

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly
worker



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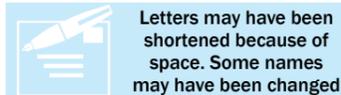
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**NOW LET'S
CRUSH THE
BLAIRITES**



LETTERS



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

Mood for 'unity'

An interesting exchange took place at the June 28 membership meeting of Eltham Constituency Labour Party in south London.

The MP for Eltham is Clive Efford, who, although he was the prime mover behind the refounding of the Tribune group of Labour MPs last year, is more of a centrist than a leftwinger. For example, he was one of the so-called "morons" who nominated Jeremy Corbyn for leader in 2015, even though he had said at the time, "I'm not going to vote for you, Jeremy", according to what he told the CLP.

However, like many other MPs to his right, in the general election he campaigned on the basis that he is an "independent-minded" MP fighting in a constituency where "only Labour can keep out the Tories" (in fact the Labour majority in Eltham had been 2,600 in 2015 and this increased to 6,300 on June 8).

At the meeting, following Efford's election report, the first speaker from the floor queried this "negative message". He pointed out that in fact Labour under Corbyn had done better in terms of total votes than any leader since Tony Blair back in 1997, yet, reading between the lines, Efford's message had been: "I know you don't like Corbyn, but just grit your teeth and vote for me if you want to keep out the Tories." The comrade asked Efford if he now regretted putting out that message.

Immediately the election agent sprang to the MP's defence, saying that the campaign had been a "team effort" and he himself "wouldn't change anything". But, to his credit, Efford actually dealt with the accusation made against him. Rather immodestly he described himself as "one of our strongest assets", so it was only right that his own credentials should be highlighted. In fact he had always been an "independent-minded" MP, voting against Blair over Iraq, for instance. Secondly, in the early stages of the campaign Labour had been "projected to lose Eltham" - which was why it was necessary to put over that "negative message" apparently.

Later Efford did claim that a consistent response on the doorstep

had been, "I usually vote Labour, but not this time", which made him now wonder about the identity of many of those who had voted for us - "we don't know who they are". However, he recognised that Corbyn's performance had been "outstanding" - he "surprised everyone" and ran a "fantastic campaign". He also praised John McDonnell and his team, who had done "a good job" on "costing" Labour's pledges, while at the same time he thought the performance of general secretary Iain McNicol was "the best ever" - for example, he "moved people around" to help out in places like Eltham.

Efford ridiculed the claim that *For the many, not the few* was a "leftwing manifesto" - it was "nothing of the sort". In fact in some ways it was "not as radical" as what Emmanuel Macron had put out in France. It contained "pretty standard socialist [sic] policies" that were common all over Europe, and these had "shifted Labour back onto traditional ground". Looking at the comrade who had challenged him, he said: "I know you're not going to like this", but, he said, the more the campaign went on, "the less it mattered" about Corbyn's past links with Hamas and the IRA. He said he had taken the initiative to issue a statement after the election, as chair of the 80-strong Tribune group, declaring that Jeremy had now definitely "won the right" to lead the party.

He strongly disagreed with Chuka Umunna's pro-single market amendment to the queen's speech the previous day - not particularly its content, but its effect: we must be a "disciplined party" - and a "disciplined parliamentary party" from now on, if we are to "take the traditional values of Labour into government".

However, he did think that the mood in the Parliamentary Labour Party had "completely changed" - most MPs now recognised that "all this stuff has got to stop". If only the Tribune group had been "as strong as it is now", we "could have stopped that coup" against Corbyn in 2016. Referring to the next general election, Efford said: "As long as Labour looks like it's going to win, I'm happy."

I think Efford's attitude sums up that of much of the PLP now - under Jeremy we can win the next election (and maybe we can curb Corbyn's remaining leftwing 'excesses' in

the process). And it also struck a chord with most members in a constituency where the left has been pretty marginalised - for the majority of those who spoke at the meeting Jeremy Corbyn should be the next prime minister. One comrade said that we had "ripped ourselves apart" thanks to an "unnecessary leadership challenge", while another said we must "not do anything to damage the momentum" - there should be "no more infighting".

Only one person expressed his disagreement with this consensus. He said we had "not started 20% behind" in the opinion polls "because of infighting", but because Jeremy was "not a good leader in parliament". Yes, he had "grown" during the campaign, but he must now "learn to be better in parliament". We have to face the fact that "hundreds of people" had told us during campaigning, "I'd vote for you but for Corbyn". But he too thought that the manifesto had been "mainstream" - "people on the right of the party [like himself] were happy with it".

The same person later gave the membership report, in which he stated that 49 people had joined Labour in Eltham since the last meeting, while, on the other hand, 17 had "resigned". However, when he was challenged on this, he admitted that the latter figure included people who had simply not renewed their membership. But he insisted that some *had* resigned, although "I don't want to get into the same argument as before".

No, for the moment, the majority of the right, together with centrists like Clive Efford, will be all for 'unity'.

Steve Williams
South London

Two revolutions?

On June 24, Left Unity members met in conference to consider the way ahead in the next period. Members are aware of the powerful forces pulling the party to the right. But conference revealed a struggle over whether the party should respond by moving to the right or shifting to the left. The general election sharpened up the issues. Should Left Unity carry on as before, or join the 'Corbyn revolution', or become the party of 'democratic revolution'?

A resolution from Birmingham says: "The 'Corbyn revolution' has for the foreseeable future closed the electoral space to the left of Labour." It has "unleashed expectations which can't be met within the confines of the existing structures of the Labour Party". This will spill onto the streets, in campaigns and communities. Like a whirlpool, this 'revolution' is pulling LU down the plug.

There is no doubt that the movement led by Jeremy Corbyn took off during the election campaign. At the start Corbyn was under siege from the Tory press, his own backbench MPs, the BBC and the Tory election machine. By June 8 Corbyn had led a very effective campaign against Theresa May's "strong and stable" leadership. Although the Tories got most seats, Labour had won the battle for hearts and minds.

If the Scottish National Party vote had held up in Scotland, Jeremy Corbyn would now be prime minister. Instead of a rightwing coalition of the Tories and Democratic Unionists, we would, or could, have had a more social democratic coalition of Labour and the SNP. It was the unionist offensive in Scotland, led by the Tories and supported by Scottish Labour, that pushed back the SNP and kept Corbyn from Downing Street.

The excitement and enthusiasm, which followed Corbyn all the way to Glastonbury, is a 'revolution' in hope. This is not to be disparaged. But we should not get carried away

by the sight of JC walking on water or feeding ten thousand with a few fishes. Political revolutions overturn constitutions and politicise the class struggle. But the 'Corbyn revolution' has not overthrown the British constitution or even the constitution of the Labour Party.

After World War II the Labour government established Britain's social monarchy. Over the last 30 years the Elizabethan welfare state has been steadily privatised and handed to the market. Since the 2008 financial crash, the policy of austerity has squeezed it to death. Today its most potent national symbols - the queen, the NHS and the BBC - have been undermined or hollowed out.

The destruction of the social monarchy began with the 'Thatcher revolution', followed by the 'Blair revolution', and supported by George Osborne's 'devolution revolution'. The 'Corbyn revolution' makes sense in the context of the struggle between neoliberalism and social democracy. Left social democracy opposes neoliberalism with reference to the 1945 Labour government, just as neoliberals accuse Corbyn of dragging us back to the 'dark' days of the 1970s before the Thatcher 'revolution'.

The Labour manifesto is about restoring the social monarchy by investing in the public sector and redistributing income. The means of carrying this out is by Labour winning a parliamentary majority and becoming Her Majesty's government and working within the laws and institutions, based on the sovereignty of the crown-in-parliament. Whilst the impossible and unbelievable has now become likely, it does not constitute a 'revolution'.

Something else is brewing. The tectonic plates of UK politics are shifting under our feet. We can even find smoke signals coming out of the Labour manifesto. This identifies the UK's "democratic deficit". It calls for federalism, an elected House of Lords and even a minister of the crown for England, to plug the constitutional vacuum here. But the main demand is for a constitutional convention to discuss a new constitution.

Had the general election been conducted by proportional representation (a little known Left Unity policy), Corbyn would now be moving his jam jars into 10 Downing Street. The LU conference went further and voted for a resolution saying, "we are committed to internationalism ... and democratic revolution". A resolution from Wigan and South London went further in support of democratic revolution both in Europe and the UK.

Democratic revolution is a process, not a theory, even if we need theory to understand it. It begins with society recognising a 'democratic deficit', out of which grows a 'crisis of democracy' and a democratic movement. We can see this process currently underway in Hong Kong. In the UK the 'democratic deficit' is a slow burner, long recognised and practically ignored, except in Ireland, Scotland and Wales with the new devolution settlements after 1997.

This settlement was disrupted by the 2008 banking crisis and recession. The 2014 Scottish referendum was the first breach in the wall. The insurgent Scots were repelled. In 2015 the SNP brought up more artillery, as 52 Scottish MPs began pounding Tory unionists in Westminster. In 2016 the 'democratic deficit' widened, when England and Wales voted to leave the European Union, as Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to remain. It put national self-determination at the heart of the European debate.

The 'Corbyn revolution' is not a programme for democratic revolution

or indeed any revolution. If anything, it is the last attempt at restoring the post-war social contract through a bankrupt two-party political system. It is nevertheless massively significant as skirmishing in the foothills of the democratic revolution. It is part of a 'crisis of democracy', as young people try to find their way out of our constitutional prison by first trying to open all the doors.

Steve Freeman
Left Unity and Rise

Doomed

With reference to Peter Manson's report on the recent CPGB and Labour Party Marxists meeting ('Bringing out our differences', June 29), I admire and respect the almost supernatural efforts of the Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB in keeping the embers of a 'pure and correct and solid' version of communism glowing, whilst all around the working populations of the developed world are duped into believing that capitalism can simply be reprogrammed or recalibrated into becoming something nicer; something a bit more fair.

In other words, they are fooled by capitalism's own disgustingly hypocritical but also crafty, grand, all-pervasive to the point of supersaturative 'marketing and branding' exercise that its system for running affairs (despite its immutably exploitative/innately brutal imperialistic needs) can somehow be modified or reformed, thereby enabling it to become beneficial, desirable and indeed fully efficient both for mankind and our planet Earth as a whole.

Capitalism cannot be fundamentally changed in that manner - not to any great extent anyway, and certainly not on a permanent basis, as the residents of Grenfell Tower recently have discovered.

Any attempts whatsoever by Corbynist Labour, People's Alliance or equivalent others to sell such a 'message of hope' is both diversionary and dangerous, not to mention sadly doomed, but most importantly thereby outright treacherous to the historical needs of all decent and good, resilient but long-suffering, working citizens.

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

No mystery

Dave Vincent refers to me "not being able to quote anything by Marx, Lenin or Trotsky advocating open borders" (Letters, June 29).

A member of the Socialist Party of Great Britain not quoting Lenin or Trotsky is no mystery to any informed leftist and Dave's ignorance of the SPGB is patent when he assumes that I am a supporter of Corbyn, who I am more than happy to label as a British nationalist.

However, to answer his question on Marx's apparent silence, I shall throw Dave's own words back to him: "Phil Kent states that Marx didn't advocate open borders because at the time he wrote border controls didn't exist. So no-one can definitively assert what he would have said then" (Letters, March 13 2014). Perhaps Dave might avail himself of the website's archive and refresh his memory with my reply (Letters, April 4 2014), where I did quote Marx and the First International responses to immigration.

Dave accuses me of expecting countries in capitalism to open their borders. I apologise if I conflated open borders with another of the SPGB's immediate demands - the abolition of capitalism. What I am promoting is a workers' free movement to achieve the best market value for his or her labour as unhindered as possible under capitalism and without regard to his or her birthplace. Which ultimately

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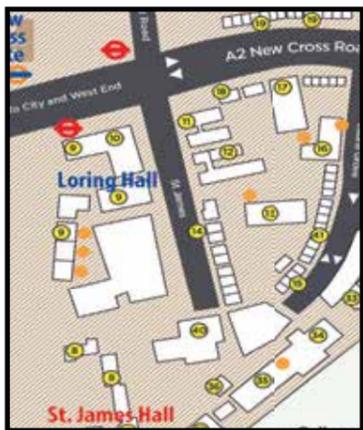
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ACTION

means workers' unity.

As for organising newcomers to join the unions, I don't think anyone underestimates the challenge, particularly since the unions are struggling to even recruit native-born workers (who would imagine that last year's strike figures were dominated by the junior doctors?).

But, let us be clear, the trend of stagnant wages and worsening working conditions cannot be blamed on migrant workers. We are confronted by more powerful forces out of capitalism's requirement to expand and accumulate, using automation and the gig economy, which hurts all workers across all borders. I suggest our priority must be to revitalise the unions so as to resist the encroachments of capital, not to oppose the arrival of foreign workers.

I will argue that excluding large numbers of fellow (migrant) workers from any benefit of intensified militancy is not going to be a successful strategy, especially if Dave alienates them further by describing them as scabs. A shameful slur that he has not withdrawn, so I now ask, in turn: Dave, when did so-called socialists turn into bigots and xenophobes? If the right wing is growing it is from the 'legitimacy' given to them by the Labour Party's past immigration policies, Bob Crow's No to the EU/Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition campaigns and by yourself.

Alan Johnstone
SPGB

Stupid left

The capacity of the *Weekly Worker* to entertain and inform has not diminished. Last week's letters page provided both, as David Vincent showed us both that left nationalist bigots are just as stupid as their counterparts on the political right and made me laugh as well! His suggestion that a member of the SPGB might support an argument through reference to "Lenin" or "Trotsky" was particularly amusing.

Almost as funny was his belief that the SPGB would advocate reforms within capitalism - when, of course, our demand for freedom of movement as an immediate one is based on our advocacy of socialism as an immediate objective. What is very clear is just how conservative the capitalist left actually is.

Darren Williams
SPGB

Left failure

Ben Stimson's hearing on 'terrorism' charges in Manchester Crown Court was brought forward from July 10 to June 30. The charges relate to the fact that he went to Ukraine to support the Donbass militia, where he was filmed by the BBC in 2015. Seven supporters of the local Revolutionary Communist Group, of which Ben had been briefly a member, attended. I travelled up from London for what turned out to be a half-hour hearing.

Ben spoke via video link. His barrister entered a plea bargain on his behalf: guilty on charge 2 - assisting terrorist acts (driving an ambulance) - in exchange for the dropping of charge 1 - engaging in terrorist acts. Sentencing was postponed until July 14, when a psychiatric report will be considered in determining the length of sentence.

The problem with this is it designates the defenders of the Donbass as terrorists and their fascist-infested militia opponents, the Azov battalion, for instance (now part of the Ukraine national army), as legitimate government soldiers, who are attacked by Russian-backed terrorists. Yet there are no organisations in Ukraine which are designated 'terrorist' by the home office.

The character of this conflict was determined by four things:

1. The fascist-led Maidan coup itself, backed by the CIA and the EU.

2. The motion in the Ukrainian parliament to ban the Russian language (the Donbass is overwhelmingly Russian-speaking). Although it was vetoed by the president, the intention had been clearly signalled.

3. The shocking Trade Union House massacre in Odessa by a fascist mob on May 2 2014, where at least 46 were burned or clubbed to death - if they survived jumping from the windows of the burning building. The whole fascist crew cheered at the death screams of a pregnant cleaner when her murderer appeared at the window to celebrate.

More than any other act this determined the character of the war and drove the Russian-speaking population to rise up and seize control of the state forces in that region to defend themselves against that terrible fate.

4. The banning of the Communist Party, the promotion of wartime Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera as a national hero, the promotion of Nazi-type flags and symbols and the banning of celebration of the defeat of the Nazis by the Red Army in the region in May 1945.

The consequences of having to plead guilty to assisting terrorism for defending Donetsk and Lugansk against fascist onslaught are serious; it might mean that those who went to Rojova to fight Islamic State may also be charged when they return. During the Spanish civil war anti-fascists who went to Spain in the tradition of the International Brigades were arrested on returning home, but the case against them was dropped.

Ben was put in this appalling position by the failure of the left in Britain to oppose the Maidan coup and the fascist-led assaults on the Russian-speaking population in the Donbass. And also by the unexplained withdrawal of the majority of the leadership of Solidarity with Anti-fascist Resistance in Ukraine from any political struggle against the Kiev regime and fascism in general in the region.

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

Slow down

Eddie Ford cites the CPGB *Draft programme's* demand that "all housing estates and blocks of flats "should be democratically run by tenants in conjunction with the local authorities and relevant trade unions" ('Seize, occupy, requisition', June 29).

Presumably these local authorities and relevant trade unions would comprise the likes of you and lead in reality to exactly the same situation we've got now. To a separate authority running the show in conjunction with other local authorities. A separated power structure that divides society in order to rule over us.

What we want in fact is full control of our housing estates and we don't want to share this with anybody in authority or "relevant trade unions", whatever that means. We've tasted outside control by local authorities for the last hundred years. It leads to the abolition of democracy. We don't want 'experts' or super-embellished party leaders serving a distant, centralised government, composed of grey suits. We don't want rule by a separated apartheid 'elite'.

We will take charge of our housing estates and, in conjunction with other housing estates, we will take full control of our affairs. We are not liberals; we don't share power. The people are better running their own affairs. We don't want to breed a technocratic, managerial 'elite'. We want a unified people and a unified society. We want self-rule. Heavy industrial societies lead to centralised parliaments and dictatorships, which is what we've got in the world today. It needs social division to thrive. We want peace and a slower pace of life. This means we need to rethink the course of history over the last 250 years.

Elijah Traven
Hull

Summer Offensive

Excellent start

The CPGB's intensive fund-raising drive, the Summer Offensive, began on July 1. The idea is to raise £30,000 by August 20 in order to aid all aspects of CPGB work, including next month's Communist University and Hands Off the People of Iran, and, of course, playing our part in increasing the quality and influence of the *Weekly Worker*.

Talking of which, during the SO period all money raised for the *Weekly Worker* will be included in the overall total - although it goes without saying that, if you make a donation specifically to the paper, that is where it will go. But, in the meantime, Robbie Rix, together with the fighting fund column, will be taking a well-deserved break.

Although the SO began rather later than usual this year, it has got off to an excellent start, with no less than £5,821 already received after just five days. That compares very favourably with the £3,484 raised in the first week of the 2016 SO - when we went on to smash right through the £30k barrier.

Mind you, the coincidence of the start of our campaign with the mass anti-Tory demonstration in London on July 1 was a happy one. CPGB members and supporters ran stalls, sold badges, books and papers - at the end of the day £1,110 had been raised for the SO. That total was boosted enormously by the heroic work of comrades MF and TB.

Meanwhile, YM has agreed to

sponsor the appearance of August Nimitz at Communist University, which begins on August 12 (see ad on p2). She has forked out £842 to pay for his flight. Another comrade who deserves a mention is MM, who has already donated a fantastic £600.

I can also report the contribution of comrade TB, who was accidentally double-charged for his subscription to this paper. However, when the error was discovered, he insisted on donating the £60 excess to the Summer Offensive! That's the spirit, comrade.

Finally there are all those who make regular donations throughout the year. During the SO period their contributions will also count towards the overall total.

In the next couple of weeks our SO team will be busy contacting dozens of supporters and sympathisers, asking if they would like to play their part in raising the cash we need for our communist work. So expect a phone call! But please don't feel you have to wait. Send in your cheque, made payable to CPGB, to BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX, or make a donation via PayPal on the CPGB website ●

Peter Manson

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

London Communist Forum

Sunday July 9, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Followed by open discussion and reading group: study of August Nimitz's *Lenin's electoral strategy from Marx and Engels through the revolution of 1905*. This meeting: chapter 1, 'What Marx and Engels bequeathed' (continued).

Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk; and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

For the many

Thursday July 6, 7pm: Political celebration and gig, Kentish Town Forum, 9-17 Highgate Road, Kentish Town, London NW5. Celebrating Labour's election campaign. Speakers include John McDonnell, Dave Ward (CWU), Paul Mason and Tariq Ali, plus a line-up of comedians and poets.

Sponsored by Communication Workers Union and others: www.cwu.org.

The Big Meeting

Saturday July 8, 7am till late: Durham Miners' Gala. Main assembly point: Market Place, Durham DH1. Also Durham Marriott Hotel Royal County, Old Elvet, Durham DH1.

Organised by Durham Miners Association: www.durhamminers.org/gala.

Maintain the Momentum

Monday July 10, 7pm: Inaugural meeting, Newtown Community Resource Centre, 123 Durham Road, Stockton-on-Tees TS18.

Organised by Momentum Stockton: www.facebook.com/momentumstockton.

Trump vs China: new cold war?

Monday July 10, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Brent Trades Hall (London Apollo Club), 375 High Road, Willesden, London NW10. Speaker: Jude Woodward, writer and journalist.

Organised by Brent Stop the War: <https://en-gb.facebook.com/BrentStoptheWar>.

In conversation with Medea Benjamin

Wednesday July 12, 6.30pm: Public meeting, Sands Films, 82 St Marychurch Street, London SE16. 'Trump, the special relationship and the "war on terror"'

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Afghanistan: the forgotten war

Wednesday July 12, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, Friargate, York YO1. Speaker: Maya Evans (Voices for Creative Non-Violence).

Organised by York Against the War: www.facebook.com/YorkAgainstTheWar.

200 years of protest

Thursday July 13, 6.30pm: History and politics educational, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. Survey of large-scale protest in Britain since the early 19th century. £11. Bar available throughout.

Organised by Bishopsgate Institute: www.bishopsgate.org.uk/event/877/We-Are-Angry-200-Years-of-Protest-in-Britain.

Tolpuddle 2017

Friday July 14, 12 noon to Sunday July 16, 6pm: Festival, Dorchester Road, Tolpuddle, Dorset DT2.

Organised by Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival: www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk.

Labour after the general election

Saturday July 15, 12 noon: *Labour Briefing* readers meeting, Daryl Ford seminar room, University College London, 14 Taviton Street, London WC1. Speaker: Graham Bash.

Organised by *Labour Briefing*: <https://labourbriefing1.wordpress.com>.

Prepare for Tory protest

Tuesday July 18, 7pm: Organising meeting for demonstration at Conservative Party conference, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2.

Organised by People's Assembly: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

It starts here!

Saturday July 22 to Sunday July 23, 10am to 5.30pm: Weekend-long human rights/anti-arms event, Amnesty International Human Rights Action Centre, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London EC2.

Organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade: www.facebook.com/campaignagainstarmstrade.

Democracy unchained

Saturday July 22, 1pm: Public meeting and discussion, Red Shed, Vicarage Street, Wakefield WF1. Speakers include Corinna Lotz, Paul Feldman and Steve Freeman. Admission free.

Organised by Wakefield Socialist History Group: www.theredshed.org.uk/SocialHist.html.

Das Kapital and Marx's economics

Thursday August 31, 7pm: Educational, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. With professor Ben Fine.

Hosted by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.

No to the arms trade

Saturday September 9, 10am: Art exhibition, ExCeL Exhibition Centre, London Docklands, Royal Victoria Dock, 1 Western Gateway, London E16.

Organised by Art The Arms Fair: <https://artthearmsfair.org>.

CPGB wills

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

LABOUR**Chuka Umunna: irreconcilable Blairite**

Now let's crush the Blairites

There is a greater opportunity than ever to break the grip of the right, argues Paul Demarty

Since the Brexit vote, it has become increasingly difficult to define what 'business as usual' looks like in the British context.

Whatever it is, the present post-election situation is certainly not it, with its prominent roles for the bigoted fundamentalists of the Democratic Unionist Party, whose only fear greater than a united Ireland is an Ireland divided by a 'hard' border, and the reduction of the Tory government to a parody of its august role in the nation's politics. Not the least of these incongruities is Jeremy Corbyn, whose great-escape act last month had the effect of silencing his critics (barring some petulant, *pro forma* sneering in the humiliated *Daily Mail*) and propelling his supporters into new ecstasies of adulation (on this point, see Peter Manson's report of the July 1 demonstration elsewhere in this issue).

Within Labour Party politics, it seemed that only Chris Leslie was able, in the immediate aftermath of the election, to express disappointment at Labour's defeat - a defeat it certainly was in the narrow technical sense that Corbyn is not currently prime minister, but Leslie's sullen intervention demonstrates only that his Blairism has left him utterly disconnected from the reality around him.

Since then, there have been some signs of revival from such quarters, if only in the matter of chutzpah. The attempt of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy to increase the number of CLP representatives on the national executive committee and reduce or even eliminate the threshold of nominations needed for a Labour MP to stand for leader have been characterised by some of the press, in suitable silly-season fashion, as a bid to make Jeremy into a "supreme leader". Even George Osborne was able to take a few minutes out from lusting after Theresa May's blood to run with this weak-tea scaremongering.

In the opposition benches, there was also the rather bizarre spectacle of Chuka Umunna's decision to move a wrecking amendment to the queen's speech that would have committed the government to maintaining Britain's membership of the single market. Unsurprisingly it was defeated, though

not before attracting the votes of 49 other members of the PLP.

It is odd to think back to the autumn of 2015, when 66 Labour MPs defied the whip to support David Cameron's token bombing campaign in Syria - including Umunna and the late St Jo of Cox - and were greeted with the most nauseating display of media fawning. Hillary Benn, shadow foreign secretary, was compared to Churchill and Bevan, so extraordinary were his powers of rhetoric. Not a finger was laid on him. How different things are this time around! Slightly fewer MPs defied the whip; the response in the media at large was basically one of bafflement (on top of which, even those papers committed to a 'remainder' outlook are shamed into silence); and three shadow cabinet ministers who backed the amendment were promptly sacked. So much for Blairism's crack suicide squad.

In the swamp

That these follies have come to nought in the current situation is no kind of a surprise. Opinion polls currently put Jeremy Corbyn's approval ratings marginally above Theresa May's, his surprisingly high and hers surprisingly low, given their respective standing a mere six weeks ago. This reversal is his achievement and her failure - not wholly, but the individual contributions are real, and moreover amplified in a society ingrained with ideological individualism.

The immediate consequence was a great and theatrical display of 'party unity' in Labour's ranks. Corbyn had not won the election, but those who declared that victory was unimaginable under his leadership had been all but proven wrong. There were thus negative and positive reasons for this love-in. The negative reason is plain: the remaining moral authority of the Blairite 'resistance' within the party was severely damaged, and the fear of the rightwing press, who now appeared to be mere paper tigers, was greatly mitigated.

The positive reason is a little more subtle. The Parliamentary Labour Party, and other parts of its machinery, are not composed entirely of a small group of

leftwingers, on the one hand, and a vast mass of irreconcilably hostile rightists, on the other. Between them there is a vast swamp - the soggy centre. Let us examine the creatures who dwell in that swamp. Some are middle class careerists - what did they want to be when they grew up? Successful, sure - but they did not just want to be hedge fund managers or lawyers or whatever. They wanted to 'make a difference'. Others (a shrinking number, in all honesty) graduated from trade union officialdom, where they would not shrink, no doubt, from making compromises if it suited 'their members', and developed a distaste for the highfalutin, studenty idealism of the left, but would hardly have taken Blair's naked contempt for the union movement well.

We could go on, through the student unions and the councillors and so on, but the point is that the motivations of vacillating elements are by definition complex. For this sort of 'mainstream' Labour representative or functionary, the point is to 'get into power', because only from there can you 'make a difference', and the constraints imposed by the compromises necessary on the road to power are *objective constraints*, a necessary part of the whole business.

This focus on government at all costs is held in common with the left and right. But the latter two forces have relatively coherent *solutions* to the dilemma of government - the left takes the view that we must get 'back to basics' and reconnect with Labour's natural core support by taking clearer leftwing positions; whereas for the right junking ever more of such principles is a principle in itself, and only parties overtly committed to the market and imperialism shall obtain or even deserve the support of the electorate ('modernisation' was the Blairite euphemism for such a position).

Both wings focus strategically on bringing the centre on board and, since the 1983 election, the right has had all the success in this regard. By poetic happenstance, that period coincides completely with Corbyn's parliamentary tenure; his election as leader did not really change this, but instead created an alternative

power base in the form of a new mass membership, with Labour's ranks trebling in number since its late-aughts nadir (you could say, after Brecht, that Blair dissolved the party and Corbyn elected another). In the last few weeks, however, the rightwing argument has been denuded of much of its force. Parts of the soggy centre are beginning to believe - and other parts are at least better reconciled to the idea - that Corbyn is as good a leader as any other.

War of manoeuvre

The absence of war is not peace, and the absence of gunfire is not the absence of war.

In the wake of the Brexit vote, the right wing of the Labour establishment was emboldened to pursue a coup, and was able to carry its less true-believing comrades of the centre with it. This time around, there is barely any appetite for such an escapade, except among those whose humiliation is so complete that they are prepared to hunker down in deep resistance. Why attack the enemy when he is strong?

Instead, we are out of the immediate heat of battle, and into a different situation - that of strategic manoeuvres. Those around Corbyn - even those collapsing to the right, like Paul Mason - feel emboldened to take on their enemies. The sacking of the shadow cabinet rebels is a clear and welcome sign of a new hardness towards those guilty of overt sabotage.

Wiser heads on the right are preparing for their long march to Shaanxi, withdrawing from overt criticism of the leadership and instead pursuing their political commitment to imperialism through other means. The idea is persistently floated of the pursuit of a cross-party, non-partisan effort to 'deal with' Brexit (by which, one assumes, many mean 'get rid of'). The national interest must be put ahead of party interests - doing the reverse, in such a view, is the great sin of Theresa May, as she weakly wobbles from one crisis to the next.

There is also the small matter of internal Labour politics. Party conference is scheduled for September, and all sorts of juicy items might

be taken onto the agenda. We have mentioned the CLPD's efforts, of which there will surely be others; meanwhile, Labour First - Luke Akehurst's shadowy outfit - is pursuing a quest to add two more seats for councillors to the national executive committee, who would very likely be from the right. LF's rhetoric is the very picture of Christian humility at the moment, but, of course, the real game is to grab as many delegates as possible, to hold the fort for just a little longer in the party bureaucracy.

The danger in this situation for the left, however, is not that the plotting of the right shall not be recognised as such, but that the support of the centre is taken for granted, or in anyway overstated. In reality, it is entirely conditional on Corbyn's continued strong standing in wider society, which seems all but impregnable today, but may not be a month or two from now, never mind a year. We should not expect Corbyn and his immediate circle, who have been engaged in trying to build an alliance with the centre for decades, to recognise this danger, at exactly the moment that it appears to be working - it is up to the rest of us to fight for *what is needed*, not what vacillating careerists can stomach.

That means, yes, stronger representation of *members* leadership. But much more needs to be done. The Welsh and Scottish NEC members ought to be elected by the members in Wales and Scotland, the shadowy compliance unit must be swept away, the sovereignty of conference must be restored, new trade union affiliates won and, of course, the PLP has to be made into the *servants* of the rest of us. This can only be done through some form of mandatory reselection, and, while we note with some satisfaction that a version of the same is also rumoured to be on the conference menu, we must be under no illusions - without serious pressure and careful organisation from the left, this will be the *very first thing given up* when the time comes to stitch up a deal. There is a greater opportunity than ever to break the grip of the right for good. Let us not squander the advantage ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

A new generation

After Saturday's inspiring demonstration, Peter Manson asks what the next steps should be



Youth: flooding into Labour Party

The July 1 demonstration, organised by the People's Assembly on the basis of "Tories out - not one day more", was a huge success in terms of the numbers mobilised (although, of course, it did not quite manage to drive the "Tories out").

It was certainly the biggest gathering I have seen in Parliament Square - far bigger than the equivalent mobilisation back in June 2015, when the PA claimed a grossly exaggerated "quarter million" had attended. This time, however, the more 'modest' 100,000 declared by the organisers might well have been accurate - the square was absolutely crammed and many more stood on the surrounding roads and footpaths.

The difference this time can be summed up in a single word - Corbynism. After the brilliantly successful general election campaign, it was clear that tens of thousands would come along just to see and hear Jeremy Corbyn, who has definitely become a phenomenon. Usually at such events people begin to drift away even before the first couple of speeches, but on Saturday almost everyone stayed put right until the end - the Labour leader was the very last speaker, mounting the platform around two hours after the rally began.

But in the intervening time there were continuous chants of "Oh, Jeremy Corbyn" every time a speaker made reference to the Labour Party, let alone its leader. It was the youth who were the most enthusiastic and, when Corbyn actually appeared, some of what he said was drowned out by the same ecstatic chants.

As most readers will know, he himself does nothing at all to encourage

this hero-worship, never referring to 'I' or 'me', but to 'we' and 'us'. And, in truth, his speeches nowadays are usually very short on substance - on detailed policies, for example. This time he said: "The Tories are in retreat, austerity is in retreat, the economic arguments of austerity are in retreat." By contrast, it is the ideas "of social justice, of unity, of people coming together to oppose racism and all those that would divide us that are the ones that are moving forward". For "This is the age of imagination, this is the age in which we will achieve that decency and social justice that we all crave."

So, yes, we are against austerity, but the alternative is, by and large, summed up by the totally vague "decency and social justice". True, Corbyn, constantly demands greater funding for the national health service, for education, for housing, but the *precise* policies - let alone any vision of an alternative *form of society* - are absent. Nevertheless, the mere posing of the *possibility* of something different, something totally opposed to the politics of austerity, is right now a message that has inspired a whole new generation.

So on July 1 it was very difficult to move very far in Parliament Square, such was the crush. Many of those present wore T shirts or badges with pro-Corbyn or pro-Labour slogans, and a large section of them were more than prepared to engage with those of us pushing a political message. A comrade from Labour Party Marxists told me that people were more than prepared to engage with him, when asked, "Are you a Labour Party member?" Half were and half were not. However,

those who were not were more than open to the idea of joining in order to defend Corbyn and defeat the right. The party is, after all, still dominated by the 'old politics' when it comes to MPs, councillors and those who run it - from general secretary Iain McNicol down to many regional and local organisations. Not that the 'new' politics, as currently espoused by Corbyn, is sufficient, of course - that is what is meant by the need to "transform" Labour: into a genuinely pro-worker formation, open to all working class groups and individuals, but where there is no place for the pro-capitalists and warmongers.

This is the message we need to hammer home to the young Corbynistas - the need to focus their anger, their resentment, their sense of injustice into the Labour Party - with organisation we are everything, without organisation we are nothing.

But what is proposed by the movementist left? For example, this is what the PA organisers, led by the Counterfire comrades around John Rees and Lindsey German, say: "This Saturday we served Theresa May notice ... it's time for her to step aside. Her coalition of chaos must end now."

The July 3 circular celebrated the 100,000-strong demonstration and thanked all who helped in its organisation, all those who spoke and performed in Parliament Square. But, when it came to "What is next?", the answer was:

We now have to shift our attention on to the Conservative Party conference Saturday September 30 - Wednesday October 4 in Manchester. We're planning on a week of politics, culture

and protest like nothing we've ever done before, including a massive national demonstration on Sunday October 1, the day the Tory Party conference starts.

So we have to wait for three months and then just do the same thing again? So the Counterfire comrades merely serve as event organisers for the trade union and labour movement. The same is true of the Socialist Workers Party too. Its internal *Party Notes* stated: "As some of the speakers said at the end - it was good to see so many people out marching, but the next one needs to be even bigger if we are to drive out the Tories" (July 3).

How big does it need to be then? Does the SWP seriously think that even a massive demonstration of a million or more - or, in the words of *Socialist Worker*, "serious mass mobilisation" - could in and of itself "drive out the Tories"?¹

The same online article continues: "The mood for change needs to fuel action in the streets and the workplaces, not just inside the Labour Party or in elections." Well, at least the comrades seem to be recognising that the political struggle inside Labour has *some* role to play. But, as they say, the main thing is "action in the streets and the workplaces":

If Jeremy Corbyn and the union leaders call now for a mass turnout at a demonstration outside the Tory conference in Manchester in October, it will be massive. And everyone needs to press union leaders for strikes to smash the pay cap, win pay rises in the private sector, stop the cuts and hit back at the bosses everywhere.

You get the idea? A combination of huge demonstrations and trade union action is the answer, not winning the battle in the Labour Party. This matters. Demonstrations are a great way of showing ourselves and others how strong we are. But when they are over everyone goes home. Their power is by definition transitory. Parties are another matter. They have history, they have social roots, they have organised structures, they have permanence. They alone can transform society.

As for the *Morning Star*, at least it put class politics centre-stage in its post-demonstration editorial, saying of the tens of thousands gathered in Parliament Square: "What united them all, whether consciously or not, was their opposition to the realities of a class-divided society based on exploitation and oppression - and their support for the progressive and left alternative represented by the current leftwing leadership of the Labour Party" (July 3).

Yes, it is true that those tens of thousands were opposed to "the realities" of a "society based on exploitation" and have placed their hopes in "the current leftwing leadership of the Labour Party" - or, more precisely, in Corbyn as an individual. However, it is also true that, consciously or not, they are well to the left of *For the many, not the few*. In other words, for socialists hope has returned ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. <https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/44903/Huge+demonstration+in+London+says+the+Tories+must+go+now>

ECOLOGY

Fossil fuel era continues

Predictions of an imminent decline of oil are misplaced, argues **Jack Conrad**. Along with global temperatures, consumption is set to rise

The question of peak oil appears to be eminently simple. The world is finite; the world's natural resources - in this case oil - are equally finite. Therefore, so runs the argument, if we humans persist in extracting and burning the stuff on any sort of scale, sooner or later absolute limits must be reached. Before that, however, production will arrive at a maximum, or a peak. Thereafter, the supply of oil will steadily diminish, till the cost of extracting an extra barrel exceeds what it can be sold for - in terms of physics, a negative 'energy return on energy inputs' (EROEI).

Over the years, peak oil pundits have announced that oil production would begin to decline in 1975, 1985 ... 2005, etc.¹ Regardless of those repeated failures, when the tipping point finally arrives, all manner of dire socio-economic consequences are confidently predicted: eg, massive hikes in consumer prices, an end to economic growth, oil wars, etc. Indeed because oil is today the primary energy source and plays a vital role in air and road transport, the manufacture of plastics, chemicals, etc, there are those who warn of some kind of civilisational collapse.²

Not surprisingly, peak oil pundits have been challenged on both theoretical and empirical grounds. Some critics dismiss peak oil as economically illiterate³. Others see a convenient excuse to assert direct US control over Middle Eastern oil. Then there are those who believe that peak oil is a gigantic financial scam. Rising spot prices certainly yield huge profits for Wall Street and City of London speculators.⁴

As an idea, peak oil has already had an undoubted political impact. On the side of the angels, green parties, environmental organisations and eco-capitalists have used the widespread fear of a pending oil crisis to gain acceptance for energy efficiency measures, alternative sources of power generation and novel technologies. But there are the devils. Oil rentier states, the nuclear industry, neocon warmongers and rightwing populists have taken full advantage of peak oil too.

Take Donald Trump. In the name of ensuring America's energy security, the 45th president signed executive orders giving the go-ahead for the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline, shredded federal restrictions on mining and drilling in national parklands, and reversed the ban on offshore drilling in the Atlantic and Arctic imposed by Barack Obama shortly before he left office. To further boost US oil production, Trump instructed his officials to assess the potential for energy exploration in recently declared or expanded marine sanctuaries in the Atlantic and Pacific. As with the US withdrawal from the *non-binding* Paris climate accord, an arrogant display of contempt for the future of the planet.

Yet due to flat-lining incomes, precarious employment and the system's relentless promotion of selfish individualism, such gestures resonate with a wide body of US electors. Through foreign wars, sweeping away environmental red tape and giving free reign to market forces, they imagine the cheap oil needed to heat their homes and fill their petrol tanks will be guaranteed ... well, at least for the moment.

Meanwhile, naive radicals treat peak oil pundits as modern-day prophets. Via blogs, websites, YouTube channels, etc, 'peakism' became something of a 'sub-culture' in the early part of the 21st century⁵. People seriously began to ready themselves for life after oil. A popular slogan to be found on the huge



Peak oil predictions: as old as the industry

anti-war demonstrations of February 2003 was 'No blood for oil'. As if the 1991 George HW Bush and the 2003 George W Bush wars were driven primarily by soon-to-be-scarce oil.

Exactly the trite explanation offered by various sections of the organised left. In 2006, with oil prices riding towards record highs, the Socialist Party in England and Wales happily presented peak oil theory as verity. Therefore, it supposedly followed that the "key reason for the two wars with Iraq was the USA's need for oil"⁶. In fact, the US imports relatively little Middle Eastern oil. However, it does have an interest in exercising military control over the region and, therefore, giving itself "strategic leverage" over potential imperial rivals: ie, China, Japan and Europe.⁷ Their oil can be choked off.

Not to be outdone, the Socialist Party of Great Britain approvingly quotes Mathew Simmons, a former energy advisor to George W Bush: "Securing adequate oil supplies was ... an important element in all the major wars of the 20th century and in the United States' two most recent interventions in the Middle East." The SPGB writer obviously agrees and adds that oil is probably "about to reach its maximum rate of production"⁸. Then we have the hapless Alan Thornett. Writing in the March 2012 edition of *Socialist Resistance* - "with the price of oil only likely to go up" - he even manages to explain the Falklands war, 30 years on, with reference to "peak oil"⁹.

Malthus

More sober minds point out that the "predictions of catastrophe" regularly trotted out by peak oil pundits are "steeped" in the doctrines of Thomas Robert Malthus and his theory of "land", "scarcity" and "overpopulation"¹⁰. Malthus (1766-1834) was, of course, a Church of England cleric, an economist and an influential apologist for the most heartless, brutal forms of capitalism. He argued, famously in his *Essay on the principles of population* (1798), that the suffering, the misery, the degradation of the poor was unavoidable ... given their irresponsible tendency to produce too many children.

Because land is finite it could only furnish so much food; meanwhile the poor produce too much in the way of mouths that have to be fed. True, Malthus accepted that agricultural productivity might improve over time. Subsistence, however, "increases at an arithmetical ratio" (ie, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 ...). Meanwhile, he insisted, population, if unchecked, "increases in a geometrical ratio" (ie, 1, 2, 4, 8, 16 ...)¹¹. Hence, the only solution, according to parson

Malthus, was late marriage, sexual abstinence or, failing that, allowing nature to take its grizzly course through disease and starvation. A blasphemy against both nature and humanity.

Blaming the social horrors of late-18th-century capitalism on the lowest, the most desperate stratum of the working class admirably suited the penny-pinching, oligarchical authorities. With a good conscience wealthy gentlemen could explain poverty not by admitting ruthless exploitation, but by the workings of god's divine laws. Leaving people to starve therefore amounted to a Christian duty (the British state did just that during the 1845-52 Irish famine). The same callous political economy saw Malthus urging the United Kingdom parliament to sweep away the niggardly poor laws inherited from Tudor times (a late feudal system of social security). According to Malthus, though the poor laws were "undoubtedly instituted for the most benevolent purpose", they were sheer folly¹². Interfering with the natural order of things only encouraged those living on the edge of destitution to further augment the surplus population.

Engels lambasted Malthusianism as "the crudest, most barbarous theory that ever existed, a system of despair", which absolved the state from any duty to come to the aid of the hungry¹³. But Engels did not reject Malthus and his misanthropic population theory on the basis of moral outrage alone. The underlying logic was transparently bogus. If there were too many people in 18th-century England, there must have been too many people when god first made Adam and Eve. After all, they were already possessed of the same innate tendency to reproduce in excess of the available means of subsistence.

Engels also maintained that science and technology grows geometrically. Physics, chemistry, mechanical engineering, oceanic shipping, rail transport, methods of storage, postal communications, agricultural technique, etc had all been revolutionised and revolutionised again. As a result, Australia, North America and South America were able to supply Europe with grain, sugar, fruit, meat, wool, cotton, fertilisers and other raw materials in abundance.

Therefore, the desperate condition of the poor should be attributed not to the laws of nature: rather to the laws of capitalist society. Overpopulation did not result from an excess of people in relationship to the means of subsistence. No, overpopulation came about because of the periodic overproduction of capital, and, as a consequence, capital's diminished requirement for labour-

power (hence the reserve army of labour).

Rainfall, sunshine and grass set an absolute limit on the number of wildebeests, zebras and gazelles roaming on the Serengeti (note, Charles Darwin's *Origin of the species* was inspired, in no small part, from his reading of Malthus). Engels, however, emphasised that human society is subject to a higher order of determination than the animal kingdom. Our population numbers result not just from nature. Historical laws, the mode of production, class struggles and technological progress, in fact, play the decisive role. The same surely applies to oil.

Endist

Peak oil is by no means a new theory. Marion King Hubbert (1903-89), an unjustly famous Shell geologist, presented a paper in 1956 which maintained that, for any given geographical area, from an individual oil field to the planet as a whole, the rate of oil production would, over time, resemble a bell curve. Overall US oil production, he figured, would peak some time between 1965, which he considered most likely, and 1970, which he considered the outlier. Global oil production was set to peak around 2000¹⁴.

The following year - ie, 1957 - admiral Hyman Rickover discussed the fossil fuel era in emphatically endist terms - he envisaged the "ultimate disappearance of automobiles, trucks, buses and tractors" because oil would inevitably run dry¹⁵. In the exact same Malthusian spirit, the Club of Rome think-tank published what was to become an instant bestseller. *The limits of growth* (1972) predicted not only the end of oil in 1992 - with no increase in reserves - but a whole range of other vital natural resources. Eg, mercury and silver (1985), tin (1987), zinc (1990), copper, lead and natural gas (1993), aluminium (2005-21)¹⁶.

In point of fact, there have been doom-laden auguries ever since oil was first established as an economically important industry. In 1874 US experts reported that the Pennsylvania oilfields were going to become exhausted within just four years. This, so went their analysis, would mark the end of the US oil industry.

Then, as now, it is when prices are considered abnormally high that peak oil punditry gains traction. Hence the widespread acceptance of peak oil during the early 1970s, late 70s, early 80s and early 90s. The same thing happened over 2002-08, when oil prices appeared to be rushing headlong towards \$150 a barrel.

High prices are equated in the popular mind with supply shortages. Yet, instead of wells running dry and mounting geological problems, a better, a more realistic explanation for the repeated ups and downs in oil prices lies in capitalism's economic cycle and the intertwined outbreak of wars and eruptions of acute class struggles: eg, the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the 1975 Portuguese revolution, stagflation and the rollback of the post-World War II social democratic settlement, Iran's revolution and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the 1980-88 Iraq-Iran war, the 1985-88 inflationary boom, the 1989-91 collapse of bureaucratic socialism, Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, the 1991 US-UK 'liberation' of Kuwait, etc. The 21st century began with the spectacular al Qa'eda terrorist attacks on New York and the Pentagon (2001), the US-UK invasion of Afghanistan (2001) and the US-UK invasion of Iraq (2003). There

followed, of course, the subprime and banking crisis (2007-08) and the Arab spring (2011-12).

The onset of peace, defeat for popular insurgencies and economic downturns have a chilling effect on overheated oil prices. Naturally, export-dependent oil producers attempt to buck what is a highly competitive market. Eg, towards the end of 2016, Opec agreed to output cuts. Then, in May 2017, Russia and Saudi Arabia came together in a strange alliance. Production levels would be held back for a further nine months. To little or no effect. There is today, according to the *Financial Times*, a "persistent glut in global supplies" ... and this seems to be no "short-term aberration"¹⁷.

The case of *peak coal* is worth mentioning here. In 1865 the British economist and mathematician, William Stanley Jevons, published his book *The coal question*. The subtitle is revealing: *An inquiry concerning the progress of the nation, and the probable exhaustion of our coal mines*. Jevons argued that British industry relied on cheap coal and that this constituted an Achilles' heel. "Are we wise," he rhetorically asked, "in allowing the commerce of this country to rise beyond the point at which we can long maintain it?"¹⁸ Given that demand grows exponentially, and that coal is a finite, non-renewable energy source, Jevons warned that having to mine deeper seams and having to incur greater costs heralded approaching limits. His central thesis was that Britain's global hegemony was in danger and that economic stagnation was unavoidable. Interestingly this doom-mongering won him national fame and many academic prizes. In fact, Jevons anticipated peak coal using the same tropes we encounter when it comes to peak oil: ubiquitous applications, local exhaustions, the necessity of going to ever greater geological depths, growing rates of usage, estimates of proven reserves, EROEI, etc.

Jevons rejected Malthusian theory when it came to agriculture: he saw no limits to the productivity of land. However, that could not apply to coal mines. Logically, at some point, output had to go into decline. All Jevons had to do was start with estimates of British coal reserves - no more than 90 billion tons. Jevons then subtracted expected rates of consumption and he had his shocking answer. Coal, he reckoned, would be exhausted in 50 or 60 years. There was no escape. He discounted possible substitutes.

Obviously, Jevons was spectacularly wrong. However, there is one aspect of his argument that made a lasting contribution to scientific thinking - the Jevons paradox. Against common sense, he insisted that, far from increased energy efficiency leading to reduced usage, the opposite would happen. Greater energy efficiency generates increased demand¹⁹.

Of course, just before the outbreak of World War I, the Royal Navy, under Winston Churchill, first lord of the admiralty, had begun the transition to oil (compared with coal, less bulky, easier to store, quicker for refuelling purposes; it also provided for greater speeds and ranges because of a far superior weight-to-energy ratio ... and, with Persia reduced to an Anglo-Russian semi-colony, oil was wonderfully cheap²⁰).

British coal did, in fact, peak in 1912. Production amounted to around 200 million tons (about half the world's total output). However, since then,

in global terms, both production and reserves have considerably increased. Nowadays, global coal production stands at 7,708 million tons annually²¹. Reserves are given as 948 billion tons (recoverable²²).

Extrapolation

As Ismael Hossein-Zadeh says, perhaps the biggest problem with peak oil theory is the “extrapolation or transition from micro to macro level²³”. What is true for an existing oil well or oilfield is extended to global oil production. Every operating, or producing, oil well or oilfield will reach a maximum or peak flow rate, after which output declines to the point - temporary or permanent - of shutdown. Eg, “UK taxpayers” are due to face “a probable £24 billion bill” for decommissioning gas and oil fields in the North Sea²⁴.

There are limits to all things in nature - in about five billion years the sun is expected to cease being a main-sequence star and balloon into a red giant; life on planet Earth might be sustainable for another billion years; an individual can only consume so much food and drink; there are only 24 hours in a day; etc. So, when peak oil pundits say there are limits to global oil production, they are not saying anything profound. It is a truism, which cannot explain past, current or future rates of output or patterns of consumption²⁵. It certainly does not follow that because there are limits we are just about to arrive at peak oil production.

Peak oil pundits refuse to confront an inconvenient truth: the discovery of new oilfields, technological innovation and the introduction of other sources of energy, including renewables, offset existing rates of depletion. No wonder predictions of doom are repeatedly confounded. Even when it comes to conventional oil, proven reserves outgrow those fields and wells that have peaked or become exhausted. Hence, in 2016, according to BP, the world’s total proven oil reserves were marked up by 15 billion barrels (0.9%) to 1707 billion barrels - “sufficient to meet 50.6 years of global production” at 2016 levels of consumption. The increase came largely from Iraq (+10 billion barrels) and Russia (+7 billion barrels).

Historically, there has been an institutional bias towards underestimation. Morris Adelman points out that in the 1920s Exxon and Mobil were “sure” that the flat plains of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia would contain “no oil at all”. Even in 1944 “a special expert mission estimated Persian Gulf reserves at 16 billion [barrels] proved and five billion probable²⁶”. Yet, by 1975, those same fields had “already produced 42 billion barrels and had 74 billion remaining proven reserves. Nowadays proven reserves in the Persian Gulf are put well above 800 billion barrels²⁷”.

There is also the phenomenon of post-peak bounce-back. The case of the United States is instructive. Having peaked in 1972 and then slowly declined, the curve is once again on the rise. Indeed over the last eight years US oil output has grown by more than 85%. By the end of 2015, output had reached 9.4 million barrels daily - the highest level since 1972. And, of course, there has been a significant shift to natural gas and shale oil. In 2015, the US produced 3.5 million barrels of natural gas liquids daily and, on top of that, 4.9 million barrels of shale oil. The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) projects that such sources will continue to make up the “majority” of the increase in US oil production “into 2040”.

Today’s depressed oil prices are, needless to say, hardly conducive to sustaining marginal operations or stimulating further exploration and innovation. Eg, out of America’s 61 offshore rigs operating in 2013, “only 22” are now active²⁸. Nevertheless, against industry expectations, though US shale companies were at first badly hit by the 2014 price collapse, they have become far more efficient and can now profitably compete even with prices below \$50.

It must be emphasised that, in general, the category of “proven reserves” is not an estimate of what oil deposits actually

lie beneath the ground²⁹. Proven reserves refer to oil that can be commercially obtained with *existing technology* and *existing price levels*. Hence proven reserves are a “short-term, static view of the future³⁰”. Oil companies will, of course, only invest if they can expect a financial return. They are not driven by the imperative to maximise output. Hence, estimates of *real* oil reserves will be considerably downplayed. By definition the vast sources of oil that are currently unprofitable are excluded. However, it should be added that reserves which may be considered unviable from the viewpoint of private capital might present a golden opportunity for a state with grand ambitions. Eg, while capital aims to realise a profit, a state will seek use-values (eg, with the aim of national self-sufficiency, military requirements, securing foreign currency, etc).

Here the experience of the Soviet Union is instructive. Bureaucratic socialism sought to maximise output and was, therefore, prepared to invest massive resources into long-term oil and gas projects. Siberia, the far east, the inhospitable Arctic were explored, settlements founded and super-deep drilling perfected. The Soviet Union thereby became an energy superpower. Not surprisingly, the 1973 oil crisis proved to be a boon. Oil exports allowed the Soviet Union to obtain western technology on a considerable scale and thereby put off the system’s inevitable demise. Having peaked in the 1980s, oil production plunged by a staggering 50% in the 1990s - not the result of natural limits though, but the “economic and political freefall” associated with capitalist restoration³¹. Oil production rebounded in the 21st century, reaching a post-Soviet high of 10.8 million barrels daily in January 2017. Russia today is, once again, an energy superpower and is credited with being the world’s number-one oil producer and number-two oil exporter.

As with Malthus, peak oil theory fails to grasp the revolutionary role of science and technology. Satellite imaging, 3D computer modelling and sniffer devices have transformed the ability of geologists to locate oil; horizontal and directional drilling, jack-up rigs, deep water production units and hydraulic fracking also allows for the exploitation of previously unprofitable sources. The net effect is to reduce costs. Simultaneously, smart technology, energy storage, radically improved industrial methods, stricter building regulations - combined with national and businesses interests in driving forward competitiveness - ought to limit demand.

According to Climate Progress, energy efficiency has long been the biggest and cheapest “new” source of energy by far. Energy efficiency technologies have also been called a “\$18 trillion windfall” by the International Energy Agency³². Certainly cars, aeroplanes and other forms of transport have become far more fuel-efficient. Hence, with one eye on an ecologically concerned public and the other on reducing dependency on imported oil and gas, Germany plans to progressively bring down primary energy consumption: from a 2008 base by 8.7% (2014), 20% (2020) and 50% (2050)³³. It is far from unique. Japan, Switzerland, Austria, Denmark and other energy-poor countries are determined to follow a similar course.

Even that energy glutton, the United States, can be cited. Bloomberg reports: “The US economy has now grown by 10% since 2007, while primary energy consumption has fallen by 2.4%³⁴.” There are, of course, a number of explanations (eg, offshoring industrial production to China, the increasing role of finance capital, the knowledge economy, etc). Undeniably, though, in terms of its basic unit, at the level of the company, the personifications of capital will ruthlessly seek to drive down costs - in other words, reducing outlays on fixed capital, labour-power, wages and raw materials to the barest minimum. A phenomenon Marx discussed in *Capital* volume one.

And yet, as a system, capital is fundamentally and inescapably predicated on endless self-expansion (C-M-C’). Hence, as Jevons *accurately* maintained, energy efficiency will paradoxically lead to *greater* usage. In global terms that is exactly what has happened. Overall consumption of oil and coal has gone up and up again. Countries such as China, India and Brazil more than make up for any primary energy decreases in the capitalist metropolises. In point of fact, the US EIA projects a 48% increase in “world energy consumption” between a 2012 base and 2040³⁵. However, while conventional oil and coal consumption will doubtless grow, the expectation is that they will grow at a snail’s pace. It is other sources of energy that will make the running.

Alternatives

Peak oil pundits pay far too little attention to alternative sources of energy, both actual and potential. They include thermal, solar, wind, bio and nuclear energy. Crucially, they also include, of course, natural gas. Natural gas now accounts for about 25% of energy supplies globally. Because of the steady rise in the production of tight gas, shale gas, and coal-bed methane, it is calculated that by 2050 natural gas will be the world’s main source of energy. Nor, frankly, do peak oil pundits treat what is sometimes called ‘unconventional’ oil with the seriousness it deserves. Unconventional oil is a category which includes tar sands, heavy oils and oil shale.

● The world’s most notable tar sand operation is located in the Canadian province of Alberta. Easily accessible, the tar sands lie temptingly just below the surface. Total production has steadily climbed and now stands at 2.3 million barrels daily. The world’s estimated reserves of tar sand oil are put at around two trillion barrels, with Canada counting for the lion’s share. Industry sources report that the cost of tar sand oil, although originally considered uneconomical, has dropped from \$30 a barrel to just over \$8³⁶.

● Heavy oil is extracted, transported and refined using the same equipment as used by the conventional oil industry. It is ‘unconventional’ only because the cost of refining is at the moment considerably higher - by \$10 to \$20, compared with a barrel of ‘sweet light’ Saudi crude. Venezuela puts its reserves at 1.2 trillion barrels. The country’s heavy oil belt stretches from the mouth of the Orinoco River, near the Caribbean island of Trinidad, across to the eastern slopes of the Andes. This is part of an oil-bearing trough that some geologists believe may be continuous along the entire South American continent, down to the Falkland Islands in the bitterly cold south Atlantic. Only a few segments of this gigantic field have been fully explored, yet even those parts have been estimated to contain some three to four trillion barrels, with perhaps one third recoverable, given current technology.

● Oil shale also requires extensive processing and consumes large amounts of fresh water. Still, reserves far exceed those of conventional oil, and costs are bound to fall, as newer and more efficient processing techniques are invented and become available. Estimated reserves are staggering - the highest figure I have come across being 2.1 quadrillion barrels³⁷.

Given the ongoing scientific and technological revolution, such energy sources are bound to rise in significance. A considerable reduction in the *relative* importance of conventional oil is more than likely. The US EIA is of the view that oil’s share of global energy consumption will decline from 33% in 2012 to 30% in 2040. However, this will not happen because natural limits have been reached. As we have argued, oil is not about to run out.

Closing remarks

Medieval society did not embrace wind- and water-power because slave and animal muscle-power had become exhausted. Nor did mature capitalism turn to coal because the wind had stopped blowing and water had stopped flowing. In turn, late capitalism shows all the

signs of reducing its relative dependence on conventional oil not because natural limits have been reached, but because of the growing availability of other, cheap, energy supplies.

Incidentally, nothing could be more stupid than to equate capitalism and the oil industry, as if the two were synonymous. Capitalism considerably predates the Royal Navy’s turn to oil, or for that matter the coal industry that was conjoined with the widespread introduction of steam-power. Mercantile capitalism thrived in classical antiquity. Industrial capitalism began its stunning rise to dominance in the 13th and 14th centuries. Profit-generating windmills and watermills - perfected with gears and other such devices - formed the primary energy source for flour milling, iron forging, wood sawing, leather tanning, etc.³⁸

Obviously, late capitalism’s relative downgrading of conventional oil usage is no cause for celebration. An existential fear of global warming has persuaded governments of every hue to subsidise thermal, solar, wind, bio and nuclear energy. A combination of the good, the bad and the downright ugly.

Thermal heating works brilliantly in geologically blessed locations, most notably Iceland and New Zealand. However, it accounts for a mere 0.07% of the world’s primary energy. That figure cannot be expected to grow by much. Solar and wind energy is equally benign, but is of far greater importance in terms of the energy mix. Solar and wind accounts for some 10% of the US energy total. And in January 2017 the World Economic Forum announced that wind and solar power either “matched” or was “cheaper” than fossil fuels³⁹.

Aircraft will, for the foreseeable future, rely on specialist aviation fuels (largely kerosene-based blends, though there are ongoing experiments with bio fuels: ie, so-called sustainable aviation fuels). However, in truth, bio fuels are an invitation for big business to replace biologically diverse rainforests with a thoroughly denatured monoculture. A hastily act of ecocide.

As for nuclear power, it not only comes with a gigantic price tag. Enormous public health risks are involved too. Because of the inevitability of human error, accidents are surely bound to happen: Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, Fukushima. If nuclear fission could be replaced with nuclear fusion, it would be another matter. But that requires extremely high energy inputs. As of 2017, corresponding outputs remain negative (EROEI). Hence, for practical purposes, that particular technology must, for the time being at least, be counted alongside the perpetual motion machine and warp drive.

Meanwhile, tar sands oil, heavy oil and shale oil are horribly polluting. They are also ecologically destructive. Thousands of square miles of top soils are to be bulldozed in Alberta, valuable boreal forests uprooted, wetlands irreversibly ruined, endangered animal species such as the caribou further denuded.

Nor will the turn towards natural gas and unconventional oil do anything to reduce carbon emissions. Primary energy consumption is set to increase and, therefore, anthropogenic CO₂ emissions - the main cause of global warming - are unlikely to be capped. Paris was not even intended to do that. The goal was to limit the *rise* in global temperatures to 2.7°C above pre-industrial levels. That did not stop *The Guardian* greeting Paris as signalling “an end to the fossil fuel era⁴⁰”. There is a real danger, however, that by 2100 the rise could be more like 4°C - and with that will come severe disruption to agriculture systems and food supplies, mass plant and animal extinctions, substantial and permanent polar ice losses, higher sea levels ... and the distinct possibility of an abrupt shift in the climatic pattern.

As I have repeatedly argued, the only hope for humanity lies not in so-called green politics, but fundamentally breaking with the destructive logic of capital and refunding society on the basis of the communist principle of production for need⁴¹ ●

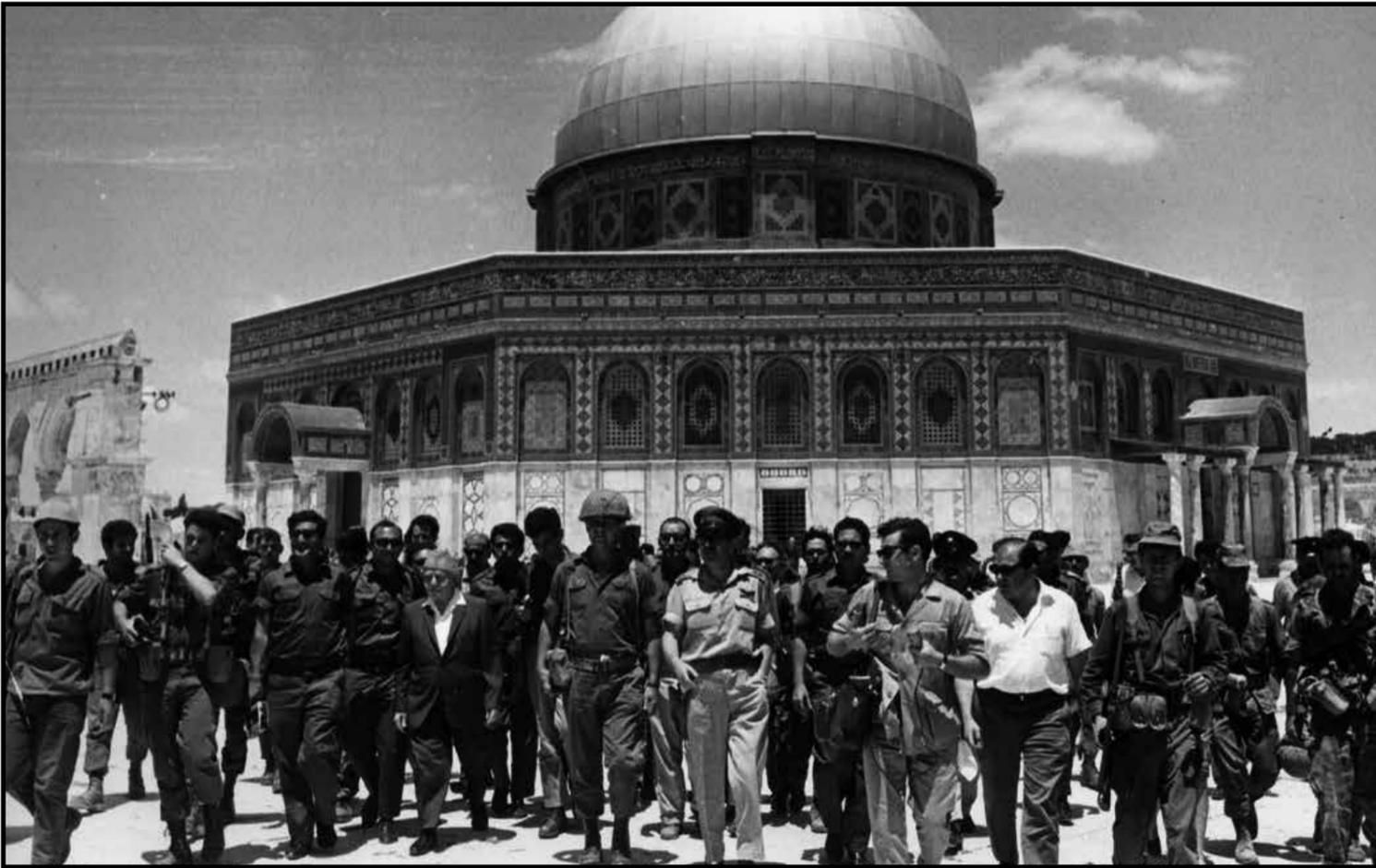
Notes

- 1 See, for example, KS Deffeyes *Hubbert’s peak: the impending world oil shortage* Princeton 2009; P Roberts *The end of oil: on the edge of a perilous new world* Boston MA 2004; M Klare *Resource wars: the new landscape of global conflict* New York 2002
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- 10 S Lilley, D McNally, E Yuen and James Davis *Catastrophism: the apocalyptic politics of collapse and rebirth* Oakland CA 2012, p19. Many other such books, articles and studies could be quoted. Suffice to say, nowadays the term ‘Malthusianism’ refers not only to pessimism based on concerns about overpopulation ... but resource scarcity (and not only land ... but coal, oil, gold, zinc, copper, etc).
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- 13 K Marx and F Engels CW Vol 3, London 1975, p420.
- 14 M King Hubert, ‘Nuclear energy and the fossil fuels’, fig 20, p22: www.hubbertpeak.com/hubbert/1956/1956.pdf.
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- 16 See www.donellameadows.org/wp-content/userfiles/Limits-to-Growth-digital-scan-version.pdf.
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MIDDLE EAST

The war Israel planned

Military action against Syria had been contemplated for several months prior to the Six-Day War of June 1967, writes **Moshé Machover**



Israeli leaders inspect their conquests

The June 1967 six-day war was in fact three wars rolled into one. In quick succession, Israel defeated Egypt and Jordan and then, as an apparent afterthought, it turned against Syria.

But appearances can be very deceptive: history unfolds in a paradoxical way. Israel's 1967 wars against Egypt and Jordan were - like World War I - predictable, but accidental. In my last article, 'Israel and the Messiah's ass',¹ I showed that the dominant hawkish wing of Israel's political-military leadership had long been waiting for an opportunity to wage war against Egypt and Jordan. In the case of Egypt, the main aim was to redress the unsatisfactory outcome of the 1956 Suez war, which Israel had won militarily, but lost politically. Israel had to unleash its military might against any uppity Arab leader, such as Abdul Nasser, who got it into his head to challenge its regional dominance. In the case of Jordan, the aim was to complete the 'liberation' of Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel), left unfinished at the end of the 1947-49 war.

But in the spring of 1967 these predictable wars broke out accidentally, in the sense that but a few weeks before June 5 Israel had no immediate plans to go to war against these two countries - nor had they been preparing for war. Thus, in a debriefing held by Israel's general staff after the six-day war, the chief of general staff (CGS), Yitzhak Rabin, said that, while the IDF (Israel's 'defence' force) had always assumed there was going to be a war against Egypt, "nevertheless, speaking for myself, I must say that, had I been asked in the beginning of May (and I think I was [actually] asked) whether there would be a war on June 5 67, I would have doubted it." General Uzi Narkiss, commander of central area command, said that the IDF got only three days to deploy its forces for conquest of the West Bank, the order for which was issued on June 5.²

Things were quite different as far as Syria was concerned. From recently

released documents it transpires that in the spring of 1967 Israel did plan to attack Syria. So this third part of the six-day war, quite unlike the other two, while not predictable long in advance, was anything but accidental. In fact, Israel's plans to attack Syria triggered the whole bloody thing. When Abdul Nasser became aware of Israel's intentions, he felt obliged to demonstrate solidarity with Syria, with which Egypt had a mutual defence treaty. His largely symbolic move, on May 15, was exploited by Israel as a *casus belli* against Egypt.

This involved a hasty change of plans: it took the Israeli political leadership three weeks to obtain a green light from the US for attacking Egypt; and the IDF also needed some time to redeploy its forces towards the south, putting off the pre-planned northern war against Syria to the six-day war's third stage (on which I barely touched in my 'Messiah's ass' article).

Palestinian guerrillas

According to a widespread story, repeated by the tendentious 'Six-day war' entry in *Wikipedia*, "In May 1967, Nasser received false reports from the Soviet Union that Israel was massing on the Syrian border."³ This canard, flown from the alternative fact factory of Israel's *hasbara*, can now be finally shot down. Recently released documents, including minutes of Israeli cabinet meetings, make it clear that from December 1966 deliberate Israeli provocations led to an escalation of military clashes with Syria, culminating in the first two weeks of May 1967 in preparations for a major military operation.⁴

Israel's main motive for this escalation was the growing Palestinian guerrilla ('terrorist') activity, led by Fatah, mostly from bases in Syria. Fatah was founded as an underground political organisation in 1959.⁵ In 1963 it came to an arrangement with Syria, which allowed Fatah's armed

wing, al-Asifa, to train in, and operate from, bases in Syria. Fatah incursions into Israel began in 1965; however, during that year the guerrilla fighters based in Syria did not enter Israel directly across the Syrian border, but mostly through Jordan, defying king Hussein, Israel's ally, who strongly objected to this activity. The reason for the indirect route was that not all leaders of Syria's ruling Ba'ath party were happy about the arrangement with Fatah. However, the 1965 Fatah guerrilla operations in Israel were pretty ineffectual, and caused no Israeli casualties.

A change occurred in 1966, when Salah Jadid became *de facto* ruler of Syria. Jadid was more radical than other Ba'athists in his Stalinist-style 'socialism', pro-Soviet orientation and - most worrying for Israel - his support for the Palestinian cause. In 1966 most Palestinian guerrilla operations in Israel (26 out of 42) came directly from Syria. Also, in that year 10 Israelis were killed by Palestinian guerrillas. This trend continued into 1967, and led to a growing feeling in the Israeli leadership that some decisive action must be taken against the Syrian regime.

In January 1967 Yigal Allon, one of the most hawkish members of the Labor Alignment (which later went on to form the Labor Party) and minister of labour in the Eshkol cabinet, wrote in the Alignment's official journal, *Or*: "Guerrilla warfare against Israel, if it continues, will eventually expand. This is in my opinion one of the most terrible dangers, more serious than a general war."⁶

By early May, Allon's view was shared by most members of the cabinet. In a cabinet meeting held on May 10, prime minister Levi Eshkol stated: "We must find an important target, even one that is far from the border ... a serious target, hitting which will lead to Syria losing prestige." The minutes of the cabinet meeting state that what took place following Eshkol's statement "is

not recorded". But on the following day United Press reported, quoting an unnamed senior Israeli source, that if terrorist actions do not stop Israel would take limited, but forceful, military action "designed to overthrow the Damascus regime".⁷ Given the close relations between Jadid's Syrian regime and the Soviet Union, there is every reason to assume that the United States, by then Israel's imperialist sponsor, would have no objection. On May 12, CGS Yitzhak Rabin gave a newspaper interview in which he threatened to occupy Damascus and overthrow the Syrian regime.⁸

In view of the fact that Egypt had a mutual defence pact with Syria, it is astonishing that the Israeli political and military leadership was surprised by Abdul Nasser's closure of the Tiran Straits and movement of troops into Sinai. Minutes of the Israeli cabinet beginning on May 15 leave no doubt whatsoever that the surprise was absolutely genuine. Rabin himself panicked and around May 25 had a nervous breakdown, which effectively ended his military career.⁹

To be sure, the Israeli generals knew very well that Egypt's army was in a rotten state. The majority of the infantry deployed in Sinai consisted of poorly trained peasants, and whatever meagre training they had was for defensive combat. They were badly equipped, without adequate weapons, uniforms, maps, food and water. Israeli military intelligence snooped into the Egyptian signalling and could hear the soldiers in the hot desert pleading with their commanders for a supply of water.¹⁰ So there was little doubt that the IDF would be able to defeat Egypt's forces - given time. The point was that time was precisely what Israel needed: its forces, mostly reserves, had to be mustered and deployed at short notice. There was also the political need to negotiate with the US to get a green light.

But why was the IDF unprepared

for Abdul Nasser's move? Recall the famous anecdote about the man who was terrified by a barking dog. His friend reminded him of the proverb, "A barking dog never bites". "Yes," he replied, "you and I know this proverb; but does the dog know it?" The Israeli generals knew the dire state of Egypt's forces: it was obvious. So a possible explanation of their surprise is that they assumed that Egypt's military rulers also knew the true state of their own forces, and would therefore not dare to make a move. In other words, Israel's leaders may have fallen victim to their own preconception about their Egyptian enemy - a mistake that would be repeated in somewhat different form in 1973.¹¹

Lust for land

A secondary motivation for Israel's war on Syria was the land lust of the kibbutzim in the northern Jordan valley, just below the Syrian Golan Heights. They coveted the Golan's fertile land. On June 8, while the Israeli cabinet was considering whether to extend the war and conquer the Heights, it was approached by a delegation of these kibbutzim who urged their minister friends to vote for an offensive. In an interview granted by Moshe Dayan to an Israeli journalist, with the proviso that it would be kept secret during Dayan's lifetime, he said:

Of course, they [the kibbutzniks] wanted to get the Syrians out of their sight. They had suffered a lot because of the Syrians ... But I can tell you with absolute certainty: the delegation that came to persuade Eshkol to go up to the Heights did not think about these matters. It thought about the Heights' land. Listen, I myself am a farmer, I come from [the village of] Nahalal, don't I? Not from Tel Aviv. And I recognise this thing. I saw them and spoke with them. They didn't even try to hide their lust for that soil. This is what guided them.¹²

This subsidiary motivation of Israel's 1967 war against Syria has left a lasting heritage in the form of Israeli colonisation of the Golan. Israeli settlements in the West Bank were spearheaded by religious, rightwing nationalist fanatics, followed by ordinary, 'non-ideological' folk looking for subsidised housing. The settlements are urban, many of them dormitory towns of people employed in pre-1967 Israel. There is very little agriculture.

In stark contrast, the Golan Heights are colonised by kibbutzim, practising agriculture and viticulture. If you boycott the best Israeli wines, you are harming the business of these 'socialist' colons ●

Notes

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IRAN

An unsavoury alliance

‘Regime change from above’ cannot be ruled out, writes Yasmine Mather

Over the last couple of weeks Iranian leaders have shown unprecedented signs of paranoia about a possible US attack against the country. However, just because they are paranoid it does not mean we should dismiss the possibility that the current US administration’s policies will lead to a third US ground war in the Middle East since 2001. There are various statements and some anecdotal evidence that point towards this scenario.

One of the most serious comments came from US secretary of state Rex Tillerson, who openly called for regime change in Iran and noted: “Our Iranian policy is under development.” In early June he was asked if the US supports a “philosophy of regime change inside Iran”. His reply was: “We are working with elements inside of Iran” to bring about “peaceful transition” in that country. He added:

We certainly recognise Iran’s continued destabilising presence in the region, their payment of foreign fighters, their export of militia forces in Syria, in Iraq, in Yemen, their support for Hezbollah. And we are taking action to respond to Iran’s hegemony. Additional sanctions actions have been put in place against individuals and others.

The son of the deposed shah, Reza Pahlavi, has echoed this in a number of interviews with exiled royalist media outlets, while making also the bizarre claim that such “regime change” will be “peaceful”. Unlike the regime change in Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban or in Iraq to overthrow Saddam, obviously. If we accept this, we must also believe that Iran’s Revolutionary Guards, the Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Iraqi Shia government and the Assad dictatorship in Syria will all throw in the towel.

I am no fan of any of the above. In fact I consider the Islamic Bassij and Revolutionary Guards, inside and outside Iran, as the enemy of the peoples of the region. However, no-one in their right mind should underestimate the kind of resistance they will show, should their role in the region be undermined. Reza Pahlavi is clearly more delusional than his father or his pro-Nazi grandfather.

The response from Iran’s ministry of foreign affairs was predictable. Spokesman Bahram Qassemi called Tillerson’s comments “interventionist” and “in gross violation of the compelling rules of international law”. Such “unacceptable” remarks should be “strongly condemned”. He reminded the world of the consequences of the 1953 US intervention in Iran - regime change undertaken against the elected premier, Mohammad Mossadegh, to be replaced by the shah, who, according to documents recently released by the US state department, did not actually want to go back to the country. He had called on western governments to ensure his future income in the US!

Although we knew about the CIA role in the 1953 coup, details of the involvement of the US embassy read like fiction. Professor Ervand Abrahamian summarises details of the embassy’s role:

It vetted candidates for parliament - the CIA congratulated itself for its “great success” in the 1952 parliamentary elections. It recruited journalists, clerics and politicians. It experimented with outside-the-box ideas, such as creating a ‘Titoist party’. It encouraged the Fedayyan-e Islam,



Mojahedin-e Khalq: Paris rally

a small gang of religious fanatics, to take “direct action” against government supporters. It waged constant “psychological warfare”, that included hiring goons to beat up demonstrators and newspaper sellers, as well as resorting to “poison pens, personal denunciations and rumour-mongering”. These activities were all categorised as “moral sabotage”¹.

Anecdotal

An example of anecdotal evidence for regime change from above happened over the weekend June 30-July 1, when a number of close Trump allies - Newt Gingrich, Rudy Giuliani, John Bolton and not forgetting prince Turki bin Faisal Al Saud of Saudi Arabia - attended the annual show put on by the Iranian religious cult, Mojahedin-e Khalq, in Paris. The Al Arabiya news agency associated with the Saudis could not contain its enthusiasm: “A vast convention hall located north of Paris was the scene of a massive Iranian diaspora gathering, who voiced their demand for a better future through regime change in Tehran.” (Al Arabiya makes Fox News look like an intelligent media outlet.)

Fact check: Mojahedin-e Khalq has lost the majority of its members since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and subsequent forced relocations - the latest from camp Ashraf in Iraq to Albania. Like previous years most of those attending the Paris event were rent-a-crowd east Europeans, paid for courtesy of US/Saudi regime change funds. Even the US-funded Radio Free Iran admits the group pays east Europeans to attend its annual ritual in Paris. This is from their 2013 report of the event:

Kyrgyz student Alina Alymkulova recounts how she was recruited to travel from Prague to Paris to attend a rally for the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organisation (MKO) ...

“I arrived at a bus station in Prague along with a friend, a fellow student from Kyrgyzstan. Just as the trip organiser said last night, there were eight buses waiting to take us to Paris. Most of the ‘protestors’ were young and obviously students like me. I met many Russians, Ukrainians, Czechs and students from Asian countries, who were all recruited via the internet.”²

Al Arabiya also quotes the main message of MKO leader Maryam Rajavi: “Islamic State cannot be defeated until Iran’s Islamic Republic is overthrown.” Unlike ill-informed US politicians, including Donald Trump, here the widow of misogynist cult leader Massoud Rajavi and current head of the loonies is not referring to Iran funding Islamic State. Her comment might be interpreted as an explanation for the *raison d’être* of IS - the reason why Sunni Wahabi groups flourished in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq. The problem is her solution, however: more wars, more invasions, with even more apocalyptic consequences for the region.

Of course, for a political group totally dependent on Saddam Hussein in the last decade of the Iraqi dictator’s rule, Mrs Rajavi’s nostalgia for the good old days of Saddam and Saudi dominance in region is understandable. Yet it is ironic that John Bolton and Newt Gingrich, who supported regime change in Iraq, should be in the same room as Saddam’s former protégés, the Mojahedin-e Khalq. Leaving aside the irony, both sides are now singing from the same hymn sheet - provided by their financial sponsor, Saudi Arabia. Prince Turki bin Faisal explained it like this: “The Iranian regime is looking for more crises and is therefore using militias to pressure other countries.”

Rudy Giuliani, who probably lost a senior post in the Trump administration because of allegations that he made a fortune by lobbying for unsavoury

governments, told the Paris gathering: “You, I, my government and your leadership, we see Iran in exactly the same way. The regime is evil and it must go.”

As for Newt Gingrich, he stated:

I think it’s fair to say that the Trump administration has much fewer illusions about the nature of the Iranian dictatorship. I think it’s fair to say that secretary of defense Mattis in his years in the central command understands exactly who the Iranian dictatorship is ... I think it’s fair to say that the national security advisor, general McMaster, in his years of service in the Middle East, knows exactly who the Iranian dictatorship is.³

There are a number of other pointers regarding possible escalation of the US action against Iran:

- Qatar is being punished for challenging the Saudi policy of isolating Iran. This policy is supported by the Trump administration, which considers Saudi Arabia as a strategic ally and is prepared to isolate those who dissent from Saudi-sponsored dictators in the region.
- On June 7 we witnessed the first Islamic State action inside Iran. Two suicide attacks targeted the Islamic parliament and the shrine of Iran’s former supreme leader, Ruhollah Khomeini. Eighteen people were killed and Iranian officials were quick to blame Saudi Arabia and the United States.
- In retaliation for the attacks in Tehran Iran fired ballistic missiles at IS positions in eastern Syria. This was an unprecedented escalation of the conflict (IS accuses Iran of acting in line with Saudi interests in the region).
- On June 27 the US government announced it has put Syria “on notice” that it will pay “a heavy price” if it uses chemical weapons against its own people.
- On July 1 Rudy Giuliani told the Mojahedin-e Khalq cult that, with Trump in power in Washington, regime

change in Iran is achievable.

Why now?

Ironically it is IS’s military defeat in Mosul and Raqqa that could be behind the current escalation of conflict in the Middle East.

After months of bloodshed and bitter fighting, the capture of the Grand al-Nuri Mosque - the very location used by IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi to launch his Sunni caliphate in Iraq in 2014 - marks a significant breakthrough for the Shia government in Baghdad and its allies, the Revolutionary Guards and Hezbollah. However, many of the displaced citizens of Mosul do not share Iran’s objectives in the city. Some Mosul inhabitants, although grateful for the defeat inflicted on IS, are expressing their concerns about Iranian influence in the city. Many claim that Mosul now has the look and feel of a Shia city, with Hezbollah, Iraqi Shia groups and Iranian forces making their mark on areas taken from Islamic State.

Meanwhile, American air strikes have helped the US-led anti-IS coalition to the point where it is near to taking Raqqa. Iran and its Syrian ally are worried about losing out in Raqqa, while the US is concerned about Mosul. In other words, the weakening of Islamic State and its potential military defeat in the region is pointing to further conflict in the region. Iran and Saudi Arabia are confronting each other on a number of fronts and US threats of military action can only make a bad situation worse ●

yasmine.mather@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. <https://lobelog.com/new-revelations-of-the-us-in-iran>
2. www.rferl.org/a/iran-mko-ncri-rally-diary/25029410.html
3. <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2017/07/01/Rajavi-Only-way-to-eliminate-ISIS-is-to-overthrow-regime-in-Tehran.html>

POLEMIC

The Corbyn phenomenon

It is important to know where we are and where we are going, argues **Tony Greenstein**

I read the discussion that took place at the June 25 meeting of the CPGB and Labour Party Marxists with interest. Let me declare where I am coming from. I have been an independent Marxist for most of my life, a member of no socialist party since, in my tender youth, I was expelled from the International Socialists (now the Socialist Workers Party) for the heinous offence of "being hostile to both the leading and local committees of the group and the IS politics that inform them". My crime was voting publicly against the IS's sectarian determination in 1972 to close down the then Anti-Internment League. Despite being relatively new to the socialist movement, I was aware enough to know that building one's sect at the expense of the movement had nothing to do with socialism.

I am, however, interested in building the maximum possible unity of the left and was a member of Socialist Alliance in the early 2000s until the SWP destroyed it by their sectarianism and the Socialist Party walked out. I then became a supporter of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, but that too went nowhere, as the SP did not wish it to develop into a genuinely living organism. Having joined the Labour Party after the election of Jeremy Corbyn, I was suspended three months later in March 2016 as part of the 'anti-Semitism' witch-hunt.

As a member of the steering committee of Brighton and Hove Momentum, I am interested in the debates that are taking place on the left, even if they are all too often surrounded by the need to adopt a line or define oneself in opposition to another group. All too often what passes for debate is really an attempt to defend a previous position which has become untenable - even if, as in the case of the Socialist Party, this means pretending that the previous position (that Labour was just another bourgeois party) has not changed and indeed has been vindicated in the light of Corbyn's election!

I therefore read comrades' assessments of the general election carefully. I have not read the theses that were put forward by the Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB at the meeting, but, assuming the report is a fair one, I have gained a good idea of the main strands of the debate. I have a number of comments and criticisms to make both of the debate and its framework.

The first problem is the context in which the debate was held, as manifested in Jack Conrad's admission that "Yes ... we thought there would be an increased Tory majority and we were clearly wrong." But the purpose of making such predictions was "to counter the ensuing demoralisation of those who thought that a Corbyn-led Labour government was the 'big prize'".

If I understand this correctly, the reason for making a clearly wrong and mistaken prediction was to insulate Corbyn supporters who believed that they were on the threshold of victory. Jack Conrad was afraid that if he pointed out that Corbyn was likely to do much better than bourgeois pundits had predicted, then the result might demoralise them. Put like this, Conrad's arguments are nonsensical. They are a *non-sequitur*.

The real problem is that the CPGB went along with the analysis of charlatans and bourgeois pundits, who predicted that Labour would get hammered. People like Nick Cohen who wrote:

Labour will get around a quarter of the vote ... The Tories have gone easy on Corbyn and his comrades to date for the transparently obvious reason that they want to keep them in charge of Labour ... In an election, they would tear them to pieces ... *Will there be 150, 125, 100 Labour MPs by the end of the flaying? My advice is to think of a number then halve it.*³

Of course, Nick Cohen is not known for his sagacity. A racist and an imperialist, he is obsessed by all things Islamic. Perhaps more typical is Owen Jones, who was also convinced that Corbyn would be heavily defeated. On March 1 Jones penned an article, 'Jeremy Corbyn says he's staying. That's not good enough'.⁴ On April 18, after the election had been called, Jones wrote: "My suggestion that Corbyn stand down in favour of another candidate was driven by a desire to save his policies - which, as the polling shows, are very popular indeed - from being buried in the rubble of a terrible election defeat."⁵

Predictions

On April 20 I wrote:⁶

It was Harold Wilson who said that a week is a long time in politics. Seven weeks is a political eternity. Theresa May has taken a gamble that her 21% lead will hold. It is a gamble that she may yet come to regret.

There is only one direction that her lead can go, and that is down. Once her lead falls, then a snowball effect can take over. What is essential is that Labour marks out the key areas on which it is going to base its appeal. The danger is that Corbyn is going to continue with his 'strategy' of appeasing the right and appealing to all good men and women. If so that will be a recipe for disaster.

No election is guaranteed to be without its surprises. Theresa May is a cautious conservative. She is literally the product of her background, a conservative vicar's daughter. Reactionary, parochial and small-minded, she is a bigot for all seasons. What doesn't help is that she is both wooden and unoriginal. The danger is that Corbyn tries to emulate her.

... Over the past 18 months his performance has been little short of dire. There is little point in pretending otherwise. The question is whether he will rise to the occasion, as he showed glimpses of doing during the leadership election last summer. There has been a conscious strategy of appeasing the right in the hope that they will come to accept Corbyn's leadership.

I followed this up on June 3 with an article, 'General election - is Labour on the threshold of victory?',⁷ subtitled 'No-one has been more disappointed with the success of Labour's campaign than the Labour right and Zionist Jewish Labour

Movement':

It would be a mistake for people to be over-confident at the fact that the Tories made major slip-ups over things like the dementia tax, taking food off children's tables, etc ...

[However, the] essence of what I wrote was correct. The Tory lead has shrunk. My fears that Corbyn might backtrack have not come to pass in the economic sphere. Labour's manifesto was unexpectedly radical. But in one particular area - the state and security - Corbyn has retreated from all the things he has believed in in the past.

... I do not have a crystal ball. My initial predictions - that there would or could be a hung parliament - was based on my assessment of the situation. This is still quite possible, as the Tories are widely detested for their attacks on the working poor, people on benefits and the continuous privatisation of the NHS. They are seen as the party of a vicious class rule, which is what austerity is about.

That does not, however, mean that the Tories will necessarily be defeated. People do not vote in line with their class interests ... The Tory press, of course, is doing its best to foster illusions in Strong and Stable. Labour *could* still become the largest party, but I also sense a vigorous fightback by the right.

It seems that one part of the prediction I made will not come true. The Lib Dems are not going to gain enough seats to prop up another Tory coalition. At the moment they are tipped to win just one extra seat. By ruling out any form of pact with Labour under Corbyn, the Lib Dems have guaranteed their own irrelevance.

We *could* be in for a period of political instability such as we have not known for 40 years. This is one of the hardest elections to call. A Tory government is still possible if it cobbles together a coalition of the Lib Dems and the Ulster Unionists-DUP. Even a majority Tory government cannot be ruled out.

My analysis from the start was that there would be a hung parliament, despite the fact that throughout the campaign the opinion polls gave the Tories a steady, but diminishing, lead.

Why I was right

The real question is why I was right and the CPGB was wrong. I believe the reason lies in that the CPGB has not fully understood the Corbyn phenomenon and what catapulted him into the leadership in the first place.

Throughout the Blair years Labour's membership was to the right of the trade unions. David Miliband won out in the constituency section in 2010. In Labour Party conferences it was often the membership that voted

for the leadership positions over, for example, pensions, when the trade unions opposed Blair. It was this that led the right into believing that 'one member, one vote' in the leadership elections would copper-bottom the grip of the right on the party.

What the right had not counted on was the reaction to Ed Miliband's defeat in 2015. Liz Kendall, Progress and large parts of the Parliamentary Labour Party drew the conclusion that Blair had drawn in advance of the election. He told *The Economist* that because of the perceived move to the left under Miliband there was now a situation "in which a traditional leftwing party competes with a traditional rightwing party, with the traditional result". Asked if this meant a Tory win, he replied: "Yes, that is what happens."⁸

Tristram Hunt, the old Etonian MP for Stoke on Trent, believed that Labour needed to show they are "also on the side of families who want to shop at John Lewis, go on holiday and get a new extension" - the aspiring middle classes.

What these people did not understand was that there was widespread revulsion and mass disappointment that, on a 36% vote, Cameron had slunk back into power on the back of four million voters for the UK Independence Party and a complete collapse of the Lib Dems. It was this that was translated into the massive growth in membership of the Labour Party.

Of course, the Labour right, being particularly stupid, screamed that they were being subjected to infiltration by the massed ranks of British Trotskyists. Thousands of people who had become registered voters found their ballot papers fished out of the polling booth. What the far left did not understand was that those who newly joined the Labour Party represented much larger forces in society as a whole - forces which could go to the Ukip right and vote to withdraw from the European Union; but equally they could go to the left and vote for Corbyn.

We got an inkling of this at the mass rallies for Corbyn both during his initial leadership bid and during his re-election. The Labour right, however, full of its own sense of self-importance, deluded themselves, as Nick Cohen and others demonstrated, that, when it came to a general election, if Corbyn managed to stay the course, then Labour would go down to a heavy defeat. Joan Ryan, MP for Enfield North and chair of Labour Friends of Israel, was typical. She "encouraged voters to elect her, 'whatever your misgivings about the Labour leadership', because she expected Corbyn would not become prime minister."⁹

What the bourgeois pundits did not want to believe and what the CPGB did not understand was that those who had first put Corbyn into the leadership of the Labour Party were quite capable of voting for him in the general election. All that Corbyn had to do was to appeal to that layer of the populace - not only the working class, but also wide sections of youth - who were disillusioned by the prospect of five more years of the same Tory government.

Corbyn, unlike Miliband, did stand on a radical manifesto. Those who had been priced out of the housing market, who feared for the privatisation of the NHS, who had lost their grants but 'gained' full-cost fees, stood to benefit

from Labour's manifesto. So did public-sector workers, who had seen their standards of living go down, year after year.

It is churlish to compare Labour's 2017 manifesto with that of Michael Foot in 1983. They are completely different political periods. Thatcher had not yet embarked on the privatisation of utilities, let alone that of rail. At that time we still had the big battalions of the working class in the form of the miners, the dockers, etc.

The promise of renationalisation of the utilities, rail, abolition of tuition fees, uncapping benefits meant that there were genuine reforms that could be voted for. Of course, it was not a revolutionary manifesto. It did not aim to abolish the standing army nor put under workers' control the main centres of the economy, but from a reformist perspective it was a major advance.

When I predicted what might happen I was conscious of the opinion polls' received opinion and being seen to be wildly optimistic (and not having egg on my face!). The irony is that, but for Theresa May's disastrous decision, Jeremy Corbyn would have been unlikely to have made it to a general election in 2020.

Revolutionary socialists and Marxists should have their fingers on the pulse of the class. We saw large sections of what would have been considered the Tory middle class voting for Corbyn. Not only swings of 19% in Brighton, but Leamington Spa, Canterbury and Kensington North went Labour.

The question is how we related to the existing consciousness of those who see in Labour's manifesto a major advance towards a socialist society. If, as is likely, there is another general election soon and Corbyn is in a position to form a government, I do not see how the CPGB position of not taking office is tenable. Is it seriously suggested that we campaign for a Corbyn government, only to say at the last minute it should go into opposition? That is neither coherent nor credible.

We have to recognise that with a Corbyn government there will be a massive onslaught by the bourgeoisie. That the question of the state will immediately be posed. The opposition that Harold Wilson faced will be as nothing to the deliberate sabotage by state forces of a Corbyn-led government. We need to build a mass movement and Momentum, in all its guises, must be at the centre of this. We will face a renewed onslaught of the pro-imperialist and Zionist forces in alliance with those supporting Nato.

But first we need to understand the situation we are in and where we are going ●

Notes

1. 'Bringing out our differences' *Weekly Worker* June 29.
2. Letter: Jim Higgins to Tony Greenstein, November 22 1972.
3. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/mar/19/jeremy-corbyn-labour-threat-party-election-support (my emphasis - March 19 2017).
4. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/mar/01/corbyn-staying-not-good-enough.
5. 'Labour is in deep trouble, but it's our only defence against a Tory landslide': www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/apr/18/labour-jeremy-corbyn-time-to-fight-theresa-may.
6. 'Labour can win if Corbyn is bold - the key issue is poverty and the transfer of wealth': <http://azvsas.blogspot.co.uk/2017/04/labour-can-win-if-corbyn-is-bold-key.html>.
7. <http://azvsas.blogspot.co.uk/2017/06/general-election-is-labour-on-threshold.html>.
8. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-30640264.
9. 'Back me despite Corbyn, as May will win, Labour candidate urges voters': www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jun/02/back-me-despite-corbyn-as-may-will-win-labour-mp-urges-voters.



Back him for PM

ITALY

Racists and Islamophobes

Following the triumph of the right in last month's local elections, writes Toby Abse, the left appears more and more isolated

The second round of the local elections on June 25 was a complete disaster for Matteo Renzi's Partito Democratico (PD) and the centre-left in general.

As I explained in my last article¹, the most significant municipal contests were in the 25 *capoluoghi* being contested this year. In the first round on June 11, two of these went to the centre-left, and one to the centre-right. A fortnight later, the centre-left only managed to add a mere four to their first-round score, whilst the centre-right gained another 15. Two *capoluoghi* (Belluno and Parma) went to candidates from 'civic lists' (ie, localist independents), whilst the run-off in the Sicilian city of Trapani was invalidated owing to the low turnout (26.8%) for the sole remaining candidate after his rival, facing criminal proceedings, somewhat reluctantly withdrew from the contest between the two rounds!

Five years ago, the centre-left had beaten the centre-right by 16 to six in the same 25 *capoluoghi*. Renzi, characteristically refusing to acknowledge defeat, tweeted that in the 160 municipalities with more than 15,000 inhabitants the centre-left was still ahead of the centre-right by 67 to 59. Whilst this is true, on closer examination even this sample reveals an unfavourable outcome - the centre-left was down 14 from 81 in 2012, and the centre-right was up 18 from 41 in 2012. Renzi's widely-mocked comment - "It could have gone better" - was a grotesque understatement. Perhaps the survey of 110 run-off ballots by the political scientists of the *Istituto Cattaneo* is more relevant - and less supportive of Renzi's special pleading: in 2012, the centre-left had taken 64 of these municipalities, and it now only has 34, roughly half of those it controlled in 2012.

Whilst the national result is bad enough, a closer look at what were traditionally 'red regions' or 'red cities'² reveals an even more depressing picture. The PD lost all five run-off ballots taking place this year in the 'red region' of Emilia Romagna and it seems reasonable to see the combination of five such losses as representing a general negative trend in the region.

In Piacenza, the right's campaign focused on the issues of immigration and crime. Stefano Cugini, a member of the outgoing centre-left *giunta* (municipal cabinet) summed up the right's rhetoric as follows: "They help the foreigners and not the Piacentini. Nobody is safe, not even in their own home. Piacenza is already a 'far west'."³ Cugini added that on the evening of June 25 Lega Nord supporters arrived in Piazza Cavalli (the site of the town hall) in the manner of a paramilitary formation.

In Vignola, the Lega engaged in similar racist tirades, saying "The prefecture wants to send us so many immigrants that they will erect a great tent city in the *quartiere Bettolino*." In Riccione, the Lega Nord's national leader, Matteo Salvini, had come in person to claim that "the PD wants so many immigrants that cost €35 a day". Sadly, crude anti-immigrant rhetoric is not the exclusive domain of the Lega - Paolo Scarpa, the centre-left opponent of Pizzarotti, claimed that in Parma "the *quartiere* San Leonardo is in the hands of Nigerian mafias", presumably hoping to win the votes of those who had voted for the centre-right candidate in the first round.

The loss of Sesto San Giovanni - a working class suburb of Milan, to



Renzi on 40%: when pigs can fly

which it is as closely linked as Salford is to Manchester - has an even greater symbolic resonance for the left than the Emilian defeats. This former steel town - once known as the Stalingrad of Italy, and one of the few cities given the Golden Medal of the Italian resistance - had been administered by the left (from the old PCI to the PD) for 72 years. Whilst some previous left mayors - particularly Filippo Penati, who was eventually acquitted of criminal charges after a notorious and long-drawn-out corruption scandal - have illustrated the dangers of very prolonged one-party rule, especially in relation to planning issues, it is unlikely that such matters were decisive. As Monica Chittò - the outgoing PD mayor, beaten by 58.63% to 41.37% on June 25 - emphasised, "there was a climate of hate linked to the migrant question".

Apart from the death threats and sexist insults that Chittò received on social media, the unofficial side of the rightwing campaign included the widespread distribution of anonymously produced leaflets, saying: "If you too want a Muslim Sesto, vote Chittò." The central issue in the mayoral election was the planned construction of a large mosque financed by the Qatari government - "to provoke the invasion of Sesto by 4,000 Muslims every Friday", according to the right. Giorgia Meloni, the leader of the neo-fascist Fratelli d'Italia (FdI), claimed the choice was between "the construction of the largest mosque in Northern Italy or a new police station" - clearly Islamophobic demagoguery of the crudest kind, since the Qataris were not going to finance the police station, and the Italian government had no plans to subsidise the mosque.

Obviously the fact that Anis Amri, the terrorist responsible for the Berlin Christmas market massacre, had been shot dead by Italian police in Sesto in December 2016 made it much easier to inflame such fears about Muslim migrants in the general population, and the supporters of the victorious Roberto Di Stefano had no hesitation in doing so, even if he himself may have been more cautious in his public utterances.

Unfortunately, Sesto San Giovanni was not the only predominantly working class city with a strong anti-fascist tradition in which the resurgent racist right made inroads. It has been claimed that on the evening of June 25 there was a moment of great optimism in the headquarters of the Genoa PD, as figures for the turnout in the working class areas of the city became known. Party activists believed there had been a strong response to the call for anti-fascist mobilisation put out by the CGIL trade union and the ex-partisans'

association (ANPI). Eventually, 42.67% of the Genovese electors went to the polls, an improvement on the 39.08% registered in the second round in 2012, which had given the mayoralty to the leftwinger, Marco Doria. Turnout this year was more or less equal in the working class and bourgeois quarters. However, the right won in almost every district, with an overall lead of over 10% - 55.2% to 44.8%. Doria sees immigration and crime (or rather the perception of rising crime, not borne out by available statistics) as the key issues behind the rightwing vote in working class areas like Sampierdarena and Cornigliano. The new mayor for the centre-right, Marco Bucci, appears like a smooth figure and makes much of the time he has spent working abroad, but in reality he is just a front man for the racist thugs of the Lega Nord, who gained 12.9% of the vote in Genoa, ahead of Forza Italia's 8.1%⁴.

The rightwing takeover of the other working class port city on the Ligurian coast, La Spezia, seems to have been accomplished with a little more subtlety than the capture of Genoa. The new Spezia mayor, Pierluigi Peracchini, is a former provincial secretary of the CISL, the trade union confederation that used to be associated with the Christian Democrats, and has a degree in sociology. Here the right's margin of victory was even greater than in Genoa - 59.98% to 40.02%.

Cracks are already apparent in 'Red Tuscany' too. Whilst the centre-left held onto the traditionally marginal city of Lucca by 50.5% to 49.5%⁵, the very working class Tuscan city of Pistoia - awarded the Silver Medal of the Italian resistance and administered by the PCI and its successors for 71 years - has, like Sesto San Giovanni, passed into the hands of the right by a staggering margin of almost 10% - 54.28% against the 45.72% for the outgoing PD mayor, Samuele Bertinelli. In this instance, the new mayor, Alessandro Tomasi, is not even a representative of Forza Italia or the Lega Nord, but a hard-core neo-fascist who came to the FdI from the Alleanza Nazionale, and had already spent 10 years as an opposition councillor. His neo-fascist associates polled 9.6% of the vote in the city, ahead of the Lega on 5.7% and Forza Italia on 5.6%.

A final illustration of the collapse of the PD in 'Red Tuscany' is provided by the outcome of the run-off ballot in Carrara. Francesco De Pasquale, the new M5S mayor, who beat the centre-left candidate, Andrea Zanetti, by almost two to one with 65.57% of the vote, copied the 2014 victory speech of his Livornese M5S colleague, Filippo Nogarini, by saying, "We

have liberated a city after 70 years of power" - M5S code for ending 70 years of leftwing hegemony by the PCI and its heirs, that had originally been rooted in a tradition of intense working class militancy going right back to the 19th century.

In sharp contrast to the Carrarese contest, M5S lost the Asti run-off ballot to the centre-right by 45.1% to the victors' 54.9%⁶, so M5S's own harvest of municipalities in the June 2017 local elections has been meagre - it won eight out of 10 run-off ballots, mainly in insignificant localities, and lost in the only *capoluogo* - Asti - in which it scraped into the run-off by a handful of votes on a recount. Nonetheless, according to the *Istituto Cattaneo*, M5S - or, to be more precise, 32.1% of its first-round voters - helped the centre-right to victory in many such second-round ballots. Although about half of M5S first-round voters abstained in run-offs between left and right, very few M5S supporters switched leftwards. And, one is bound to add, the incessant racist rhetoric of Beppe Grillo, Luigi Di Maio, Virginia Raggi and others - along with M5S's disgraceful alignment with the Lega Nord in the Senate against the PD-sponsored *ius soli*⁷ - has contributed to the climate that made possible the election of a neo-fascist mayor of Pistoia and an Islamophobic one in Sesto San Giovanni.

Renzi's obstinacy in rejecting any notion of a broad centre-left coalition of the type currently advocated by his social democratic internal opponent, Andrea Orlando, and by former premier Romano Prodi, who twice headed such broad coalitions (in 1996 and 2006), as well as by the PD's founding leader, Walter Veltroni, seems to be leading the PD to electoral disaster - not just in this year's municipal contests, but, more importantly, in next year's national one.

Whilst pragmatists - and not just those with genuine social democratic inclinations - can see that a shrinking and isolated PD will lose in a three-sided contest with M5S and a resurgent traditional right, Renzi's arrogance should not be underestimated. It is not a good sign that current PD premier Paolo Gentiloni, usually a calmer and more rational figure than Renzi, over whom he generally exerts some restraining influence, gave an interview after June 8 in which he dismissed Jeremy Corbyn along with Bernie Sanders as "losers".

Pigs will fly before Renzi's neo-Blairite PD scores 40% in any general election ●

Notes

- ¹ "Grillo and M5S humiliated" *Weekly Worker* June 22.
- ² This is shorthand for localities generally, and often continuously, controlled by the old Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) between 1945 and 1991.
- ³ For some strange reason, Italians have for decades used the English-language phrase, 'far west' to describe what Americans call the 'wild west'.
- ⁴ In any event, Giovanni Toti, the Forza Italia president of the Ligurian region, of which Genoa is the capital, is notoriously soft on the Lega, and increasingly impatient with Silvio Berlusconi's apparent desire to move Forza Italia into the mainstream of Italian Christian Democracy and away from Marine Le Pen's Italian fan club in the Lega and FdI.
- ⁵ In the days of the cold war, Lucca was regarded as the one 'white' (ie, Christian Democratic) city in a 'red' region.
- ⁶ By and large, M5S does better in run-offs against centre-left candidates, and goes down to defeat against centre-right opponents.
- ⁷ This is a draft law giving Italian-born children of immigrants Italian citizenship on certain conditions. The Lega tabled thousands of amendments as a filibustering strategy in the Senate, but it remains to be seen whether the PD will defy the current surge of racism evident in the local elections and force the issue with a vote of confidence.

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly WORKER

**Courage,
dignity and
raising
the roof**

Big Meeting gets bigger

The 133rd Durham Miners' Gala this Saturday will see some 150,000 march through the ancient city. Davie Douglass looks at the history and the ongoing significance

Crowds are now back to the size they were in the immediate post-war years following nationalisation, when they celebrated the defeat of the hated private coal-owners. This mother of all miners' galas, featuring both picnics and demonstrations, was the labour movement's most prestigious public platform. The miners formed the bedrock among the proletarian, trade union and socialist ranks; they made up an army of labour that was strategically placed in terms of their bargaining power and influence - the politics of coal dictated much of politics *per se*. The position of the miners in the class war sent waves across the broad labour movement.

To appear on the platform of the Durham Miners' Gala, or Big Meeting, was often to announce a forthcoming leadership challenge within the Labour Party or within the NUM or other union. It often signified a challenge to current policy or direction; it tested attitudes, prepared for forthcoming militant action (or its opposite). These crowds, these unions in general and this union in particular were for a century or more the presidium of the labour movement's soul.

In the tradition of the Chartists, miners held mass rallies on moors and fenlands - often they would march from the various lodges all day to reach the Big Meeting, to express their outrage at the impositions and injustices of the coal-owners and to announce their united resistance. With the Durham and Northumberland miners' associations firmly established and here to stay, the first actual Durham Miners' Gala in 1871 preceded the foundation of the Miners Federation of Great Britain (1889). Previous attempts to build miners' unions over the preceding two centuries had been ruthlessly suppressed through violence, lock-out and starvation. There were over a million coal-miners immediately preceding World War I, when the world's biggest ever single-industry strike was launched. The Durham miners made up no less than 200,000 of them - they were often highly political and militant class warriors, for whom the union was the soul of their communities.

The gala has always picked its guest speakers through the democratic vote of the lodges. Irish republican speakers were popular guests in the early years, reflecting the influence of the Irish in the northern mines, as well as a deep political sympathy and sense of solidarity. Its star-studded platforms have featured everyone from Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin to, among rather more recent popular and regular speakers, Arthur Scargill, Tony Benn and Dennis Skinner. But the gala is no platform for back-slapping, mutual appreciation: vexed speeches and tub-thumping, fierce arguments have been no stranger to this platform. In 1914 Jim Larkin of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union denounced the leaders of the Durham Miners Association and urged the miners to turn them out. Members of the

Communist Party wearing Red Army uniforms had blocked the stairway to the platform to men too 'moderate' in their view.

Debate has often been fractious, such as when a left leadership emerged and challenged the old-guard constitutionalists, or when moderate Labour leaders attempted to sell us restraint and collaboration - as with James Callaghan's social 'con-trick', a policy which saddled us with the 'incentive scheme' that helped cripple united action in the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85. Sometimes it was foreign policy, as when George Brown was heavily heckled over 'the special relationship' with the US of Harold Wilson's government during the Vietnam war. Turning fiercely on a young miner in the crowd with a cloth cap and shoulder-length hair, Brown suggested: "If you'd have your hair cut, young man, we might be prepared to listen to you." The crowd of tens of thousands looked round at the lad, who silently and without further comment removed his cap to show a completely bald head, rendering Brown speechless among howls of laughter.

After Neil Kinnock's shameful fence-sitting and ballot-mongering during the 1984-85 strike, he was nonetheless booked to speak in 1989 - the bands marched straight by instead of playing the customary piece in the leader's honour. Worse, when he took the platform, the entire crowd of men, women and children - thousands upon thousands of them - simply turned and walked away, leaving a near empty field, and a deeply embarrassed Kinnock. It was years and years before another Labour leader dared to accept an invite. I was with Davie Hopper, the Durham NUM general secretary who sadly died a week after last year's gala, when a message was received saying Ed Miliband would be prepared to speak at the gala in 2013 - but not if Bob Crow was on the same platform. The air was blue - Dave made it crystal-clear that it is the Durham NUM who decide who speaks on our platform, not the Parliamentary Labour Party. In case you were wondering, it was Bob who spoke.

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But the gala is more than just a political meeting. It is a pageant of our collective history - the banners and their themes record the struggles since the 1700s; key players now long since gone, key



A day of looking back and looking forward

turning points of history; and our progress. Each decade a new pattern was woven into its collective tapestry, scenes from 1984-85 now join 1832, 1926 and all stops in between. As miners' children we learned our class history - it was often said that as a pit-village child you didn't get stories of 'Goldilocks and the three bears', but rather 'Churchill and the general strike'.

It is a case of great and great-great grandparents, generation on generation. I was carried to Durham on my Da's shoulders, as he had been on his. But now the link is broken - no more sons and grandsons follow their forebears down the pit or add their own pages to the miners' history. The last Durham coal mine closed in 1993 following the defeat of our last stand against John Major's and Michael Heseltine's 'final solution to the problem of the miners'. They quickly demolished headgear, colliery buildings, pit heads and heaps, and tried to wipe us from memory, tried to make us become simply part of some amorphous, undifferentiated 'new service' workforce, tried to destroy who we were.

Many thought the gala would die, for what was its purpose now? But the Durham miners and the Durham villages refused to go away, refused to abandon their class and tradition. Banner groups were formed, the bands played on: the mission of the gala - the cause of labour and the unions - remained. Under the leadership of the two Davies (Guy and Hopper) the

gala has gone from strength to strength. Inspired by its dogged determination, I christened the last book of my *Stardust and coaldust* trilogy *Ghost dancers*. The ghost dancers made up the revivalist, political-spiritual resistance of native Americans, who believed that, if they dressed in their traditional manner, held onto their own values and principles and kept on dancing and beating their drums, the white man would lose his power, the buffalo would return to the prairie, and they would be able to claim back their culture and land.

Ten years after the closure of the last Durham mine, 55,000 pit folk and their friends followed their bands and banners through the thronged street of Durham. The big drum was still bashed, the martial music rang out and miners like guardsmen proudly carried their banners high in the wind. I thought 'ghost dancers' - as long we keep parading, keep bashing those drums, stick to our values and culture, the pits will reopen, the Tories will be no more and Arthur Scargill will walk on water again. Well, perhaps not quite, but the case for deep-mined coal and the need to revive our industry and reclaim our union from the bureaucracy and the museum is as strong as ever. Somewhere on Jeremy Corbyn's long 'to do' list, we are hoping, is resurrection of the industry. No, not a million miners again - we're not stupid - but at the moment 40 million tonnes of heavily subsidised coal is imported for British manufacture and

power, when we could mine it here. Coal power is still the cheapest form of energy generation and with carbon capture it need not cost the earth.

But the gala is much more than that. It is also a place for the young 'uns for wild gaanin's on - ever since the days of the straw boater and blazer (yes, they did) and miners' girls dancing the Charleston in their flapper dresses and beads to the strains of the band. And from the days when the local press called it the Teddy Boys' Picnic and when there were mini-'Woodstocks' on the river banks and in the woods, this has always been a place where you could strut your stuff and find interesting partners.

For the kids, it is a day of funfairs, of numerous stalls, ice cream, burger and chips, and candy floss, of bingo prizes and of boating on the river. It is a day of drinking and bravery - diving into the river from the bridges with your shirt off. Once it was also a day of inter-village fights - thankfully now just a memory. But it is still a day of dancing through the streets - at the end of the day the bands play on and the crowds link arms and dance back through Durham's streets, while folk musicians recall our musical and lyrical legacy in pubs.

This year the banners will be draped in respect of Davie Hopper and Davie Guy - two men who held this union and this event together and ensured the Durham Miners Association is still a vibrant and vital part of the labour and trade union movement. My latest book (soon to be reviewed in this paper, *Red banner; green rosette*) is dedicated to them and also Dennis Murphy, the late leader of the Northumbrian Miners. They were men who led this ancient and once mighty coalfield in the greatest and most bitter battle of its existence. They ensured that this coalfield and this union would expire with all the courage and dignity our history would expect. If it had slunk off behind armoured buses, put itself at the disposal of Margaret Thatcher and collapsed into a forgotten corner of history, we would all have died of shame. With the help of those blokes we never lost that dignity - or class courage - to the last man standing. This will be plainly evident on those Durham streets.

I hope to see you in the field or along the route, or in the evenings in the bar - all in a county where we chew the cud, down some beer and raise the roof in song ●

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