in 1981, and in 1983 published an edited collection of translated articles from the 1910-12 debate in the Social Democratic Party of Germany on the mass strike, under the title *Socialisme: la voie occidentale* ("Socialism: the western road"). As the title indicates, Weber's "spin" on this debate - very delicately indeed in this book - was to prefer the views of Karl Kautsky's *Ermattungsstrategie* (strategy of attrition/war of position), or strategy of patience, to the *Niederwerfungsstrategie* (strategy of overthrow), or mass-strike line, of Rosa Luxemburg and Anton Pannekoek. Within a few years Weber had become a functionary of the *Parti Socialiste*, linked to Laurent Fabius. [5] His use of Kautsky had turned out to be a short route to the ideas of Bernstein: "Between Baden and Luxemburg" on the road to Baden. [6] Today he is a PS MEP. A "slow impatience" would thus be, implicitly, an alternative to the conclusions of Weber and (numerous) others who have passed over from the far left to the PS: slow, but retaining the "impatience" which these ex-leftists reconciled to the existing order have lost.

I described Bensaïd's book, above, as a "book of reminiscences and meditations on his life" rather than a memoir (as it is subtitled in English) or an autobiography: it is less structurally coherent, more episodic and more interrupted by substantive arguments than either. The element of reminiscences is extensive. At times the book reads like an enormous list of names and character sketches of the living and the dead, and anecdotes of meals, meetings and occasional semi-poetic impressions of events. Verso has provided footnotes identifying characters at their first appearance (sources and Bensaïd's notes are in endnotes), as well as 11 pages of abbreviations; for the reader not familiar with these characters, an alphabetical *dramatis personae* of the people, or at least an index of names, would make it more readable. (Of course, even without the familiarity, if you like long novels with sprawling plots and huge casts of characters who appear briefly, only to disappear, it would also be a good read ...)

Tariq Ali in his foreword says that reading "much of this material today is like delving into the archives of Atlantis" (pix): the period before the 1980s seems like a lost world. Ali also claims that if "there was a weakness in Daniel it was this: even when he knew that mistakes (some of them serious) were being committed by his organisation [the LCR and the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, of which it was the principal national section], he would never stand up and contest the will of the majority" (pxi). At one level, this is to say no more than that Bensaïd did not agree with some of Ali's choices about opposition within the USFI and its sections. [7] At another level, it forecasts a marked feature of the book: that Bensaïd's gaze is fixed pretty resolutely outwards, with markedly little attention to the (then lively) inner intellectual and political life of the organisations - LCR and USFI - of which he was a leader.

To give a single example, Bensaïd was - under his cadre name, "Jebracq" - the prime author of the theoretical reinterpretation of the Comintern's policy of the workers' united front as the "dialectic of unity and outflanking". This rendered it "available" to small Trotskyist groups (the Comintern leaders thought only mass parties could apply the policy). Tony Cliff plagiarised the idea. At the same time, if perhaps by a partial vulgarisation of Bensaïd's ideas, the "dialectic of unity and outflanking" allowed the united front idea to be divested of class content and turned into a name given to broad-front, single-issue campaigns, of a sort which go back, in Britain, to 18th century "civil society" before the working class appeared as a political actor. This aspect of his political history is missing from the book.

Narrative

Daniel Bensaïd: Repeated disappointments

The considerable absence of the inner life of the LCR and USFI may help explain the somewhat episodic character of the narrative. Alternatively, this may be partly driven by Bensaïd's wish to discuss lessons and issues related to aspects of his experiences and prior writings: several chapters are reflections rather than narrative.

Bensaïd was born in 1946, the son of small bistro owners in Toulouse. His mother, Martha Starck, a milliner by training, and his father, Ham Bensaïd, an Algerian Jewish amateur boxer, had met in Oran before the war and, though Ham was arrested during the war, he narrowly avoided deportation. The cafe was a centre of French Communist Party (PCF) activity after the war, so that Daniel Bensaïd was in a leftwing milieu from an early age. He became politically active at secondary school round the Algerian war and, by the time he went to the école normale supérieure at Saint-Cloud, Paris, as a student in 1966, he was already aligned with the semi-Trotskyist left opposition in the Jeunesse Communiste (Communist Youth) and Union des Étudiants Communistes (Union of Communist Students) and had, indeed, participated in the split of 1966 and formation of the JCR (chapter 4). 1966-68 was occupied with JCR activity, especially round international solidarity issues (Vietnam; the death of Che Guevara) though enough academic work was done for Bensaïd to pass the licence and enrol for the maîtrise (thesis topic: 'Lenin's notion of revolutionary crisis') in autumn 1967; then, of course, student politics triggered May 68 (chapter 5). He somehow managed to produce the thesis for September 1968 together with a book, with Henri Weber, on the May crisis: May 68, répétition générale ('May 68, dress rehearsal') (chapter 7).

Chapter 8, 'When history breathed down our necks', on 1969-72, covers the (banned) JCR's fusion with the (smaller) adult Trotskyist Parti Communiste Internationaliste to form the Ligue Communiste, and their debate about joining the USFI (in this debate Bensaïd was a pro-USFI non-Trotskyist, identifying himself with a Guevarist trend in the JCR - pp91-92); the first campaign of Alain Krivine for the French presidency in 1969 (lots of media impact, but 1% of the votes ...); Bolivia solidarity activity; a complicated love life; teacher training in a lycée; and conspiratorial work with contacts in Francoist Spain.

Chapter 9, 'The time of "hasty Leninism"', covers 1972-73: the beginning of Bensaïd's relationship with his long-term companion, Sophie Oudin; discussions with Roberto Santucho of the Argentinian semi-Trotskyist guerrillaist group, the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores - Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (Revolutionary Workers Party - People's Revolutionary Army); a legislative election campaign; and the June 1973 attack on the far-right Ordre Nouveau meeting, which got the Ligue banned. Chapter 10, 'Crying for Argentina', is more on the PRT-ERP: the 1974 10th World Congress of the USFI, Bensaïd's visit to Argentina in the run-up, and the tragic outcome of the PRT-ERP's 'armed struggle' policy and that of the other lefts who attempted guerrilla struggle in Latin America.

Chapter 12, 'Colour Rouge', is on the 1974 presidential campaign, the Portuguese revolution (very briefly) and lost hopes of revolutionary 'synergy' between Portugal and Spain, the daily, Rouge, and its failure, the beginnings of public debates about Eurocommunism, and the USFI's crisis over the Nicaraguan revolution and the 'turn to industry' (the significance of the Iranian revolution, and the Afghan 'Saur revolution' and Soviet intervention, are passed by).

Returning from reflections to narrative, chapter 15, 'E agora, Zé', concerns Bensaïd's responsibility for 'Latin America' at the USFI centre and in particular - after a brief sketch of the Nicaraguan revolution and revolutionary movements elsewhere - the development of the Brazilian Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers Party) from the 1980s down to the early 2000s. At the end of this he jumps back (in response to those who set up the neoliberal policy of the Lula government as a model) to a brief discussion of the 1973 coup in Chile. Chapter 16, 'Spectres of the Blue House', has some reportage of the Mexican Trotskyist Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores at its height in the early 1980s, before turning into a travelogue and discussion of Trotsky's last years in Mexico.

Chapter 17 is mainly devoted to characterisations of the actors in the leadership of the USFI, particularly Ernest

Mandel, besides discussing the fall of the Soviet bloc and the USFI's undue hopes of a renewal of a democratic socialism; on the side are a show trial in Cuba and the breakdown of Bensaïd's own health (he was diagnosed with Aids following, as Tariq Ali puts it (pxi), an "imprudent sexual encounter" in the 80s). But (chapter 22) "The 1980s were sordid. The 1990s began a renewal ... the Zapatista cry of January 1 1994 [in Mexico], the French strikes of winter 1995, the Seattle demonstrations of 1999, were indeed the first sign of a shift, even if not yet a full turn." (One might find similar comments from SWP writers ...)

Reflections

Bensaïd's reflections are mixed with the reminiscences throughout, but to some extent concentrated in chapters 1, 2, 6, 7, 11, 13, 14, and 18-23. Chapter 1 concerns Bensaïd's hesitations about writing the book - dislike of 'transparency', distrust of autobiography in general - and his motivations for doing so, triggered (pp2-3) by his 2001 habilitation examination (the formal qualification for research in philosophy), which reviewed his career and work: in particular, to "rescue [the] tradition" of the 1950s-70s left "for the new minds of the new century", "from the conformism that always threatens" (p3). Chapter 2 is addressed to the idea of the "committed intellectual" and "being a militant" in spite of persistent disappointments, in spite of the absence of actual revolution, and in face of the condescension of those who have reconciled to the existing order.

Chapter 6, 'Mai, si! (unfinished business)' is, as its title suggests, on May 68. Bensaïd responds to recent academic downplaying of the event by analogising this to Auguste Comte's counterposition of positivism to the 1848 revolution, and draws on Auguste Blanqui's attack on Comte's fatalism. He goes on to show how the several decennial 'celebrations' and publications in 1978, 1988, 1998 have all played a similar role of normalising, playing down the event, and so on. He makes the point in particular that in all these playing-down discourses the general strike (more exactly, a mass strike wave) goes missing, and 68 is reduced to the activities of the students and, in particular, of their leaders who have gone on to various careers.

Chapter 7, 'Thinking the crisis', begins with the 1960s intellectual ascendancy of Louis Althusser among a part of the French left and the JCR's reasons for suspicions of Althusserian structuralism, before moving into discussion of Bensaïd's *maîtrise* thesis on 'Lenin's notion of revolutionary crisis'. He identified this conception with "creative subjectivity", drawing on György Lukács's *History and class-consciousness* and on "psychoanalysis, epistemology and linguistics". While he included Lenin's requirement that "the ruling classes can no longer maintain their rule", his focus is entirely on the other side: that "those at the bottom no longer tolerate this" (pp82-83). He admits that this involved a "strained" reading of Lenin and favoured "an excessive passion of will and certain ultra-left impulses"; "But it at least had the merit of shaking the chains of structural fatality and interpolating each person's responsibility" (p83).

I was scarcely aware, on the other hand, of the trap that this negative dialectic of the subject risked leading into, ending up with a disconcerting game of hide-and-seek between, on the one hand, a theoretical subject that was both absent and abstract (a virtual proletariat inscribed in the formal structure of the mode of production) and, on the other hand, the practical subject of a vanguard representing the proletariat 'for itself', finally conscious of the meaning of history and of its own role in this profane theodicy. This 'for itself' might be framed by cautious quotation marks, but it still tended to make the party the equivalent for the Hegelian absolute spirit, protected from the ebb and flow of 'class-consciousness' (pp83-84).

The autocritique is correct, but radically insufficient. The underlying problem with Althusserian structuralism is not the lack of a space in it for voluntary choices, whether of individuals or of classes (true as this criticism is). Rather it is - also present in Lukács - structuralism's failure to recognise that capitalism itself is a process of change. Equally, not merely of 'decline', contra both Lukács and his Frankfurt school descendants, and Trotsky's statement that

“objective prerequisites for the proletarian revolution have not only ‘ripened’; they have begun to get somewhat rotten”. [8] Both continuities and changes are present in the historical process, and in the expectations from recent past to immediate future which we call ‘the present’; and the processes of change force choices on individuals, on social groups and on parties.

Neither capitalism nor the capitalist state stands still to be shot at (whether by an *Ermattungsstrategie* or a *Niederwerfungsstrategie*). At the same time when the JCR-LC-LCR and USFI were attempting to assert the role of the ‘subjective factor’ on the assumption that capitalism was in a sort of stasis along the lines of the 1950s-60s (eg, Mandel’s 1976 *Late capitalism*), the US state was beginning, with Nixon’s China opening and pull-back of troops from Vietnam, a radical reorientation of its policy. As this reorientation developed more fully in the later 1970s-80s, it was to wrong-foot both the ‘reformists’ and the ‘revolutionaries’ of the 1950s-70s.

Chapter 11, ‘Restrained violence’, is a reflective response to the issues posed by the policy of ‘armed struggle’ in Latin America in chapters 9 and 10, while criticising the reformists’ “rejection of violence” (which is, in reality, merely an assertion of the ‘good violence’ of the capitalist states and the ‘bad violence’ of those who resist these). Within this general frame, May 68, he argues, “displayed a remarkable mutual restraint” (p149) and “the parody aspect of the violence deployed by an organisation like the *Ligue Communiste* in the 1970s is striking” (p155), providing examples (pp155-58).

After its legal dissolution in 1973, the *Ligue* contemplated creating an actual clandestine armed wing, but in fact began only (more useful) clandestine propaganda and agitation among the army conscripts (pp161-62). Attempts at party training in resisting police interrogation produced some results similar to the Stanford prison experiment (pp162-63). [9] The terror in Cambodia under Pol Pot (1975-79) and exposures of the character of the ‘Cultural Revolution’ raised further questions (pp163-64). He concludes the chapter with an interesting idea:

Being unable to eradicate violence in a foreseeable future, we must at least work to discipline and restrain it, which presupposes the development of a new legal culture, and a culture of violence itself. One learns to appreciate wine without becoming alcoholic, and to drive without becoming reckless. Why should it be impossible to develop a culture of dominated violence? Certain military codes, and certain martial arts, have sketched a few pointers in this direction

...

The problem, of course, is - as Bensaïd documents elsewhere in the chapter - the deep commitment of the capitalist states to the use of unlimited violence, both in the periphery and in great-power wars. Indeed, even going back before capitalism, the “military codes” and “martial arts” never applied their constraints to dealing with rebels ...

Chapter 13, ‘Duck or rabbit?’, begins with *Rouge* as an ‘anti-newspaper’ (p182) and develops into a discussion of intellectual critiques of journalism, ranging over elitist critiques, the history of media, as connected to other aspects of civil society, and so on. The upshot is curiously inconclusive. Chapter 14, ‘Once upon a time, there’ll be ...’, addresses the ‘crisis of Marxism’ in the 1980s, the substitution of the idea of “desire” for that of “need” and ‘goodbye to the working class’ narratives; the argument is that such crises are no novelty.

Chapter 18, ‘The Marrano enigma’, addresses the ambiguities of the author’s position as a person of partly Jewish ancestry and a Jewish name, albeit without Jewish cultural or religious commitment; one whose “elective genealogy” was communist Jews (pp273-74); an active critic of Zionism from the time of the Six-Day War on; and so on. He adopts the figure of the ‘Marrano’, the Jewish-origin compelled convert to Christianity who nonetheless retains a Jewish identification, as in some sense prefiguring the ‘non-Jewish Jew’. Chapter 19, ‘The gymnastics of the possible’, in a sense follows on, beginning with Bensaïd’s interest in Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism around 1980, leading into deepened reading in Walter Benjamin and thence to messianism and millenarianism, and his writing the books *Moi, la révolution* (1989), *Jeanne de Guerre* (1991), and *Walter Benjamin, sentinelle messianique* (1990) as ways to “tie the necessity of historical determinations to the contingency of the event” (p291) and to “deploy the

bundle of possibilities that each conjuncture contains" (p293).

Chapter 20, 'A thousand (and one) Marxisms', starts with Bensaïd's teaching of close readings of Marx at the university of Saint-Denis in the 1980s and moves into the writing of *Marx l'intempestif* (1995; translated as *Marx for our times* in 2002) and *La discordance des temps* (1995). The chapter then moves into a history of receptions of Marx - 'warm' and 'cold' Marxes, and so on. He celebrates the multiplicity of 'Marxisms' at the end of the 20th century as a sign of the continued relevance of Marx: "If he was fully of his own time, he is also of ours" (p302). Chapter 21, 'The inaudible thunder', continues this story, discussing *Capital* (the text) as "[i]nescapable, always uncompleted, constantly recommenced ... an unending project" (p303) and arguing that Marx was "before Nietzsche and Benjamin, a pioneer of the critique of historical reason" (p307). The conclusion is the ethical imperative to change the world - in spite of its difficulty, "more difficult, certainly, than Marx and our earlier selves believed" (p313). But this poses in a different form the point I made in relation to chapter 7: capitalism is not static, but changing. The problem is, then, not to 'change the world', but to make choices about preferable changes, since changes of one sort or another will occur anyhow.

The last two chapters, on the 1990s and early 2000s, have less of substance. Chapter 22 insists on the necessity of the "wager" of political action on the possibility of a better world. Chapter 23 sees the Zapatistas and the social forums movement as symbols of hope, and the debacle of the French presidential elections of 2002 (after five years of cohabitation between the PS and president Chirac, second-round choice between Chirac and Le Pen) as a symbol of the fact that:

In order for the other world that is necessary to become possible, another left is equally necessary. Not a left 'lite', like fat-free butter, alcohol-free wine or decaffeinated coffee, but a left of struggle, to match the right of struggle. We can no longer be satisfied with a left resigned to the subaltern role of opposition to the republican or liberal bourgeoisie. It is time to break this vicious circle of subordination (p328).

Means and ends

The JCR defined itself, against the 'official' JC, as 'Révolutionnaire' and the LCR emerging from the illegality of the LC used the same marker. This is a substantial difference from the old Parti Communiste Internationaliste which was swallowed in the LC fusion.

But what is a 'revolution' and what is 'revolutionary' politics? The answer, which is clear enough both from Bensaïd's reminiscences and from his reflections, is that he and his contemporaries conceptualised it as a matter of means - mass, or merely illegal, direct action - which would, through mobilisation, solve the problem of ends, by creating a dual power in the style of the division between provisional government and soviets in February-October 1917. This orientation is reflected equally in the initial attraction to 'armed struggle' and Guevarism, and in Bensaïd's illusory hopes in Spanish developments (the real revolutionary crisis in Portugal is passed over lightly) and those in Latin America.

The consequences of this choice are multiple. The most obvious is repeated disappointments: in Latin America, in the expected return of the direct class struggle in Europe, in the illusions in the Polish Solidarno??, and so on. The most spectacular is the utter disorientation round Gorbachevism and the fall of the 'Soviet bloc'. But this itself was arguably foreshadowed by the illusions of the USFI - which Bensaïd hardly discusses - in the Cuban and Vietnamese communist parties, and even in the Chinese regime (eg, Livio Maitan's 1976 Party, army and masses in China). There was no sense of the dynamic towards capitalism in the Stalinist regimes, and a lack of real thought about alternatives to Stalinist 'planning'. Hence, when the Soviet bloc fell, Bensaïd (and other Fourth

Daniel Bensaïd: Repeated disappointments

Internationalists) are left with nothing but the ethical “wager” on the necessity to “change the world”.

Equally, the identification of the far left as “revolutionary Marxists” - against the “non-revolutionary Marxists” of the PCF and so on - in terms of mass struggle, assumed that the institutions of working class mass, collective solidarity would retain their force and presence as the base - a rearguard, just as Santucho and those like him thought the USSR could serve as a rearguard (pp116-18). This assumption was, of course, also made by Luxemburg and Pannekoek in 1910-12 ... With capitalism’s reorientation from the late 1970s on and the decline both of the proletarian industrial ‘strongholds’ and of the mass parties and unions, the “revolutionary Marxists” increasingly become voices crying in the wilderness in a language few can understand.

The irony is (as Marc Mulholland has explored [10]) that the rejection of revolution has ceased to be central to contemporary capitalist ideology, which is now happy to see ‘colour revolutions’ and événements like those in Kiev earlier this year. It is not the left’s inappropriate means which are used by ideologues to uphold capitalist rule, but our supposedly utopian and disastrous ends.

The repeated disappointments which left Bensaïd offering only the ethical wager on the possibility of change and appeals to millenarians and messianism are just as much present, though with different outcomes, in the British left’s disappointments over the failure of a mass movement against ‘austerity’ to materialise and for the same reasons. The conception of revolutionary politics as about mass-action means, not about ends, leads inevitably to the hope that capitalism making things worse will on its own produce a mass-action fightback, which will in turn create a better political climate for the ‘revolutionary left’.

In reality, revolutionary politics is about ends, and only secondarily means: the goal of general human emancipation, a society focused on human development; more immediately, the necessary leading role of the working class as a class, those who live by their labour and lack other productive property, in the transition to such a society; and hence, in turn, the necessity for the overthrow of the state order, the constitution, which is designed and structured to make the state answerable to capital.

A revolutionary politics conceived in this way has things to say and do in conditions of revolutionary crisis - but it also has things to say in ‘normal times’, when people are merely angry and exasperated, but not ready to embark on major strike waves or go on the streets; or even when they are upbeat and hopeful about the future (as, in fact, many people were in 1968). We too may be disappointed that people are not ‘up for a fight’ about austerity, though it is understandable - but we need not be disoriented by defeats and the absence of ‘mass actions’.

Mike Macnair

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.co.uk

[1] The Guardian July 25. The ‘longest recession for 100 years’ tag was used by the Daily Mail (May 9 - then reporting that it was ‘about’ to be over).

[2] www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/regional-tre...] The house price bubble has been reinflated by the government printing money (‘quantitative easing’) and ultra-low interest rates, plus twisting the banks’ arms not to repossess defaulting mortgages. [Some useful discussion in the Resolution Foundation report Hangover cure: dealing with the household debt overhang as interest rates rise (July 23): www.resolutionfoundation.org/media/...]

[3] www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?id=994&am...

[4] William Wordsworth on the French Revolution of 1789: www.bartleby.com/145/ww285.html.

[5] French prime minister 1984-86 and currently foreign minister.

[6] 'Between Baden and Luxemburg' is the title of one of Kautsky's articles in 1910, a geographical pun placing his opponent, Rosa Luxemburg, on one side and the SPD in the Baden parliament, which had voted for the Land budget in coalition with the liberals.

[7] Ali drifted out of the USFI in the 1980s and satirised the Trotskyists very crudely in *Redemption* (London 1990). He was more unambiguously pro-Gorbachevite than the USFI leadership (who were fairly pro-Gorbachevite and, like him, cherished illusions in Yeltsin): see his *Revolution from above: the Soviet Union now London 1988*.

[8] [The transitional programme \(1938\): ...](#)

[9] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanfo...>

[10] *Bourgeois liberty and the politics of fear Oxford 2012*, reviewed in this paper two weeks ago ('Bourgeois or capitalist?', July 17).