

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



**Moshé Machover:
Palestine and Hebrew
self-determination**

- Letters and debate
- Corbyn's populist turn
- Labour and migration
- 'Star wars' review

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Reducing Momentum to a corpse



LETTERS



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

Animals first

During the 2016 Democratic primary, I was very much a Bernie Sanders partisan. The candidate was so much on my mind that, when I was writing my biography of Ronnie Lee, founder of the Animal Liberation Front, my subject emailed me on more than one occasion to say I'd accidentally substituted his name with that of the Vermont senator's in the manuscript draft!

Now, there was a period during the primary in which it seemed that the animal activist group, Direct Action Everywhere, was only protesting at Sanders' rallies. This made me very angry. It made me even more angry when the group was challenged on this and essentially said a pox on both Clinton and Sanders; vote for Cory Booker in 2020. While the New Jersey senator is vegan, he's very much aligned with the Clinton wing of the Democratic Party. As Frederik deBoer pointed out, Booker has "criticised unions, pushed for lower corporate taxes and undermined public schools".

I seethed over what I saw as Direct Action Everywhere's naive bourgeois liberalism. But, as time passed, I wondered if my feeling reflected an insufficient commitment to animal liberation. I found myself empathising with something the pseudonymous socialist, Carl Beijer, wrote: "Given the scale and proximity of the danger, it seems to me to follow trivially that stopping global warming warrants literally any sacrifice we could possibly make." He said: "If stopping climate change means accepting a totalitarian global autocracy that exercises absolute control over the world economy and carbon outputs with zero tolerance for democratic resistance, that is what we should endorse."

That's how I feel about ending the exploitation of animals. I believe their suffering dwarfs that of any human tragedy or injustice. After all, we slaughter more than 65 billion land animals every year, according to the Farm Animal Rights Movement. To put that in perspective, the Population Reference Bureau estimates that only 107 billion humans have ever lived. If mitigating this violence, only to a slightly greater degree than we would otherwise, means accepting an economic conservative like Booker, then that's what I believed we should endorse.

The New Jersey senator's record on animal issues seems to be fairly strong, when compared to that of his colleagues. Booker's personal veganism, while perhaps symbolic, suggests a certain degree of ideological commitment. He received the Humane Society of the United States 2011 'Humane Public Servant' award. "Booker has been a strong champion of animal protection and an effective leader in cracking down on cruelty and abuse," said Sara Amundson, executive director of the Humane Society Legislative Fund. "He has consistently stood up for the values of kindness and compassion."

While both Sanders and Clinton managed a 100% rating from HSLF in some years, Booker seems to have done this every year. Keith Ellison, a prominent Sanders ally and possible 2020 candidate, has never done it. If someone wants to make the argument that HSLF ratings don't accurately reflect politicians' record on animal issues, I'd be open to hearing it. Perhaps the ratings don't fully account for the impact of unrestrained capitalism on non-human lives. Such a conclusion would certainly simplify things for me, a progressive animal activist, looking toward the next presidential primary.

This seems to miss the point though. Why is the relative commitment of centrists and progressives to improving the lives of animals even up for debate? Why isn't animal liberation - hell, even animal welfare - a core progressive value? There's a long history, from Élisée Reclus to Angela Davis, of the left extending its emancipatory vision to include non-humans. Let's just hope that when 2020 rolls around, progressive animal activists aren't forced to make a terrible choice.

Jon Hochschartner
USA

In a nutshell

Eddie Ford asks, "What the hell is coal, anyway?" ('Keep the guards on board', December 22).

Coal is an organic natural solar battery, which supplies more than half of all power in the world. It is capable of being used 'full strength', if you like; it can be used as smokeless coke after extracting the gas, which can be used separately; it can be used as source of oil fuel and its components are used in everything from soap to nylon, to plastic and much else.

More particularly, unless Eddie's driverless cars and planes and trains are made of cocoa, they will not be built without the utility of coal, since you can't make steel without it. You will struggle to make cement without coal or make aluminium or a hundred other essential materials.

Coal reserves in the world will outlast oil and gas by thousands of years. Clean coal technologies will be developed despite the political hostility toward coal and, more importantly, the men who mine it.

That, in an anthracite nutshell, is coal, bonny lad!

David John Douglass
South Shields

Backstabber

Len McCluskey of Unite is preparing to back-stab Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell. No fighter for the oppressed working class, he is simply an opportunist, bureaucratic manoeuvrer, who is ready to sell everything for short-term benefits - mainly to himself and his fellow bureaucrats, whom he represents. No significant difference in principles separates him from the GMB, Unison or Usdaw union bureaucrats.

And he is again promoting his initial preference, Andy Burnham, to replace Corbyn. It's no accident that he has no faith in his own membership. The April 2011 'Cuts too far, too fast' high-visibility vests are his real plan to save capitalism's profit margins and his disgraceful promotion of immigration controls is again on show in a recent *Mirror* article, when he argued that the movement must "get its narrative right on free movement", because worker must be pitted against worker to defend the corrupt system from which he benefits so hugely personally.

The last substantial argument against Ian Allinson to replace him as Unite general secretary falls with this article. The principled rank-and-file candidate - who supported Corbyn while McCluskey was supporting Burnham, until overturned by his own executive - is now the only choice for all rank-and-file socialists and militants. What an appalling political stance to take!

Gerald Downing
Socialist Fight

Sanctions

Rugby has been piloting the introduction of universal credit, the government's flagship welfare reform, since 2013. Having talked to claimants outside Rugby job centre throughout that three-year period, and with examples below in the lead-up to Christmas, it is clear to us that it's putting people into severe poverty, and is simply not working.

As more and more local people are being pushed onto universal credit, cases of hardship caused by it have multiplied. Part of the problem is the harsh sanctions, when benefits are stopped for several weeks, or even months, without discussion. This leads to rent arrears and other debts in order to stay alive.

A further problem is the insistence of applying for everything, including work, online. Around 20% of people do not have internet access at home, and many of them are not computer-literate, through no fault of their own. If there's a problem and you have to use the universal credit phone line, it can cost the claimant 45p per minute on a mobile and 12p on a landline. A care worker phoning on behalf of clients told us she spent nearly two hours on the phone to help one resident, and that the average call lasts 45 minutes.

Claimants don't want to be named in fear of further punitive action by the department for work and pensions (DWP). We met a 50-year-old woman, whose sanction included her rent no longer being paid because she failed to provide enough evidence of her 17-year-old daughter's apprenticeship, even though she receives no benefits at all for her daughter. As a result, she was being harassed by her landlord. Poverty was forcing her to use the local food bank for the first time.

A 57-year-old male amputee had just had his employment support allowance stopped overnight by a phone call informing him he had to apply for universal credit instead. He was told he would have no further benefits until he had been interviewed. This included stopping his housing benefit, which resulted in serious rent arrears. He has now been told he will be interviewed in the middle of January, nearly two months after his benefits were stopped. He was told he could apply for a loan if he does so online, attends the job centre with proof of identity, and gets an appointment with a 'work coach'. What does he live on in the meantime? And how does he repay the loan without falling into even deeper poverty?

A middle-aged woman was sanctioned, and had no income for several weeks, forcing her to pawn personal jewellery. The DWP claimed not to have received a reply to a letter the local postman saw her post. Another woman who had had a nervous breakdown was told she had to attend the job centre weekly and go on courses, even though her doctor had written asking the DWP to give her 'space and time' to recover.

One man, recently separated and living with a friend, was told that one of his "universal credit commitments" was to find a place of his own or face sanctions. He was also asked to provide a sick note from his doctor, for which the DWP is now insisting that he, the claimant, must pay the £20 charged by the doctor.

These cases will be just the tip of the iceberg, as more claimants are forced onto universal credit. The government intends that the transition will be completed within the next 12 months. If that happens - and evidence from Rugby's pilot suggests that is highly unlikely - poverty will become epidemic. Instead, the government should admit its flagship reform has failed, withdraw it and not allow any benefit claimant to fall below the poverty line.

On another subject, it is disgraceful that the government is going ahead with its plans to cut a further £30 billion from national health service budgets through 'sustainability and transformation plans' (STPs), and it is unbelievable that local NHS bodies refuse consultation on what is being cut.

The NHS is in severe crisis according to doctors, nurses and the International Red Cross amongst others. Patients are

increasingly being kept on trolleys, with lengthening waits for hospital beds, ambulances queuing outside accident and emergency departments and record numbers of patients facing long delays once they do get inside. Doctors warn lives are being put at risk. This situation will worsen if we get a spell of serious bad weather.

The Rugby Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition has been trying since August to obtain information about health plans for Coventry and Warwickshire, but none of our queries have been answered, despite continual promises that there will be "local engagement and, where required, consultation". Now we hear a local newspaper has also been refused information about the local STP.

This is our NHS, and we must leave no stone unturned until we establish the truth about proposed health cuts, whilst we continue to campaign for improved funding to maintain and develop all NHS services.

Pete McLaren
Rugby Tusc

STP baloney

Last night I went along to a public meeting, which was supposed to be a discussion about the NHS England five-year Sustainability and Transformation Plan for my home region of Cornwall and the Scilly Isles. Regrettably, my very worst pre-existing doubts and fears were largely confirmed. But let me explain.

In theory or as a concept, STP represents very sensible, very good, highly desirable - in fact absolutely essential and urgently needed - change for the NHS and other directly associated care providers all along the pipeline. That pipeline is made up of multiple entities, which currently operate somewhat separately or certainly are funded/budgeted that way. Moreover, that funding being provided by and thus 'channelled' from two distinct sources - either from central government or from local authorities.

The main entities involved are as follows: 'acute and urgent' care in hospitals; 'primary' care in GP surgeries plus local/community hospitals; social services care and other support; state-run nursing and care homes; community/home-based nursing; health visitors and healthcare educators/

lifestyle and dietary advisors; physio/occupational and other therapists. All with sub-divisions based upon adult/child and mental health needs rather than 'physical', amongst others.

I'm no ruddy expert, as they say, but it's blazingly clear to me this unavoidably long and complex list of healthcare 'entities' needs to be fundamentally restructured, reorganised, rationally and logically coordinated, fully and effectively integrated - yes, the whole caboodle properly and genuinely socialised plus 100% correctly and intelligently funded.

But here's the thing, comrades. In all of their happy-smiling-faces, pastel-coloured and corporate 'marketing-speak' glory, the STP 'Draft outline business case' documents and brochures and 'Have your say' feedback questionnaires, as handed out at the public meeting, were both visibly and categorically prefaced on each and every relevant page with the following clear and purposeful statement: "All health and care services must be delivered within the budget available and within the resources available."

As things stand, there is a £265 million "overspend" forecast for the upcoming five-year period in our Cornwall and Scilly Isles region concerned. Do I need to say any more? Self-evidently, this entire STP process is both premised upon and thus wholly dependent upon making "savings" - ie, making more cutbacks beyond those already implemented.

To state the obvious, all of those austerity measures have in essence been made necessary by the collapse/implosion of the global banking system, and the subsequent bail-out from the 'public purse' - aka we working citizens and taxpaying suckers.

In summary then, comrades. There are no real solutions available or even possible within capitalism. The only thing to be achieved will be merry-go-rounds of rejigging, underwritten by surreptitious agendas for either partial or full privatisation - and certainly all of it following a smokescreen-cum-massaging process of 'public consultation, engagement and feedback' and 'Your opinion matters' baloney.

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

Fighting fund

With a flourish

Readers will be pleased to know that our fighting fund ended 2016 with a flourish - £579 was raised in the final week of the year to take our December haul to a magnificent £1,950 - all but making up for the £282 deficit in November.

Of course our monthly target is £1,750 and we should aim to reach it every single month in 2017. And I must say that a number of comrades set a fine example at the end of 2016 - not least comrade BK, who transferred £250 to our account (not to mention his partner, RD, who threw in an extra £50). Other generous donors were AC, who transferred £100 via his online account, plus DS (£50) and TB (£30), who both made use of our PayPal facility. On top of that there were seven standing orders totalling £99.

So far in the first month of the new year 23 comrades have ensured that their donations reached our account - either by transfer or standing order. Amongst them were CG and SW (£30 each), FK,

BK and GD (£25), and DL, II and DV, who all contributed £20. Then there were two cheques - £50 from KT and £20 from RD (added to his subscription). But a running total of £412 is somewhat lower than I had hoped for - now we need to step things up.

This is, of course, the first issue of 2017 - three weeks after the last one of 2016. But our online readership has remained pretty high despite there being no new edition - a total of 7,875 visitors logged on to our website over that period. We aim to ensure that those figures increase much more over the next 12 months, as we continue our central focus on the need for a principled, united Marxist party. But for that we need your continuing support, including financial support. Let's make sure we hit our £1,750 target each and every month ●

Robbie Rix

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

OBITUARY

As good as his word

John Berger, November 5 1926-January 2 2017



John Berger: looking back

Art critic, novelist, writer and academic John Berger died last week, aged 90. Amid the media accolades, Suzanne Moore writes an opinion piece for *The Guardian* entitled 'I do not recognise the stereotype of John Berger as a dour Marxist - his work embodied hope'. Though the headline is provocative, Moore's piece does remember the man as kind, interested and warm.

Berger originally trained as a painter at the Chelsea School of Art, but stopped painting in the late 40s, as the post-war nuclear threat seemed to him to render his work trivial. Instead he threw his energies into writing. He managed to enrage the art and media establishment by his pro-Soviet stance, as well as his criticism of big figures in the art world, such as Henry Moore, Francis Bacon and Pablo Picasso (whose work he felt further mystified art). Berger wrote extensively throughout his career - not just criticism, but fiction and other non-fiction works. In 1972 he won the Man Booker prize for his novel, *G*. His 1975 book, *The seventh man*, focuses on the plight of the urban poor.

Berger's warmth comes across in his most well known work, *Ways of seeing*. Unlike contemporary programmes of the time, this 1972 BBC four-part series of films-turned-essays was not presented by a stuffy old man in an art gallery with a suit and a pipe. Filmed in an electronics workshop, Berger, sporting an Aztec patterned shirt, talks to the viewers at home in a laid-back, conversational manner - the aesthetics of the production have a dynamism that transcends the very 1970s look. Berger places advertising images next to still lifes and soft porn beside nudes, in order to make the viewer interrogate the image, the artist and the subject. His aim was to demystify western European painting from its holy status (where criticism's purpose was to help us pray) and instead find a different way of seeing, if you will. It is no wonder that critics like Kenneth Clark and Stephen Spender disliked him.

The BBC was not confident about airing the series, scheduling the first part for late in the evening. However, following low turn-off rates compared with similar programmes, they agreed to screen the following three parts earlier in the evening. The first episode dealt with the ability to reproduce art using technology. It could arguably be seen as a 30-minute 70s film adaptation of Walter Benjamin's 1935 essay, 'The

work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction'. Though most of the episode focuses on painting, one of the opening sequences is from Dziga Vertov's 1929 film, *Man with a movie camera* - an embodiment of the avant-garde vision for technology's role in making dynamic and accessible artwork. Berger looks at the reproduced work through the camera or screen and echoes Benjamin's argument that the two are not the same work of art. It exists in the context of viewers' homes, framed in their wallpaper. It is cropped to tell part of the story. The light that transmits the image to the viewer's television flickers and moves, the voiceover opines, the crescendo of the mood music emotes - not to mention the contextualisation of the sounds and images that the viewer has flipped from watching on the other channel.

There is a scene in which Berger, making a point about demystifying the work of art, meets with a group of primary school-aged children, whom he shows a Caravaggio painting. Going back to Moore's article, here we see the warmth of Berger's character, as he interacts with these kids. They readily engage with the work and offer their insights. There is debate among them with regard to the central figure in the painting, who some think might be Jesus. They are also divided over the figure's gender. The skin is smooth, there is not facial hair or stubble and the features could be of either sex, the children argue. Berger tells the viewers that they have picked up on something the critics do not mention, putting the gender ambiguity of the character down to Caravaggio's own homosexuality - a conclusion that might be a little more controversial in these highly triggered days of identity politics.

While we are on the topic of the politics of identity, the second episode of *Ways of seeing* is a critique of the depiction of women in western European artwork. Berger criticises the hypocrisy of the male gaze: the subject, reproduced for the pleasure of the male viewer, is nevertheless condemned for her promiscuity or vanity. He comments on the way women, from childhood, learn to view themselves and learn to be viewed. The notion that we are always being surveyed and therefore, with this in mind, we watch ourselves being watched:

Men act and women appear. Men

look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women, but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object - and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.

After about 20 minutes, it appears to occur to Berger that, while he has been articulating this position, not a single woman has participated. As this point he gives over the rest of the episode to a group of women to discuss the topic, while he listens and smokes.

Berger also discussed the frequent purpose of art criticism: in his view, to mystify and obfuscate the artwork, to imbue it with a sense of religiosity - or to secure its market value. He commented on art galleries being guarded at night as though they were banks. However, he does not discuss, as Marx does in *Capital*, the peculiar nature of the price of the work of art, which can fluctuate significantly due to fashion and has little to do with the amount of labour time employed.

Berger was interested in the way that western European art was used to show status. Still life painting showing delicacies in abundance; the depiction of fat livestock for eating and strong horses for riding - opulent *objet d'art*. Portraits provide ample opportunity to show wealth, either directly through clothing and surroundings or reinforcing status by posing as biblical or other mythological characters. Berger also noted that not even landscape painting was free from this agenda. The rolling fields are not necessarily a celebration of the beauty of the countryside, but rather a declaration that 'This is my property - keep out or I'll shoot you'. But, while the aristocracy or the bourgeoisie used oil painting to demonstrate status, Berger noted that they did so to show what they had, if not at whose expense it was acquired. He juxtaposed this with contemporary advertising, which gives the illusion that, while what is being offered is open to everyone, the reality is that it is achievable by only a few.

Berger once wrote: "I would never compromise my opposition to bourgeois culture and society." He was as good as his word ●

Sarah Black

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday January 15, 5pm: 'Palestine and the right of the Hebrew people to self-determination'. Speaker: Moshé Machover.

Sunday January 22, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Study of Ralph Miliband's *Parliamentary socialism*. This meeting: chapter 9 ('The climax of Labourism'), section 4: 'From consolidation to defeat'.

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

Hunt must go

Thursday, January 12, 6pm: Emergency protest, department of health, Richmond House, 79 Whitehall, London SW1.

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

Corbyn: where next?

Saturday January 14, 12 noon: Discussion, the boardroom, RMT HQ, 39 Chalton Street, London NW1. Speaker: Alex Nunns, author of *The candidate: Jeremy Corbyn's improbable path to power*.

Organised by Labour Briefing: <http://labourbriefing.squarespace.com/home>.

Stop arms supplies to Saudi Arabia

Sunday January 15, 2.30pm: Meeting, St John's church, St John's Road, Sparkbrook, Birmingham B11.

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

Foreign policy under Trump

Monday January 16, 5.30pm: Public meeting and discussion, Alington House, 4 North Bailey, Durham DH1. Speaker: Chris Nineham.

Organised by Durham Stop the War: www.facebook.com/durhamstopthewar.

Stop the arms trade

Tuesday January 17, 7pm: Quarterly meeting, Quakers Meeting House, 7 Victoria Terrace, Edinburgh EH1.

Organised by Edinburgh Campaign Against the Arms Trade: www.facebook.com/edinburghcaat.

Yemen - Britain's secret war

Tuesday January 17, 6pm: Public meeting, the Old Firestation, 84 Mayton Street, London N7. 'Why Jeremy Corbyn is right to stand up to Saudi Arabia'.

Organised by North London Stop the War: www.facebook.com/nlondon.stwc.7.

Brexit: what demands?

Thursday January 19, 7pm: People's Question Time, St Pancras Church, Euston Road, London NW1. Speakers include: Emily Thornberry MP, Amelia Womack (Green Party), Kevin Courtney (National Union of Teachers), Steve Turner (Unite), Malia Bouattia (National Union of Students), Lindsey German (People's Assembly).

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

No to Trump

Protest against the new president

Friday January 20, 5pm: US Embassy, 24 Grosvenor Square, London W1.

Friday January 20, 5.30pm: The Fountains, St Augustine's Parade, Bristol BS1.

Friday January 20, 5.30pm: Newcastle city centre, details tbc.

Organised by Stand up to Racism: www.standuptoracism.org.uk.

Defend Corbyn

Friday January 20, 7pm: Meeting, Isabel Blackman Centre, Winding Street, Hastings. Speaker: Alex Nunns, author of *The candidate: Jeremy Corbyn's improbable path to power*.

Organised by Momentum Hastings: www.facebook.com/MomentumHGS.

Doves in flak jackets

Saturday January 21, 2pm to 9pm: Theatre, poetry and politics, Friends Meeting House, 37 Scotts Road, Stourbridge. Reservation of places essential: 07791 210687 or via Journeyman Theatre.

Organised by Journeyman Theatre: www.journeymentheatre.com.

Palestine Solidarity Campaign

Saturday January 21, 9.30am to 5pm: AGM, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

Leveller revolution

Tuesday January 24, 6pm: Book launch with John Rees, Newcastle - address tbc.

Event page: www.facebook.com/events/1168171913217979.

Organised by Counterfire: www.counterfire.org.

Ireland and the Soviet Union

Thursday January 26, 7pm: Book launch, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Michael Quinn's *Irish-Soviet diplomatic and friendship relations, 1917-1991*.

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

No to war

Wednesday February 1, 7.30pm: Meeting, Friends Meeting House, 4 Lechlade Road, Faringdon. Speaker: Mayer Wakefield (Stop the War Coalition).

Organised by Faringdon Peace Group:

www.faringdonpeacegroup.org.uk/index.html.

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.

MOMENTUM

Reduced to a corpse?

We knew it was coming, says **Carla Roberts** of Labour Party Marxists, but the sheer cynicism of Jon Lansman's coup is staggering

Once team Momentum announced its "online survey" of all members and supporters, the result was a forgone conclusion. In plebiscites the dictator gets to ask the question and barring accidents they get the result they want. Not only were the questions loaded, they were also disgracefully backed up by Jeremy Corbyn, Clive Lewis and Diane Abbott. Topping it all it was team Momentum which did the count ... a wonderful opportunity to gerrymander.

So, with a victorious 80.6% voting for OMOV, at a stroke, the national committee, steering committee and regional committees were abolished. Now, there will only be a powerless 'official' Momentum conference and members have to agree to accept the constitution and join the Labour Party (even though many have been already barred or expelled because of their activity in support of Momentum).

Jon Lansman's coup de grace was a long time in coming ... and, frankly, we are surprised it took him so long. Even though he has handed ownership of 'Momentum Data (Services) Ltd' to his ally Christine Shawcroft, he is still in charge of 'Jeremy for Labour Ltd'. In other words legal control of Momentum lies not with its membership nor its elected committees. No, it lies with its tiny group of shareholders (very capitalistic).

If Momentum were a film, we would say that it is now firmly in its final, third act. The witch-hunt of Jackie Walker, vice-chair of Momentum, could be described of the 'inciting incident' - the moment that set in action a narrative that almost inevitably led to the current situation. Lansman was flexing his bureaucratic muscles and, rather than defending the vice-chair from the ludicrous charge of anti-Semitism, he jumped onto the witch-hunting bandwagon and had her demoted.

Jon Lansman:
principle of property
trumps principle of
democracy

That was the end of act 1 for Momentum. What followed was a second act that felt much longer than the two months it actually lasted and which saw the action move up and down like a yo-yo:

- First, Lansman cancelled the Momentum national committee meeting that was due to take place on November 5.

- Then the small leftwing minority on the steering committee under the leadership of Matt Wrack (leader of the Fire Brigades Union) fought back and encouraged NC members to go ahead and meet on the same day.

- This and an intervention by John McDonnell MP to "sort this mess out" led to a "unanimous statement" of the SC, which forced Lansman to allow another meeting of the NC to take place on December 3. But, despite his best efforts to stuff this meeting with people who are on board with his vision of transforming Momentum into nothing more than a well-financed phone bank, a majority voted - just - to hold a democratic conference, which would see real-life delegates discuss real motions and, crucially, agree on a constitution. A conference arrangements committee (CAC) with a small pro-democracy majority was set up which invited branches to submit motions and select delegates.

- Lansman did not take this defeat lying down, however. A media onslaught followed, in which Paul Mason, Owen Jones and the "naive" Laura Murray declared that 'old Trots' were holding Momentum hostage.

- Lansman then sent out the "online survey" to all members and supporters, which was stuffed full of (mis)leading questions. It is actually amazing that under those conditions 12.5% of participants ticked the box opting for decision-making by delegates. (As an aside, we know the survey was also sent to the well over 150,000 contacts marked as Momentum supporters, but their responses are not listed - presumably because the turnout was much worse than the 40.4% of members who replied.)¹

- The CAC ploughed on and announced on December 21 that a two-day conference would take place on February 18-19 and encouraged branches to elect delegates and vote on motions.

Final act?

Let us now look at the climactic action that has propelled us into the third - and no doubt final - act of Momentum's existence as a potentially useful site for the exchange of ideas.

At 6pm on January 10, the CAC announced that, although it was "unable to get in touch with the steering committee" and was having its ability to communicate to members delayed, disrupted and censored by Jon Lansman's team

Momentum, a conference venue had been booked. For financial and organisational reasons, this was now scheduled as a one-day event on Sunday February 19 in Rugby. The CAC encouraged all members to "book transport now".

At 7.39pm on the same day, Jon Lansman sent an email to the Momentum steering committee,² in which he asked the committee to impose on the organisation its first constitution, which would abolish the SC and all other Momentum structures and committees.

At 8.54pm he

declared in another email to SC members that he had now received "a majority" in favour of his proposal (ie, his six allies out of the 11 SC members had replied) and that therefore the committee no longer existed.

All national and regional structures in Momentum were abolished at that moment. The conference arrangements committee was declared non-existent. All online discussion forums for regional committees on www.loomio.org were to be deleted and branches' access to the Momentum database severely restricted.

At 9.01pm all Momentum members received an email informing them about the decision, which, so claims Lansman, was the direct result of the survey he sent out in December:

80.6% of respondents said that key decisions should be taken by 'one member, one vote', rather than by delegates at regional and national conferences and committees (12.5%). 79.3% of respondents said all members should have a say in electing their representatives, as opposed to national representatives being elected by delegates from local groups (16.2%).

Following this decisive response, the steering committee voted to introduce a constitution for Momentum to deliver the kind of action-focused, campaigning organisation that our members want.

So, let's get this straight: 80.6% said they wanted to have a say *on all key decisions* - so the best way to implement this is to ignore them all and just impose a deeply undemocratic constitution on them (see William Sarsfield's article opposite). This is pure cynicism.

With an amazing power of foresight, weeks before the survey was sent out, Paul Mason had already announced on the *Daily politics show* on December 8 a key plank of this so-called constitution: the purge from Momentum of all those troublesome lefties who have been expelled from the Labour Party.³

He claimed, wrongly, that in order for Momentum to qualify as an affiliated organisation of the Labour Party its members had to be current individual members of the party. This is clearly not the case: members of affiliated organisations - eg, trade unions - are entitled to become "affiliated members" of Labour, who enjoy fewer rights than full members.⁴

No, this has nothing to do with trying to implement the results of Lansman's deeply flawed survey or even plans to transform Momentum into a Labour affiliate. This is a witch-hunt against the troublesome left within the organisation. Again and again, it has obstructed his plans to strangle the political life out of Momentum in order to preserve it as a mere fan club for Jeremy Corbyn: a money-heavy, democracy-light organisation that could be used as a massive phone bank for this or that Lansman-approved campaign or a mobilising tool when the next coup against Corbyn happens.

The more naive observers of the current crisis have pleaded for Jeremy Corbyn to step in and bring Lansman to heel. Nick Wrack demands to know on Facebook "who in the leader's office" Lansman has consulted. But, while Corbyn might not have been

involved in plotting the finer details of this coup, there can be no doubt that he will be on board with the basic trajectory. His recent email to Momentum members pushing Lansman's survey has demonstrated this reality.

Neither Lansman nor Corbyn have any interest in Momentum becoming a vibrant, decision-making, member-led organisation that could fight for democracy and socialism. Any such organisation would undoubtedly embarrass the Labour leader sooner or later. A truly democratic conference would see motions criticising this or that particular attempt of Corbyn's to become a "populist", which has, for example, seen him zig-zagging over the question of immigration, Trident and Brexit. Corbyn will not be happy about the negative press reports, of course - but he is on board when it comes to stamping out Momentum as a vibrant organisation.

Take it or leave it

The uneasy peace settlement in Momentum has now come to an abrupt end. The knives are out. Lansman has declared that, yes, there will be a conference, but it will be organised by his own personal company, 'Momentum Campaign (Services) Ltd', will take place on February 18 and will hear "no motions". Instead, his "conference" will concentrate on "workshops" and "exciting speakers" and will no doubt look a lot like 'The World Transformed' event at the 2016 Labour Party annual conference.

Lansman has made it clear that in his view there is no room for manoeuvre, no space for normal members or branches to amend his 'constitution' or challenge any of his decisions: "If you consent to Momentum's constitution, you do not have to do anything. Simply continue paying your membership fees. However, if you wish to opt out, you can email to cancel your membership."

A happy ending to this drama seems unlikely and a split the most likely outcome. Credit to the CAC, which - as we go to press - continues to plan for its own conference on February 19, with motions being discussed and decisions taken democratically (though the details are still understandably fuzzy).

Labour Party Marxists supports this fightback. We would urge Momentum members and supporters to attend both events and fight for democracy, socialism and transparency on the two consecutive days.

Jon Lansman might have won this particular battle, but he is not going to ride into the sunset with a smiling Corbyn on his back. Without a strategy of fighting to transform the Labour Party into a real party of labour - a strategy that would require challenging Corbyn when he goes wrong, rather than giving him *carte blanche* - Momentum is nothing but an empty shell that is likely to run out of members and money before long. Whether 'The end' for Momentum can become the beginning for something better remains to be seen ●

Notes

1. https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/momentum/pages/939/attachments/original/1484068264/Momentum_members_survey_16-17.pdf?1484068264.
2. You can read the full text here <http://socialistnetwork.org.uk/2017/01/10/an-email-from-jon-lansman-to-the-momentum-steering-committee>.
3. <http://labourparty marxists.org.uk/a-false-narrative>.
4. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_society_\(Labour_Party\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_society_(Labour_Party)).





Labour left should embrace radical democracy, not kill it

Contemptible document

William Sarsfield of Labour Party Marxists looks at the new Lansman constitution

I really hope that readers will find the time to plough through the near 4,000 words of convoluted sub-clauses and provisos in the latest Lansman constitution. Like mainstream news outlets such as the *Daily Mirror*, *The Guardian* and *The Times*, the online Labour List site parrots the official spin from team Momentum that the so-called “member shake-up” is primarily about a Momentum move to seek affiliation to Labour. As an afterthought, it mentions that “The Corbynista group last night told its 20,000 members it had introduced a constitution” - which is just about accurate.¹ This important development has simply been announced as a *fait accompli* and, as such, the manner of its arrival suits the contents of the crassly bureaucratic ethos of the document itself.

Jon Lansman has evidently grown weary of even the pretence of democracy in ‘his’ organisation. This constitution was sent out amongst a raft of papers on January 10 after, Lansman informs us, “consultation with a number of others in Momentum, the leader’s office and trade unions that have supported Jeremy Corbyn”. He is explicit that it means “[winding] up the steering committee, the national committee and the conference arrangements committee with immediate effect” and, “though the conference would go ahead” on February 18, it would be bound by the “new rules”, which mean that “no motions would be considered”. In effect, ownership rights have, for the moment, triumphed over democratic rights. If you “consent” to this coup, “you don’t have to do anything”, Lansman assures us: thoughtfully however, he supplies an email address to fire your resignation off to “if you

wish to opt out.”

The comrade clearly wants some of us to sling our hooks. His covering letter underlines that future Momentum membership requires “all members to be [Labour] party members” - in contrast to the February 7 2016 communication from team Momentum that told us that the organisation was open to “Labour members, affiliated supporters, and supporters of the aims and values of the Labour Party, who are not members of other political parties”.

The repetition of the same narrowed view of the Momentum membership is reiterated at different points in the imposed constitution. In a sub-section titled ‘Ceasing to be a member’, we are informed that that you will have been “deemed to have resigned” from the organisation if you have not “[joined] the Labour Party by July 1 2017”; or you are out of Momentum if you “[cease] to be a member of the Labour Party” at any point (including if you are expelled by the witch-hunting right, presumably); or if you “[act] inconsistently with Labour Party membership” (like perhaps call a rightwing scab like John Mann MP “a rightwing scab”, perhaps?)

Regular readers of the *LPM Bulletin* should recall that we have previously featured the nasty comments of Lansman fan Laura Murray - herself a Stalinist chip off the old Andrew Murray block - who wrote that, “Given that Nick Wrack, Jill Mountford and Jackie Walker are, in turn, blocked, expelled and suspended from being members of the Labour Party, it is unsurprising that they care little for reforming and democratising the Labour Party.” We wondered at the time whether “we see here the beginnings of an attempt to

oust those members of Momentum who have been expelled and suspended from the Labour Party?”² Lansman has now answered the query, we think.

The ‘Labour members only’ criterion makes another appearance under the section describing the operation of the new leadership body, the “national coordinating group” (NCG). This “shall consist of Momentum members who confirm (and can provide evidence on request) that they are current Labour Party members” and “confirm their agreement to the rules of Momentum”. What, *all* the rules? *All* the time?

In addition to abolishing existing democratic structures (such as they are), the announcement of a new leadership body effectively negates any real democratic control from below. Jackie Walker estimates that just 12 out of the 31 people on the NCG would be rank-and-file members - the rest would be comprised of MPs, councillors and union delegates. Her figures might well be right, although the Lansman constitution is so dense and convoluted in places it is difficult to be sure what the final numbers would be. Her basic point is spot on, however.

The active base of Momentum - members organised in branches, running campaigns, discussing politics - is drastically underrepresented in the Lansman constitution. The entire country is to be carved into just three “divisions”: “the North and Scotland”, “Midlands, Wales and the West” and “the South”, with each of these allocated just four reps each. That is, a total of just 12 comrades.

This is farcical.

For instance, there is a *national question* in Scotland that does not find a reflection in Sunderland. The

issues of London - the capital city and political hub of British life - have a rather different dynamic to those in Dover. Cardiff is not St Ives.

Lansman’s actual motivations are clear, especially when we scan the list of the other groups that will - by right - be represented on the NCG. There will be:

- six places for (current, we assume) affiliated unions
- four Labour members who are elected to some official post - eg, MPs, members of the Welsh or Scottish Assemblies (even police commissioners, we are told)
- “up to four additional members”, who may be coopted at the discretion of the NCG - although the criteria for what is, in any organisation, an exceptional action are not made clear. I think readers might be able to hazard a guess, however ...
- one place each from the Scottish group, Campaign for Socialism, and Welsh Labour Grassroots (voted for by the membership in those regions? We are not told).
- four places from other “affiliated organisations, as defined in rules 11 (iii) and (iv) ...” Thirteen such groups (including, confusingly, the Campaign for Socialism and Welsh Labour Grassroots) are actually listed, which begs the question of how those four places will be determined. Some other interesting organisations that “may affiliate” to Momentum, as the document coyly puts it, include “The World Transformed” - the event organised by the central team Momentum at September’s Labour Party conference; Lansman’s blog platform³, Left Futures; Red Labour; Christine Shawcroft’s Labour Briefing Cooperative, Compass, etc.

In the original constitutional proposals that I critiqued in a previous

article, I mocked the absurd suggestion that “In addition to the 12 [steering committee] members, on a three-month rotational basis, three members of Momentum, drawn at random, will be invited to join the SC.”⁴ This idea is developed further in Lansman’s actual constitution, only this time the lucky rank-and-file lottery winners (50 of them now) are to be parked in a “members’ council” (MC) rather than them cluttering up the *actual* leadership.

Instead, the MC will be gifted the “opportunity to directly participate in the development of activities, resources and campaigns for the use of Momentum members and groups”, while the “format of this engagement will be defined by the NCG, having regard to the requirements of the individual members of the council”. Under no circumstances will the MC “be required to make decisions on the operation of the constitution or administration of the organisation, this being the remit of the NCG, but it may review decisions of the NCG and the administration of the organisation” and “make recommendations and provide advice on the basis of its findings”.

There is much more to dissect in this contemptible document, but if there is one proposal in it that reveals the real, thoroughly anti-democratic agenda of Lansman and co it is this “members’ council” - a cynical Potemkin village-type stunt ●

Notes

1. <https://labourlist.org>, January 11 2017.
 2. ‘The nuclear option’ *Weekly Worker* December 8 2016.
 3. www.leftfutures.org.
 4. ‘Fit for a dictator’ *Weekly Worker* December 15 2016.

LABOUR

Yet more retreats

Backpedalling will not save Jeremy Corbyn, argues **Paul Demarty**



Jeremy Corbyn: isolated and confused

Back in the distant past of, say, 2013, it was common to hear among the few huddled faithful of the hard Labour left a particular refrain.

The press in those days, it will be remembered, used to bang on relentlessly about how useless was the party's leader, 'Red' Ed Miliband; he was a charisma vacuum, but - more to the point - far too full-blooded a 'socialist' to win an election. He needed to get out of his 'comfort zone' and appeal to the 'aspirations' of 'middle class voters', etc, etc, *ad infinitum*. The left (including, to my memory, John McDonnell) retorted that the problem was the exact opposite: Miliband was *too* worried about appearing leftwing. Was not most of the British population anti-war in sentiment? Did poll after poll not reveal overwhelming support for the nationalisation of the railways? Far from being a necessary sacrifice, firm left social democratic policies would have to be adopted in order to avoid electoral calamity.

To some of us, of course, such arguments smacked of naivety, and we rather feel grimly vindicated just now. For the polls are hardly great reading for supporters of the now thoroughly left-Labourite leadership. The Tories are 10 points clear in terms of voting intentions, and only 14% - according to YouGov - think Jeremy Corbyn cuts it as a potential prime minister.¹

The complaint is often sounded that the constant sniping of Blairites and media lies are getting in the way; while true enough, this is rather like the apocryphal memo from some World War I general or other to the effect that the offensive had gone just fine, and would have been successful if the enemy hadn't shot all our boys to death with machine guns. That is what the media and their parliamentary *agents*

provocateurs should be expected to do, after all.

There is therefore a scramble for a 'plan B': something - anything - that could turn the tide. In the last dregs of 2016, *The Guardian* revealed that Corbyn's close advisors were preparing to relaunch him as - wait for it - a populist. 2016, after all, was a pretty good year for 'populists'. Indeed, that fact meets far more agreement than even the definition of the word 'populist', which seems sometimes to be an all-purpose amalgam containing anyone you disagree with - a tent always big enough for one's immediate enemies and Adolf Hitler, but conveniently too small for oneself.

What does this populist turn entail? Not overly much, according to *The Guardian*. Corbyn is "expected to appear more frequently on television"; Labour has "retained the polling firm BMG and the advertising agency Krow Communications to professionalise its approach to campaigning". Even by the prevailing standards, that stretches the definition of 'populist'. In fact, it looks like exactly the sort of centrally commanded, media-led strategy vulnerable to subversion by enemy agents.

If we're going to play at populism, anyway, Corbyn could do worse than take a leaf out of Donald Trump's book. How did The Donald treat the media on the campaign trail? Why, at his infamous rallies, he perp-walked them into an exposed cage at the back of the hall, breaking off mid-tirade to lambast the scum, animals, liars betraying the nation on TV and in the newspapers, as his admiring followers screamed in jubilant hatred.

Now that's what I call a media strategy - and it is no worse than the confined hacks deserved. For Corbyn's part, alas, even the very notion of a

relaunch smells less like Trumpian populism and more like the apparatus politics of the long vanquished Jeb Bush - who, as his primary campaign founder, gained an exclamation mark ("Jeb!") and lost all credibility.

Movement towards Trumpism has come in an altogether less pleasant aspect, with the Christmas period seeing a great deal of pressure on Corbyn to address the question of immigration one way or another. As the Brexit panto lurched from farce to farce, the great question facing the nation has become: access to the single market even at the cost (NB: the *cost*) of free movement, or stricter border controls at the cost of World Trade Organisation rules governing European trade?

In the end, Corbyn has indicated that he will abandon his commitment to open borders with Europe, although the emphasis in Labour's Brexit policy is towards maintaining "full access" to the single market, which is apparently not the same as *membership* of the single market (the politics of Brexit are replete with such distinctions without differences). There is no way to dress this up as other than a shameful retreat; and, though the political content is toxic enough, the point in this connection is that it is a *retreat* and, far from looking like a man who will stick to principle, Corbyn appears as one who will listen to the pollsters and tell whatever lies he is told to.

Unite election

In fairness, not all the pressure has come from rightists and enemies. Len McCluskey has chosen this moment, of all times, to repeat his old trick of lengthening his reign as Unite general secretary by calling a surprise election, which brought out Gerard Coyne as a rightwing candidate. Coyne's line of attack

has been on the immigration question; not wanting to be seen as soft and 'out of touch', still less overly attached to Corbyn, McCluskey has gone on a tough-talking spree. Corbyn can afford to piss off the rightwing press, and in reality he can take his knocks from the Blairites - but he cannot do so without the support of Unite. All this leads us, inevitably, to the problem of how to vote in Unite's general secretary ballot.

Gerry Coyne, for reasons that ought to be obvious, is out, leaving a decision between Len McCluskey and left challenger Ian Allinson. There is much to object to about McCluskey, about as purebred an example of the species 'left bureaucrat' as has been produced in the laboratory of the British labour movement.

We have already discussed his interventions on the question of immigration, which are the sort of weasel-worded nonsense one says if one wants to be seen by backward workers as 'tough' without actually calling for anything concrete; and he has recently reminded us, in the interests of heading off the threat from Coyne, that Unite's support for a leftwing Labour leadership should not be taken for granted. He has played a bad role on the nuclear question, pleading 'his members', like the GMB barons.

For all these equivocations, and for all the tedious inevitability of bureaucratic betrayal, we must offer critical support to McCluskey in this election. McCluskey has taken the right side - so far - in Labour's civil war. He has done so in a real, not a Platonic sense, bringing Unite's institutional heft to bear at crucial moments to defend the Corbyn leadership against coup attempts. He need not have done so: empty words would have sufficed to preserve his reputation.

Comrade Allinson is a former member of the Socialist Workers Party, and currently associated with the Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century group, which split from the SWP in 2014. It is thus no surprise to find him commendably critical of the increasingly dodgy Labour discourse on immigration, delphically encouraged by McCluskey. No doubt we could find, on further examination, a legion of further issues on which our views accord more closely with Allinson's than the incumbent's. Yet there is the small matter that he is *not* a Labour member, and has no intention of playing a serious role in the unfolding struggle.

"If members want to see a Corbyn government," he wrote announcing his bid, "Unite needs to shift the debate by fighting in workplaces and communities now, rather than relying so heavily on internal battles within Labour."² An ex-SWPer comrade Allinson may be, but that could have come from any edition of *Socialist Worker* in the last year or two - it is no surprise that his former comrades support his bid. Indifference to internal Labour Party politics was a forgivable sin, just barely, last time the question was asked, and Jerry Hicks (another ex-SWP member) was the challenger; today, with the most significant episode in the British class struggle at least since the great strike of 1984-85 playing out on exactly that terrain, it is enough to exclude the most principled imaginable contestant from communist support •

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Notes

1. www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/jeremy-corbyn-labour-polls-latest-under-pressure-improve-against-theresa-may-a7513616.html.
2. www.iansunitesite.org.uk/2016/12/ian-allinson-stand-against-mccluskey.html.

Labour's migration wars

Jeremy Corbyn cannot 'triangulate' between soft Brexit and hard Brexit, writes Eddie Ford

Recent weeks have seen frantic manoeuvring over the terms of Brexit, principally concerning freedom of movement and immigration. This has taken a particularly acute form in the Labour Party, albeit often in a coded or slightly Aesopian language.

Broadly speaking, you have what could be called the 'soft Brexit' wing of the party, where the most important thing is retaining access to the single market. Hence Diane Abbott, shadow home secretary told the BBC's *Andrew Marr show* in December that "you cannot have access to the single market without a measure of freedom of movement", reassuring viewers that Labour wants immigration rules that are "fair" and offer "reasonable management of migration" - adding that it "would be wrong to put the economy anything other than first" as part of Brexit negotiations.¹

Strangely, this 'soft Brexit' outlook unites Diane Abbott with traditional Blairites and other pro-EU members of the Labour neo-liberal right. In order to retain access to the single market, and possibly the customs union too, so goes their reasoning, freedom of movement is an acceptable price to pay, no matter how enthusiastic or not you are about immigration. However, you can just as equally argue that this position effectively amounts to no Brexit at all: by accepting free movement you are signing up to the rules of the European Union club, but without any formal influence or say as to how those rules are drawn up or implemented. In which case, especially seeing that you are still paying significant sums of money into the club, you might as well have MEPs, a seat at the council of ministers, and so on. In other words, to hell with Brexit and just stay within the EU.

On the other hand, there are those the Labour Party who think that the overriding priority is 'control over immigration' - ie, 'hard Brexit'. If that means no access to the single market, regrettably or not, then so be it: at least we now have 'control over our borders'. A nation proud again. Of course, for the Labour's 'hard Brexiters' this is fundamentally about combating the UK Independence Party - you have to be seen to be tough on immigration and making the right noises. For Labour's 'hard Brexiters' the only way forward for Labour is to out-Ukip Ukip, just as many voices this year will be saying that the only way to defeat Marine Le Pen is to out-FN the FN - or at least show you are 'listening to the concerns' of the French people.

Brexit dilemma

Fear of losing the next general election if the party is unable to get to grips with the realities of Brexit is reflected in the Fabian Society report published on January 2 - *Stuck: how Labour is too weak to win and too strong to die*.² The study essentially argues that the combined difficulties of plotting a course on Brexit and the loss of support in Scotland means that Labour may get as little as 20% of the vote at the next election, leaving it with possibly only 140 seats (though I suspect that even this figure might be a little optimistic). Some recent opinion polls have Labour on 26% or less, whilst Jeremy Corbyn's personal ratings have collapsed to 14%.³

The report goes on to say that team Corbyn appears to have little idea how to win back the four million voters who supported Labour in 2015, but say they would not do so now. More precisely, using YouGov data, it calculates that the party has lost a net 400,000 votes since



Charlie Chaplin *The immigrant*, 1917: poor, unskilled and desperate

the last election among *pro-'leave'* voters, and 100,000 among those who backed 'remain', making its support more strongly pro-'remain' than before. This poses the "Brexit dilemma", by which Labour needs to somehow appeal more to 'leave' voters without alienating those existing supporters who opposed Brexit - a near impossible task, you would think.

Anyway, the report points out that to gain an absolute Commons majority Labour needs to beat the Tories by *more than three million votes* - a higher margin than in 2001. Hardly surprisingly in a Fabian document, the author of the report argues that, given the "impossibility" of outright victory in the next election, then Labour needs to prepare instead for an era of "quasi-federal, multi-party politics" - meaning some sort of 'progressive' alliance or electoral arrangement with the Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru, Liberal Democrats, Greens, whoever. As the title of the study suggests, Labour will not be completely decimated thanks to the first-past-the-post electoral system acting as a "firebreak", so even if either Ukip or the Lib Dems could tie with Labour on 20%, the electoral system would mean neither would win more than 20 seats, with Labour remaining at 140 to 150. We shall see.

This Brexit tension, or desire to scoop up some of the Brexit vote, can also be found in a report published by the all-party parliamentary group (APPG) on social integration, which is chaired by Chuka Umunna, a one-time hopeful for the Labour leadership.⁴ The report says that all new immigrants to Britain "should be expected" to either speak English already or be enrolled in "compulsory" English classes upon arrival. Umunna remarked afterwards that immigration "has impacted on different communities in different ways and the pace of change has alarmed many", warning that failure to address integration has "left a vacuum for extremists and peddlers of hate to exploit". In other words, the only way to take on Ukip and the xenophobic right is to adopt aspects of their language. The APPG document comes in the wake of Dame Louise Casey's report last month recommending that new arrivals to the country be required to

swear an "integration oath".

Naturally, communists are in favour of people being able to communicate through use of a common language. But *forcing* them to learn English is inhuman. What about your 80-year-old granny? Is she going to be kicked out if she does not learn the language to a certain standard within six months? *The Daily Telegraph* delightedly reported that, even though the APPG has a "leftwing majority" (ie, SNP, Labour and Lib Dems!), it too is in favour of tougher controls and requirements upon migrants.

Many other people in the Labour Party want to accommodate to the politics of hard Brexit. Tom Watson, the unscrupulous deputy leader, said in an interview for Sky News that the party would lose the next election if it backs the "status quo" on immigration and free movement - he admitted that the party was not united on the issue and is still "formulating" its policy, because "we don't know what is going to come out of the Brexit settlement". However, Watson all but demanded that Theresa May comes out and says that "this country will have control over its own borders" - indeed, we should "be able to count the number of people in and count the number of people out, and make sure that a convincing, fair solution to people's genuine concerns about immigration is addressed". More border guards, please.

Clive 'Dr Strangelove' Lewis (or Nuclear Clive to his friends), the shadow business secretary, has called for immigration to be tied to trade union membership and in general argued for an "inclusive, civic, outward-looking, open, tolerant" English nationalism. Sir Keir Starmer, the shadow Brexit secretary, last year stated that immigration is "too high" - a view increasingly being backed by leading party figures. Writing in *The Observer* (January 8), Stephen Kinnock and Emma Reynolds - with the backing of Jon Cruddas, Rachel Reeves, Caroline Flint and others - called for a new "two-tier system" of immigration controls that would separate skilled workers from unskilled workers. They warned that "mixed messages" on immigration were proving "deeply corrosive" to voters' trust in the party,

which risks sliding into "irrelevance" in the eyes of the British public. Flint, a former minister for Europe, thought that Labour now "has to get real". She claimed it was "ridiculous" that the party, which supports the regulation of businesses and markets, wants "no limits on an open-door EU labour market". No, she declared, backing "fair controls" on immigration is "entirely in keeping with Labour values".

Peterborough

Obviously Corbyn has been under intense pressure from those around him, and many others, to 'readjust his position on Brexit to show that he is 'listening to the concerns' of the traditional Labour voter. Hence his January 10 speech at Peterborough - a marginal Tory seat that voted heavily in favour of Brexit and exactly the sort of place Labour needs to win if he is ever to get into No10 as prime minister.

Reporting his speech, the rather dramatic headline from *Business Insider* went: "Corbyn: Labour is willing to sacrifice the free movement of people" (January 9).⁵ More accurately, the BBC Radio 4 headline was "Corbyn sowing confusion on Labour's immigration policy", while *The Independent* declared: "Jeremy Corbyn muddies water over Labour immigration policy after appearing to back EU free movement". Perhaps as part of his new 'populist turn', on the day of the speech Corbyn popped up on various shows like the *Today* programme and ITV's *Good morning Britain* to promote his pre-released speech. New year, new Corbyn. We heard how Labour "is not wedded to freedom of movement for EU citizens as a point of principle" and wants "reasonably managed migration" as part of the post-Brexit relationship with the EU.

Of course, when it came to the actual speech, it was a classic Corbynite fudge - trying to be all things to all people in the hope of maintaining 'party unity'. What the party leader ended up saying was, no, Labour "is not wedded to freedom of movement for EU citizens as a point of principle" - then immediately added: "but I don't want that to be misinterpreted, nor do we rule it out".⁶ Naturally, the *Telegraph*

could not resist mocking Corbyn: "To summarise: Mr Corbyn appears to be saying that, while he no longer supports uncontrolled immigration, he still supports uncontrolled immigration, unless of course he doesn't, although he definitely could. But please don't misinterpret him" (January 10).

Frankly, the *Telegraph's* derision is well justified. Corbyn now comes across as weak and vacillating - all over the place. So Jeremy, do you support free movement as a "point of principle" or not? The likes of Clive Lewis, Tom Watson, Keith Starmer, etc seem to think you can 'triangulate' between soft Brexit and hard Brexit - even magically cut across the Brexit/'remain' divide and reinvent the Labour leader as a popular challenger to 'the establishment'. But this will simply not work. Anti-immigrant voters will not be attracted by the inconsistent messages coming from Corbyn at Peterborough. They will rather act to demoralise his activist base - which, after all, is the source of his political strength.

There is a simple principle. It is not the principle of free movement in the EU. It is the principle of free movement - full stop. Border controls do not serve the interests of the working class. They serve the interests of capital. People ought to have the right to live in any country they choose. Of course, for us that goes hand in hand with organisation. Free movement needs free trade unions and a mass, socialist, Labour Party working with likeminded parties across the whole planet. Now that would be a message worth defending on the *Andrew Marr show* ●

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Notes

1. www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/labour-block-brexit-trivial-way-diane-abbott-a7468886.html.
2. www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jan/02/labour-election-jeremy-corbyn-fabian-society.
3. www.totalpolitics.com/articles/news/support-jeremy-corbyn-be-next-pm-hits-new-low-14.
4. www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4089544/ALL-migrants-learn-English-moving-UK-Verdict-Labour-MP-s-time-ditch-failed-multiculturalism.html.
5. http://uk.businessinsider.com/corbyn-labour-is-willing-to-sacrifice-the-free-movement-of-people-2017-1.
6. http://press.labour.org.uk/post/155675139454/jeremy-corbyns-speech-in-peterborough.

STRATEGY

Palestine and Hebrew self-determination

Is there a Hebrew nation and how should it be defined? Moshé Machover proposes a strategy envisaging the defeat of Zionism

In the mid-1960s, the Socialist Organization in Israel - better known by the name of its journal, *Matzpen* - evolved an analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and an outlook regarding its eventual resolution. It saw the conflict as caused by the colonisation of Palestine, which started at the end of the 19th century, accelerated following World War I, and is still ongoing. In this conflict, Israel - a settler state that is both product and perpetrator of the Zionist project of colonisation - faces the resistance of the indigenous Palestinian Arab people.¹

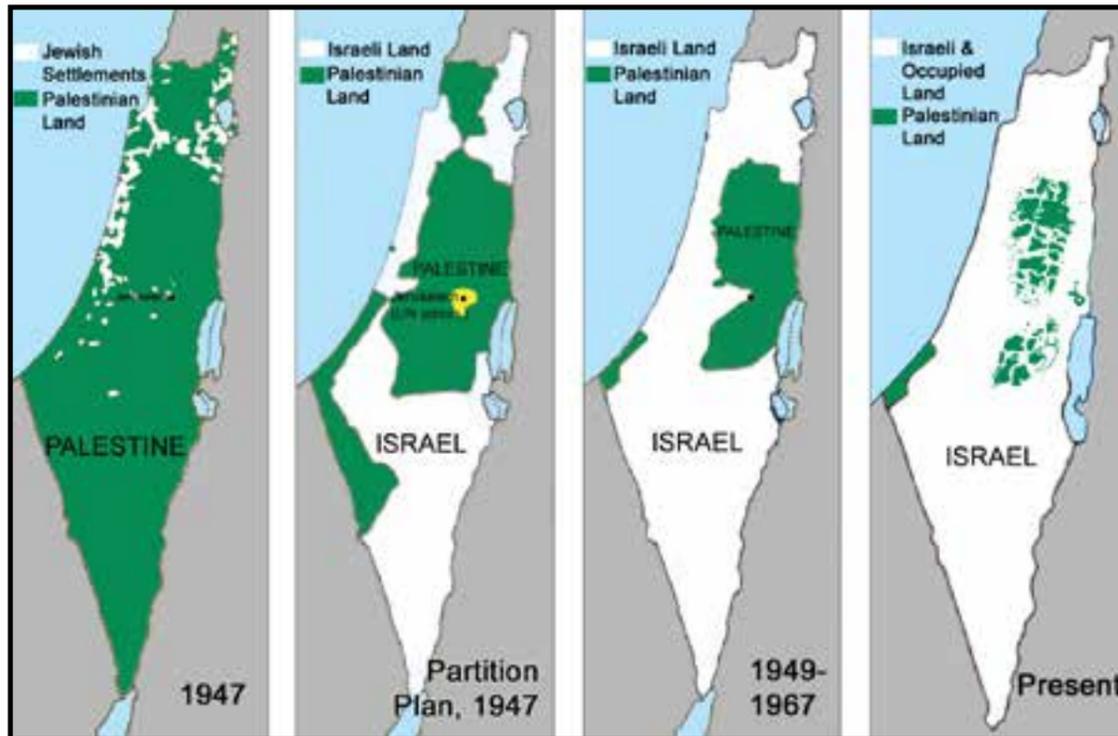
This analysis - far from widely held when it was put forward by *Matzpen*, before the June 1967 war - has by now been generally accepted by the international radical left. It has subsequently also been advanced by left-leaning academics writing on the subject, although few of them deign to admit any intellectual debt to *Matzpen*.

In this connection I must put in a caveat. The academic discourse of postcolonial studies usually characterises the Zionist project and Israel as an instance of 'settler colonialism' - a generic category that may include all cases in which a substantial number of settlers move into a colonial territory. *Matzpen's* analysis is more specific: it emphasises the fact that the political economy of Zionist colonisation is not based on *exploitation* of the labour-power of the indigenous people, but on their total *exclusion* and eventual elimination. From a Marxist standpoint this distinction is, of course, fundamental.²

However, while *Matzpen's* analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is now shared by much of the international radical left, the same cannot be said of our position on the resolution of this conflict, summarised in the following theses:

1. The conflict can only be resolved as part of a socialist transformation, rather than in a 'bourgeois democratic' framework.
2. The conflict cannot be resolved in isolation, within the 'box' of Palestine. Due to the specific features of Zionist colonisation, the balance of power is heavily tilted in favour of Israel (backed by its imperialist sponsor) and against the Palestinian people. The imbalance can only be redressed, and Palestinian liberation will become possible, as part of a revolutionary transformation of the region, by an Arab revolution led by the working class, which will overthrow the repressive regimes, unify the Arab East and put an end to imperialist domination over it.
3. An Arab revolution can create the conditions for a revolutionary overthrow of the Zionist regime by the Israeli masses.
4. The regional framework applies not only to the *process* whereby the conflict would be resolved, but extends also to the *form of the resolution itself*. The liberated Palestinian Arab people will be a partner in the regional unification, as one of the component parts of the Arab nation. A de-Zionised Israel will join the regional socialist union or federation of the Arab East.
5. In joining the regional union, the Hebrew (aka 'Israeli Jewish') nation must be accorded the right to self-determination.

Theses 1 and 2 obviously exclude the 'two-state solution', which would set up a Palestinian micro-pseudo-state dominated by a Zionist Israel. (In any



A Zionist single state in the making

case, Israel has effectively torpedoed this non-solution.) But it also excludes the 'one-state solution', which envisages a liberal 'secular' bourgeois democracy in the whole area of pre-1948 mandatory Palestine, comprising the pre-1967 territory of Israel, as well as the West Bank and Gaza Strip occupied by Israel since 1967.³

I have explained the reasoning behind theses 1-4, and in particular *Matzpen's* position on the 'one-state solution', in a recent article, to which I refer the reader,⁴ so I will not repeat the arguments here in detail. Let me just summarise them very briefly, as I will need to assume them in the present article, in which I will argue for thesis 5.

From our analysis of the conflict it follows that its benign resolution - decolonisation of Palestine and liberation of the Palestinian Arab people - requires the overthrow of Israel's Zionist regime. This cannot be achieved directly by forces external to Israel. External changes, global and regional, are indispensable for creating *favourable conditions* for the overthrow of Zionism, but the only social force able directly to achieve this overthrow is internal: the Israeli masses, primarily the Hebrew working class.

But will this class have not only the potential *ability* to overthrow the Zionist regime, but also an *interest* in so doing? No, if it is just a 'bourgeois-democratic' overthrow; because that would leave the Hebrew working class in its position of a socio-economically exploited and dominated class, while ending its advantages of being part of a privileged nation. Such an adverse change would in all probability be strongly resisted by the Hebrew workers, who would side with their own exploiters in fighting against it. However, a regional socialist transformation may well create a situation in which the Hebrew working class would be invited to give up its national privileges and swap them for a position of partnership in a regional rule of the working class. Such a deal would be attractive and, under favourable circumstances, could induce the Hebrew working class to play its vital role in overthrowing the Zionist regime.

(I may add, parenthetically, that this logic is not confined to Israel, but applies, in various forms, to all imperialist countries. Socialism, as a new world system, will only be possible

if the working classes of these countries would be persuaded to give up their national privileges in exchange for emergence from their exploited and dominated class position to become part of a worldwide dominant class.)

Zionist spin

Before I get into the main topic of this article - explaining and contextualising the demand for Hebrew self-determination - I must, for the sake of clarification, contrast it with something that sounds vaguely similar, but is in fact counterposed to it.

Zionist propagandists, reciting in unison from the same *hasbarah* briefing manual, repeat the mantra: 'Zionism is the movement of national self-determination of the Jewish people in the land of Israel.' Here is a small sample out of countless similar pronouncements - all eager to revile anti-Zionism as 'anti-Semitic'.

● Jonathan Freedland, *The Guardian's* resident Zionist gatekeeper: "If one wants to criticise the historical movement that sought to re-establish Jewish self-determination in Palestine, Zionism is the right word."⁵

● Eylon Aslan-Levy, a British-Israeli news anchor and political commentator: "Zionism is, at its core, the belief that the Jewish people have a right to self-determine in the land of Israel."⁶

● *Zionism on the web* is a well-resourced website, whose CEO, Dr Andre Oboler, "has been involved in the UK Jewish community as an executive member of the Union of Jewish Students (UJS) and a deputy on the Board of Deputies of British Jews. In 2006 (during the Hizbullah crisis) [he] was the UK delegate on the *Bayit Meshutaf* programme run by the Israeli ministry of foreign affairs."⁷

Here is its brief definition of Zionism: "Zionism is the belief in a Jewish homeland for the Jewish people, in Israel. Zionism is the Jewish people's instantiation of the human right of self-determination. No more, no less."⁸

Helpfully, the website also offers a fuller, "accurate definition of Zionism":

Zionism is the national revival movement of the Jews. It holds that the Jews are a people and therefore have the right to self-determination in their own national home. It aims to secure and support a legally recognised national home for the Jews in their historical homeland, and to initiate and stimulate a revival of Jewish

national life, culture and language.⁹

Like a crudely counterfeited coin, this seems plausible - provided you do not look too closely. But a careful examination reveals, even to the naked eye, that there is something very wrong with it. In fact, there are at least two reasons for discarding it as a fake.

First, the right to national self-determination - which includes the right to form a separate state - is a *modern* concept, accepted internationally after World War I, although it was discussed by socialists and others before that war. It clearly does not apply to any sort of human grouping, but only to nations in the modern sense of this term, which is essentially secular. For example, it does not license the formation of a Presbyterian state: Presbyterianism is a religious category, not a national one. The Vatican is a Roman Catholic state, but - whatever its legitimisation (if any) - it cannot appeal to the right to self-determination. The right to self-determination also does not apply to a religion-based group or movement that calls itself a 'nation', such as the African-American Nation of Islam.

Do the totality of Jews constitute a nation in the modern secular sense, to which the right of national self-determination is applicable? Zionist ideology claims that they are a nation, albeit an 'anomalous' one; but this is at best extremely questionable - a bit like claiming that the salamander is an anomalous fish. It has in fact been denied by many Jews, who assert cogently that Jewish identity is not national, but primarily based on religion.¹⁰ Indeed, the *only* attribute shared by all Jews around the world is the religion, Judaism, practised by them or by their recent forebears. Further, a necessary and sufficient condition for a non-Jew to become Jewish is undergoing a religious conversion - *giyyur*. Moreover, Jews can belong to various actual nations: a Jew may be French, American, Italian, Scottish, etc. But Jewishness excludes other religious affiliations: a Jew cannot be Muslim, Hindu, or Roman Catholic.¹¹ Thus the propagandist formula describing Zionism as 'the movement of self-determination of the Jewish people' is invalid, being guilty of *suggestio falsi*. Second, this self-justification of Zionism is spurious because it is also guilty of *suppressio veri*. Whatever

group of people the right of national self-determination may apply to, it does not entitle them to pick and choose at will the territory over which they may exercise that right. Claims that the group's alleged distant ancestors lived in the coveted territory many centuries ago, or that it was promised to them by a deity in whose existence many of them happen to believe, or that they have long wished to possess it, are simply not good enough. The right to self-determination certainly does not license any group to colonise a territory long inhabited by other people. But the key fact about Zionism is precisely that it is a project of colonisation of Palestine, an inhabited land; and it is precisely this essential fact that is conveniently omitted by the definitions of Zionism parroted by its present-day propagandists. They avoid the word 'colonisation' like the proverbial plague; it has become too compromising.

Earlier Zionist leaders and ideologues had no such qualms. Thus, Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880-1940) - the political and spiritual progenitor of five Israeli prime ministers, including Binyamin Netanyahu¹² - used in his seminal article, 'The iron wall' (1923), the term 'colonisation' repeatedly and un-self-consciously to describe the Zionist project:

Every native population in the world resists colonists as long as it has the slightest hope of being able to rid itself of the danger of being colonised. That is what the Arabs in Palestine are doing, and what they will persist in doing as long as there remains a solitary spark of hope that they will be able to prevent the transformation of 'Palestine' into the 'Land of Israel' ...

Colonisation can have only one aim, and Palestine Arabs cannot accept this aim. It lies in the very nature of things, and in this particular regard nature cannot be changed ...

Zionist colonisation must either stop, or else proceed regardless of the native population. Which means that it can proceed and develop only under the protection of a power [ie, Britain - MM] that is independent of the native population - behind an iron wall, which the native population cannot breach.¹³

To eyes with present-day sensibilities this reads as a condemnation of Zionism, but Jabotinsky, an ardent Zionist, was just being frank. Few Zionist leaders were as candid as him in admitting that Palestinian Arab resistance was understandable;¹⁴ but his use of the term 'colonisation' to describe the Zionist project was standard and unremarkable at the time.

So we can dismiss the justification of Zionism as 'the movement of self-determination of the Jewish people': it is propaganda disseminated in bad faith, a camouflage for the bogus claim that Jews have a divine right to colonise Palestine.

Is there a Hebrew nation?

Turning now to the main topic of this article, Hebrew national self-determination, I must first address the question whether a Hebrew nation exists: in other words, whether the collectivity commonly - and, as I shall show, misleadingly - referred to as 'Israeli Jews' constitutes a nation in the modern sense of this term. At one level, this is a silly question, because the answer is obvious. As the saying goes, 'If it looks like a duck, walks like

a duck and quacks like a duck, then it's a duck.' Anyone who has observed Israel at close quarters with an open mind can be in no doubt that its population is manifestly divided into two national groups: an Arabic-speaking minority and Hebrew-speaking majority. The former is clearly part of the Palestinian Arab people, which in turn is a component of the Arab nation.

What about the latter, the Hebrew-speaking majority? It has all the objective attributes of a modern nation: geographical concentration, common polity and a modern (developed capitalist) economy with a class structure to match, as well as a common language and culture. That this is a settler community, formed by recent (and ongoing) colonisation, does not preclude its being a nation. Quite the contrary: if the Hebrew-speaking Israelis were *not* a nation, it would be a peculiar, inexplicable exception, because new settler nations did emerge in *all other* colonised territories where - as in Palestine/Israel - the settlers' political economy did not depend primarily on exploiting the labour-power of the indigenous population, and in which the direct producers were for the most part themselves settlers. Of course, new settler-nation formations did not generally occur in colonised territories where the settlers depended mainly on the labour-power of the indigenous people. But it should be obvious, especially to Marxists, that to radically different political economies there correspond very different social and political structures.

So why is any doubt at all cast on the very existence of the Hebrew nation? The reason is that here we have an instance of what logicians call *argumentum ad consequentiam* (appeal to consequences): a fallacy whereby a proposition is denied because it has unwelcome consequences. And, as usual in cases of this sort, the mental process behind it is implicit, hardly recognised, let alone admitted, by the deniers (compare the denial of global warming).

Paradoxically, the Hebrew nation's existence is denied by two diametrically opposed ideologies, each of which has its own political axe to grind: Zionism and Palestinian nationalism. Of these two, the former has been by far the more consequential, and I shall discuss it first.

Collective amnesia

Until 1948 the settler community in Palestine referred to itself as the 'Hebrew Yishuv'. This term, which simply means Hebrew settlement, was used in contradistinction to the 'Old Yishuv', denoting the Palestinian Jewish community that pre-existed Zionist colonisation. Moreover, the label 'Hebrew' was attached to virtually all organisations and institutions set up by the Zionist settlers. Thus: the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights in Eretz Yisrael (founded 1919); the General Organisation (Histadrut) of Hebrew Workers in Eretz Yisrael (1920); the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1925); and so on and on; there was even a short-lived Hebrew Communists Party. In 1937, the rightwing Zionist leader, Vladimir Jabotinsky, published a programmatic book entitled *A Hebrew state*; and these very words also served as one of the main slogans raised in mass Zionist demonstrations during the 1940s, following the rift between the Zionist movement and Britain.¹⁵

Throughout that period it was generally accepted - indeed taken for granted - by the settlers that they constituted a nascent national formation, a Hebrew people. They reconciled this with their Zionist ideology, which postulated the existence of a worldwide Jewish national entity, by viewing the Hebrew people as part - to be sure, a novel and distinct part - of that larger entity.¹⁶ Indeed, the settlers regarded

the novelty and distinctness of the Hebrew people with pride, as it served to confirm the ideological claim that the Zionist project, by creating a 'normal' territorial nation, would 'normalise' the 'anomalous' nationhood of world Jewry.

This was clearly reflected in Israel's founding document, its Declaration of Independence. The person mainly responsible for finalising the text of this document was Moshe Sharett - who was about to be Israel's first foreign minister and later its second prime minister - an accomplished linguist and stickler for terminological precision. The declaration makes a deliberate distinction between the terms, 'Jewish' and 'Hebrew', both of which occur several times: the former consistently refers to world Jewry, and the latter always to the settler community in Palestine/Israel. Here are the final two paragraphs:

We extend our hand to all the neighbouring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighbourliness, and appeal to them to establish bonds of cooperation and mutual help with the independent Hebrew people in its own land. The State of Israel is prepared to do its share in a common effort for the advancement of the entire Middle East.

We appeal to the Jewish people throughout the diaspora to rally round the Yishuv in the tasks of immigration and upbuilding and to stand by it in the great struggle for the realisation of the age-old dream - the redemption of Israel.¹⁷

The distinction between the Hebrew people - also referred to as the *Yishuv* - and the Jewish people dispersed around the world could hardly be clearer. And yet, at the very moment when the existence of a Hebrew people "independent in its own land" was proclaimed, it began to be downplayed. It seems that David Ben-Gurion, Israel's founding prime minister, felt uncomfortable or ambiguous about it. Professor Yoram Shachar, who researched the genesis of the declaration, listened to the original voice recording of Ben-Gurion proclaiming it at the meeting of the Provisional Council of State on May 14 1948, and noticed that he deviated from the official written (and published) text: instead of "independent Hebrew people" he read out "independent Jewish people".¹⁸

This highly significant alteration may have been a Freudian slip. But the official English translation of the declaration, published by the Israeli government, is certainly guilty of deliberate falsification. In the first of the paragraphs I quoted above, it replaces "independent Hebrew people" by "sovereign Jewish people" and in the second paragraph it replaces the word "*Yishuv*" (which earlier in the original declaration is spelt out as "Hebrew Yishuv") by the spurious "Jews of Eretz-Israel".¹⁹ The subtle intention behind the official falsification is instructive: while the local Hebrew people can only assert the mundane fact of its political independence, it is the worldwide 'Jewish people' that is claimed to have sovereignty of 'its own land', which must be the whole of Eretz Israel, aka Palestine.

In fact, within a few years the term 'Hebrew' as referring to a nation (rather than to its language), previously ubiquitous, virtually disappeared from Israeli public discourse, which is firmly guided by Zionist ideology that permeates the media and the educational system.

Obliterating the distinctness of the Hebrew nation was motivated by the need to legitimise the Zionist colonising expansionary project, past and future. The Hebrew nation is a new formation. What national rights could it possibly claim? It could appeal to the right to national self-determination, as commonly understood; but this would at most apply to the territory where it

was a majority of the population. In 1948 this was a rather small part of mandatory Palestine. Or it could appeal to the UN Assembly resolution 181 (November 29 1957) on the partition of Palestine, which would legitimise possession of 56% of mandatory Palestine, including areas populated exclusively or mainly by Arabs. In either case, this claim would have to confront and be reconciled with the stronger claim to national rights of the indigenous Palestinian Arabs.

But mainstream Zionism, led by Ben-Gurion, its most astute and determined strategist, had no intention of confining colonisation to a mere part of Palestine/Eretz Yisrael. (Indeed Israel has studiously avoided specifying its borders, either in its Declaration of Independence or ever since).²⁰ Nor did it leave room for Palestinian Arab national rights: on this there had never been any difference between Ben-Gurion's and Jabotinsky's brand of Zionism. But this meant that invoking the existence of the new Hebrew nation and claiming national rights for it would fall far, far short of legitimising Zionist appetites. Something much grander was needed. As the Zionist historian Yigal Elam put it,

Zionism could not appeal to the principle of self-determination and rely on it in Palestine. This principle worked clearly against it and in favour of the local Arab national movement ...

From the viewpoint of national theory, Zionism needed a fiction that was incompatible with the accepted concepts of national theory ... [It] needed a much broader conception than the simplistic one. In this other conception ... referendum of the world's Jews superseded referendum of the population of Palestine.²¹

This fiction is the claim that world Jewry is a national entity that has a 'historical' or divine right to possess the whole of Palestine and colonise it. As we saw, the spurious 'right to self-determination of the Jewish people' is a marketing jingle for this fictitious claim. Outrageous as it is by any rational standard, it has nevertheless been very potent. It certainly managed to persuade not only a large number of Jews, but also elites of western imperialist countries, who found it politically useful.

But for this self-legitimation of the Zionist state to work smoothly, the term 'Hebrew' as describing a new Israeli settler nation, or even a distinct part of world Jewry, had to be abandoned. And abandoned it was. It has become virtually disused, except as a means of making some deliberate political point.²²

An effective way of obscuring the existence of an entity is to deprive it of a name. The nameless is only faintly thinkable. The Hebrew nation still exists, but, having lost the memory of its proper name, it has been reduced to referring to itself by ill-fitting and confusing monikers. In official and most public discourse in Israel, members of this nation are called 'Jews' (while outside Israel they are usually called 'Israeli Jews'). But this designation is ill-fitting, because there are in Israel tens of thousands of persons who are not Jewish by any criterion, but are well assimilated in Hebrew society and are not regarded by most (non-religious) members of that society as belonging to a different nation.

(Most of these are close relatives of Jews who were allowed to immigrate to Israel and be naturalised under the Law of Return, such as a non-Jewish spouse or child of someone who has a Jewish grandparent. While a person having a single 'proper' Jewish grandparent is Jewish according to some definitions - for example, the one used by the Nazi legal code and by Israel's Law of Return - the non-Jewish spouse of such a person was not regarded

as a Jew, even by the Nazis. The same applies also to children of such couples, because they have no Jewish grandparent. Go figure it out.)

In addition to these Hebrew non-Jews, there are in Israel persons who are regarded by themselves and by most sane people as Jews, but whose Jewishness is somehow not quite kosher by Israeli legal standards. Such are converts to Judaism, whose conversion was officiated by a non-Orthodox rabbi, who might well be - what sacrilege! - of the female gender. These would-be Jews are not recognised by the Orthodox rabbinate, which enjoys a monopoly in Israel.

In informal discourse, the Hebrew nation is often referred to by its own members and by others simply as 'Israeli'. But this too is confusing, because Israeli law recognises this term as denoting citizenship, not ethnicity or national identity. Moreover, as we saw, there are clearly *two* Israeli national groups: Hebrew and Palestinian Arab.²³

Having descended into a state of collective amnesia and disremembered its own proper name, the Hebrew nation has become uncertain about its identity - which is just fine as far as Zionist self-legitimising propaganda is concerned: it can go on claiming that Israel is 'the nation-state of the Jewish people'.

But on rare occasions the old memory resurfaces, and the officially induced confusion is lamented even by some old-time Zionists, such as the Hebrew poet, Haim Guri; the extended title of his article on the subject speaks for itself: "Israelis used to be Hebrews, now what are we? - More than six decades after their state was founded, Israelis still grapple with their identity."²⁴

'One-state solution'

From a Zionist viewpoint, admitting the existence of the Hebrew nation is inconvenient, because it falls short of providing adequate legitimation for the grandiose claim that the entire 'Jewish people' has a 'historical right' to possess the whole of Palestine. But from a Palestinian Arab nationalist perspective, recognising the existence of the Hebrew nation poses an opposite problem: it implies coming to terms with a reality created by the Zionist project that gave illegitimate birth to this settler nation on Palestinian soil. Admitting its existence would automatically raise the unwelcome issue of its national rights. After all, if such rights were only accorded to immaculately conceived and innocently born nations, then few nations indeed could claim them.

A nationalist movement may be compelled or outmanoeuvred to concede possession of part of what it regards as its homeland, but it would view this as a temporary imposition of adverse realities. Even if there is no realistic prospect of reversing the concession in the foreseeable future, nationalist ideology will resist accepting the legitimacy in principle of any rival claim to national rights in the homeland.

The Palestinian Liberation Organisation crystallised a new long-term programme in 1969, when it was at the peak of its militancy and optimism, before suffering its first major reverse in the Black September of 1970. This programme was in fact promoted by al-Fateh, the dominant component of the PLO, led by the late Yasser Arafat. By that time, mainstream Palestinian nationalism had come to terms with the painful realisation that the Hebrew Israelis were there to stay, and had to be accommodated in a future free Palestine. But it could not accept the inconvenient fact that they had become a new Hebrew nation. Instead, it regarded their collective identity as denominational: they were adherents of the Jewish religion living in Palestine. Its vision of the future Palestine,

which it hoped to achieve by armed struggle, is expounded in English in an authoritative unsigned article entitled 'Towards the democratic Palestine', published in the official journal *Fateh*. It calls for "a democratic, non-sectarian Palestine, where Christians, Jews and Muslims can live, work and worship without discrimination".²⁵ This formula, often abbreviated as "a secular, democratic Palestine", was deliberately designed to suggest a future Palestine in which Jews would have individual equality and freedom of religious worship in a unitary Palestine. But a binational interpretation is explicitly rejected as a "misconception":

The call for a non-sectarian Palestine should not be confused with ... a binational state ... Furthermore, religious and ethnic lines clearly cross in Palestine so as to make the term 'binational' and the Arab-Jewish dichotomy meaningless, or at best quite dubious.

The majority of Jews in Palestine today are Arab Jews - euphemistically called Oriental Jews by the Zionists. Therefore, Palestine combines Jewish, Christian and Muslim Arabs, as well as non-Arab Jews (western Jews).²⁶

According to this Palestinian Arab nationalist view, there is and will be only one national group in Palestine: Arabs (of various religions). The rest of the inhabitants are "non-Arab Jews", presumably having no national identity. Indeed, the mono-national character of the projected secular, democratic Palestine will be Arab:

The liberated Palestine will be part of the Arab Homeland, and will not be another alien state within it. The eventual unity of Palestine with *other Arab* states will make boundary problems less relevant ...²⁷

Thus the ideologies of Zionism and Palestinian nationalism concur in denying the Hebrew nation's existence, and both refer to its members simply as 'Jews'. They differ, however, on what this Jewishness means, as well on the national identity of the Israeli Jews. According to Zionist fiction, Jewishness is a national category, and Israel's Jews are simply those members of the worldwide Jewish nation who live in the Jewish national homeland. Palestinian nationalist ideology maintains (correctly) that Jewishness is a religious category; but it clings to the strange fiction that the Jews of Israel/Palestine do not all belong to the same nation: the majority are Arabs, while the rest are presumably devoid of any national identity.

The PLO's programmatic vision of the late 1960s soon became a dead letter as far as that organisation was concerned. Its armed guerrilla forces, concentrated in Jordan, were mauled by the Jordanian army in the Black September of 1970, and decamped to Lebanon, where they were shattered by Israeli invasions, first in 1978 and finally in 1982. By the 1980s the PLO had accepted a 'two-state solution', which would leave about 22% of the area of mandate Palestine for a Palestinian Arab micro-state 'alongside Israel'. The Oslo accords of 1993 did not even secure the PLO this consolation prize. The PLO has been left with the so-called Palestinian Authority, whose main function is to act as Israel's security subcontractor.

However, the vision of a secular, democratic Palestine has been reincarnated as the 'one-state solution', advocated by some bourgeois liberal Palestinians and various supporters of Palestinian rights around the world, including Israelis of both national groups. You can find several versions of this vision on the internet; a typical example is a statement entitled 'A state of *all* its citizens: the one-state vision and foundational principles of a

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republic in historic Palestine', signed by seven academics (five Palestinian Arabs and two Hebrew Israelis, all but one of the seven are expatriates).²⁸ The state envisaged in this and similar statements is evidently inspired by a highly idealised version of post-apartheid South Africa: what it was promised to be rather than what it turned out to be. It depicts what is essentially a bourgeois democratic state with a capitalist economy ameliorated by liberal, reformist promises of 'social justice' and 'equal opportunity'. The class nature of the society is not discussed. (In fact, in the statement by the seven academics the word 'class' is never used.) The Palestinian refugees will be invited to return. Equality of individual rights will be guaranteed; but the existence of two discrete national groups in the proposed single state - let alone the question of their collective national rights - is not mentioned.

Undoubtedly, the vision of a single democratic state in the whole of mandate Palestine represents a huge and highly desirable improvement compared to the present situation. Its attractiveness is therefore not in doubt. But all variants of this vision share a fatal flaw: they provide no indication as to the process leading to an overthrow of the Zionist regime and its replacement by the single democratic state; nor do they tell us what social forces would lead this process. In particular, they do not tell us how and by whom the Hebrew people would be induced to accept being transformed from a dominant, oppressing nation into a minority without any institutionalised national status and rights. The one-staters do not deal with these questions of *process* and *agency*, which indeed have no credible answers.

Socialist allies

Among the advocates of the 'single democratic Palestine' there are some socialists, including a few who regard themselves as Marxists. Lamentably, instead of developing an independent socialist perspective, they are content to subscribe to what is quite clearly a bourgeois liberal vision. And what is most astonishing is that, just like their liberal allies, they fail to answer or even raise the questions of process and agency, which a Marxist ought to regard as absolutely crucial.

As typical representatives of this negligent line of thinking, I will quote two people whom I regard as friends and comrades: Tony Greenstein (a frequent contributor to the *Weekly Worker*); and Tikva Honig-Parnass, a veteran Israeli socialist, who at one time subscribed to the Matzpen position, but has changed her mind and joined the one-state advocates. Both deny the existence of the new Hebrew settler nation, for which there is no room in the one-state vision, and *a fortiori* they oppose its right to self-determination under any circumstances.

Comrade Tony is categorical:

Jack [Conrad] asserts that an Israeli-Jewish nation has arisen. I disagree. An artificial political entity has arisen which has the trappings of a nation.²⁹

This would make Palestine an inexplicable exception among all countries that have been subject to exclusionary colonisation (ie, whose political economy did not depend on indigenous labour-power), such as the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In those countries there are settler nations that are presumably natural entities rather than artificial political ones. Tony does not mention these cases of exclusionary colonisation. Instead he goes on to compare the colonisation of Palestine with that of South Africa:

Of course, it [the artificial political entity] is in the majority [in Israel], unlike in South Africa, because it consciously sought to exclude the

Arabs from its borders. South Africa never did this, even at the time of its Bantustanisation policy.

Yes, precisely! Without realising it, Tony has stumbled on the fundamental difference between the two species of colonisation, which should be clear to any Marxist. Under exploitative colonisation, such as that of South Africa, the settlers did not form a new nation, but an exploiting quasi-class; whereas in all cases of exclusionary colonisation the settlers became a new nation. Tony continues:

Yes, it [the artificial political entity] speaks the same language generally and certainly it lives in the same contiguous area. But a nation is something like a 'chase in action'. It is intangible. States and nations usually correspond. Not so Israel, where Arabs are excluded from the nation.

This is simply untrue: there are very few mono-national states. States and nations *do not* usually correspond. Tony should surely know this: he lives in a multinational state. In fact, most states that *claim* to be mono-national do so in order to hide and deny the existence of their suppressed national minorities. The prototype of this spurious mono-nationality is France, but a more blatant example is Turkey. Ignoring this, Tony continues:

Israel represents the Jewish nation, including myself. It doesn't recognise itself as a separate Hebrew nation, which is the weakness in Machover's argument.

So the "weakness in Machover's argument" is that he rejects the Zionist ideological claim that Israel represents the fictitious worldwide 'Jewish nation' - a claim that comrade Tony is apparently ready to accept at face value. He is ready to do so because he shares with both Zionist and Palestinian Arab ideologies their denial of the existence of a Hebrew nation.

Occasionally Tony is prepared to admit the existence of the Hebrew nation, but he does so only provisionally, for the sake of argument and in order to deny its right to self-determination:

But if Israeli Jews are a nation then they are an oppressor nation. Their very definition is in opposition to the indigenous population ... To talk about 'self-determination' of such a nation makes as much sense as to talk of self-determination of the American or Afrikaner or the Russian nations.³⁰

Elsewhere he says:

People are getting hung up on the question of 'national self-determination'. Supposing that the Israeli Jews or Hebrews are a separate nation, which I doubt, then the question is, what type of nation? It is clear that Israeli Jews, just like the white South Africans and Afrikaners before them, are above all oppressors of another group of people or nation. *That is their identity; that is what makes them a nation.*³¹

Tony knows perfectly well that Matzpen, and I personally, never upheld the right to self-determination for the Hebrew nation in the present situation, when it is indeed an oppressor and has its independent state. Such a demand would indeed be both wrong and vacuous. We have insisted on Hebrew self-determination in a *future* situation, in which the Zionist regime will have been overthrown. In that context, the Hebrew nation would no longer be an oppressor. Indeed, denying it equal national rights with other nations of the region would, by definition, make it an oppressed nation. But this argument cuts no ice with Tony, because in his view the Hebrew nation - if it exists - is

an oppressor by its very nature and essence, and can never be other than an oppressor.

Secession or accession?

Like Tony, comrade Tikva also insists on dismissing the fundamental structural difference between the Zionist settler state and apartheid-era South Africa. In fact, a major part of her polemical article from which I will quote is devoted to denying the significance of this difference.³² I have refuted her arguments on this question in a previous article,³³ so I will not deal with them here, but go on directly to the crux of the matter: her denial of the existence of the Hebrew nation. In this she goes even further than Tony: bizarrely, she attributes to me the invention of a Hebrew nation:

Inventing the Hebrew nation and placing it on the same level as the Palestinian nation allows Machover to present a presumed homogenous 'socialist' approach which recognises nations' equal rights for self-determination.

All I can say about this attribution is that it must have involved prodigious disremembering on Tikva's part. I am prepared to bet my bottom shekel that many years ago she heard and read lots of references to the Hebrew nation or the Hebrew people (and, no, I did not draft Israel's Declaration of Independence). She goes on:

However, the Marxist call for self-determination has never placed an equal sign between the rights of the oppressed and their oppressors. What Machover suggests implies that the subjugated Palestinians should guarantee the Zionist colonialists that in the post-Zionist socialist federation they would be granted equal rights for self-determination.³⁴

Here comrade Tikva is unwittingly guilty of a major misunderstanding, which I must clear up in some detail, because it is shared by other socialists, especially Leninists, who reject Matzpen's advocacy of Hebrew self-determination. The source of their error is the fact that they derive their understanding of the right to national self-determination from Lenin's pre-World War I polemical writings on the subject. The issue at the time was the position that socialists ought to take towards national movements of subordinate and oppressed nations *within existing multinational empires*, which demanded the right to *secede* and form their own independent states. Should socialists support this right of secession, at least in principle? Could they condone or tolerate forcible suppression of such secessionist movements? Inadvertently, these comrades assume that national self-determination is *always* essentially about secession.

This is indeed the sense in which the right of the Palestinian Arabs to self-determination should be upheld at present. But the scenario within which Matzpen posed the issue of Hebrew self-determination is quite different. It is not mainly about the right of secession from a regional socialist federation. Such a federation does not exist right now in reality; it is a project for the future, part of the programme of revolutionary socialists. So before the issue of secession from this future federation can even be posed, there is a prior question: that of *accession*. In other words, should the mode of the Hebrew nation's accession to that future federation be coercive or voluntary?

Early on, in the mid-1960s, we in Matzpen arrived at the insight that I outlined in the preamble to this article. We reached the sobering realisation that the overthrow of Zionism will not and cannot be achieved mainly from the outside, against the wishes and resistance of the Hebrew masses. Regional and global changes will be

necessary conditions for overthrowing Zionism, but the task itself will require the active participation of the Israeli working class. And the only chance of gaining the consent, let alone participation, of the Hebrew majority of this class in overthrowing Zionism is offering it partnership as part of the new dominant class in a workers' regional federation. This is Matzpen's independent socialist, class-based position - very different from the bourgeois-liberal one-state vision.

Once the issue is posed this way, it is pretty clear that accession of the Hebrew nation to a future socialist federation of the Arab east can only be voluntary. Moreover, it would be a grave error on the part of socialists to condone, let alone advocate, attempts at a forcible accession. But this means that Hebrew accession to the federation would occur by exercising *self-determination*.

Those who oppose Hebrew self-determination in the sense I have just explicated should consider carefully and soberly what alternative route they propose to the overthrow of Zionism. Military conquest? By whom? What would be the likely consequence of a serious attempt at overthrowing Zionism from the outside by force of arms? And supposing for a moment that such an attempt would succeed rather than ending in a regional catastrophe (as is infinitely more probable); think of the repression subsequently required to suppress the resentful vanquished nation. No, thanks.

Socialists who reject Hebrew self-determination are not just being reckless. They are guilty of dereliction of duty. Voluntary participation of the Hebrew working class in overthrowing Zionism and joining forces with their regional class brothers and sisters is a possibility, but is by no means assured without proper political preparation long in advance. It is a project of long duration that should be engaged in right now, and must involve patient efforts both in Israel and in the Arab region ●

Notes

1. For an official Matzpen formulation dating from before the June 1967 war, see 'The Palestine problem and the Israeli-Arab dispute': www.matzpen.org/english/1967-05-18/the-palestine-problem-and-the-israeli-arab-dispute (May 18 1967). See also M Machover and A Sa'id (Jabra Nicola), 'The Middle East at the crossroads', September 10 1969, adopted by Matzpen as a position statement: www.matzpen.org/english/1969-09-10/the-middle-east-at-the-crossroads. For a brief later restatement, see point 11 of Matzpen's 'Basic principles': www.matzpen.org/english/about-matzpen/basic-principles.
2. For further discussion see my article, 'Colonialism and the natives' *Weekly Worker* December 17 2015.
3. For an instructive discussion of the unlikelihood of this kind of 'one-state solution', see Moshe Behar, 'Past and present perfect of Israel's one-state solution', in J Ehrenberg and Y Peled (eds) *Israel and Palestine alternative perspectives on statehood*, Lanham 2016, pp243-70.
4. 'Belling the cat' *Weekly Worker* December 12 2013. See also 'The decolonisation of Palestine' *Weekly Worker* June 26 2016.
5. 'Labour and the left have an anti-Semitism problem': www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/mar/18/labour-antisemitism-jews-jeremy-corbyn.
6. 'Why anti-Zionism is inherently anti-Semitic' *The Times of Israel* December 8 2013: <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-trouble-with-anti-zionism>.
7. www.zionismontheweb.org/zionism_on_the_web_people.htm.
8. 'Zionism in brief': www.zionismontheweb.org/zionism/zionism.html.
9. www.zionismontheweb.org/zionism_definitions.htm.
10. For a detailed discussion, see my article, 'Zionist myths: Hebrew versus Jewish identity' *Weekly Worker* May 16 2013.
11. An exception to this exclusion was Nazi Germany, because Nazi racist ideology regarded

- Jewishness as a racial category - "a racial community based on blood and not a religious one", as SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich put it. See my article, 'Don't apologise - attack' *Weekly Worker* May 19 2016.
12. The others are Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Shamir, Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert.
 13. 'The iron wall' (*O Zheleznoistene*), published November 4 1923 in the Russian-language journal *Rassvyet* (Dawn). For an English translation see www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Zionism/ironwall.html.
 14. Among these few was general Moshe Dayan. See his eulogy at the grave of Roy Rutberg - *Davar* May 2 1956, quoted in M Machover and A Orr, 'The class character of Israeli society': www.matzpen.org/english/1972-02-10/the-class-character-of-israeli-society/#fnref-98-2 (1972); also his speech at a Technion students' meeting - *Ha'aretz* April 4 1968, quoted in M Machover and M Offenberg, 'Zionism and its scarecrows': www.matzpen.org/english/1978-10-10/zionism-and-its-scarecrows-moshe-machover-and-mario-offenberg (1978).
 15. For the widespread usage of the term 'Hebrew' in such contexts during the mandate period, see my article, 'Zionist myths: Hebrew versus Jewish identity' *op cit*; and further details in E Ein-Gil, 'The nation that was erased and forgotten' *Ha'aretz* December 13 2014: www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-1.631467. For the Hebrew Communist group, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_Communist. For the rift with Britain see my article, 'The decolonisation of Palestine' *Weekly Worker* June 23 2016.
 16. However, a small group of rightwing nationalist intellectuals, the Young Hebrews, regarded Hebrew national identity as a negation of Jewishness, which they repudiated. See my article, 'Zionist myths: Hebrew versus Jewish identity' *op cit*.
 17. My translation (with emphasis added) of original Hebrew text in http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Hebrew/Texts/Declaration_of_Independence.
 18. Shachar's Hebrew research article, published in *Zmanim*, 2007, is quoted in E Ein-Gil, 'The nation that was erased and forgotten' *op cit*.
 19. Israel ministry of foreign affairs: www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/declaration%20of%20establishment%20of%20state%20of%20israel.aspx.
 20. Ben-Gurion's long-standing doctrine is quoted in chapter 33 of my book *Israelis and Palestinians: conflict and resolution* Chicago 2016; this chapter is also at www.matzpen.org/docs/IsraelisPalestiniansConflictResolution-Machover.pdf.
 21. Y. Elam, 'Hanahot hadashot leota tzionut' ('New assumptions for the same Zionism') *Ot* No2, winter 1967; my translation (emphasis in original).
 22. A highly exceptional recent public use of this term was made, no less, by the president of Israel, Reuven Rivlin, who in a TV interview on April 12 2016 expounded his vision of a future confederation between two 'entities': one Palestinian and the other *Hebrew* Zionist.
 23. This confusion is further compounded by the fact that an Israeli passport does say 'Israeli' under the *Nationality* rubric. But this is because, according to international convention, this rubric in any passport denotes the citizenship status of the bearer, not his or her national identity. For example a UK passport states under the rubric *Nationality/Nationalité* the citizenship of the bearer (eg, 'British citizen') not whether s/he is English, Scottish, Welsh or Irish. Indeed, in an Israeli passport the rubric *Nationality* is translated into Hebrew by a word *ezrahut*, meaning citizenship.
 24. *Ha'aretz* February 25 2014: www.haaretz.com/jewish/the-jewish-thinker/premium-1.576349.
 25. 'Towards the democratic Palestine' *Fateh* (English-language newspaper published by the information office of the Palestine Liberation Movement) Vol 2, No2, January 19 1970.
 26. *Ibid*. In 1970 the majority of Hebrews were indeed immigrants from Muslim-majority (mostly Arab) countries, referred to as *Mizrahim* (Oriental). The fallacy that these could be regarded as Arab by nationality is discussed in E Ein-Gil and M Machover, 'Zionism and oriental Jews: dialectic of exploitation and cooptation' *Race and Class* January 2009, pp62-76 (also downloadable from www.matzpen.org/english/2008-07-10/zionism-and-oriental-jews-dialectic-of-exploitation-and-co-optation).
 27. 'Towards the democratic Palestine' *op cit* (emphasis added).
 28. www.1not2.org/One_State_in_Palestine/English.html.
 29. T Greenstein, 'Self-determination is not an abstract principle' *Weekly Worker* May 27 2009.
 30. *Ibid*.
 31. Letters *Weekly Worker* March 19 2009 (emphasis added).
 32. T Honig-Parnass, 'One democratic state in historic Palestine' *International Socialist Review* July 2013: <http://isreview.org/issue/90/one-democratic-state-historic-palestine>.
 33. 'Belling the cat' *op cit*.
 34. 'One democratic state in historic Palestine' *op cit*.

Palestine and the right of the Hebrew people to self-determination

Sunday January 15, 5pm

London Communist Forum with Israeli socialist **Moshé Machover**
Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1.
Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk;
and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

REVIEW

There will not be blood

Gareth Edwards (director) *Rogue one: a Star Wars story* general release

There is nothing more nostalgic than *Star wars* and, sitting down to write a review of this latest spin-off movie, I remembered a couple of things.

The first - a debate in these pages about James Cameron's *Avatar*, during the course of which I took a comrade to task for simply using the film as a jumping-off point for a diatribe about the 'noble savage' cliché, without actually saying very much about the film beyond pointing at said savages and saying, 'Look! There they are' (Letters *Weekly Worker* September 23 2010). I bring this up only because I am now rather hoist on my own petard - if ever there was a film that demanded critics focus on literally everything else in preference to the screen in front of them, this is it.

The second follows from the first. Any *Star wars* film is impossible to understand apart from *Star wars*, the vast pop-cultural phenomenon. There is a whole generation of people, it seems, whose formative experience in the cinema was seeing the first film, or else some part of the opening trilogy, and being forever changed by the sheer spectacle of the thing. I am a little younger than that and I hit adolescence around the time of *The phantom menace* - the first of the prequel trilogy retrospectively considered a disaster by fandom. Unlike the fanboys, I hated it at the time as well, but my opinion of the franchise was softened by the fact that several very good computer games were set in it in the 1990s.

One in particular, *Tie fighter*, put the player in the role of the pilot of one of the eponymous Imperial attack ships, defending order and peace in the galaxy, hunting down rebel spies and so on. Quite apart from the enjoyable narrative reversal, you get to play your part in the main narrative; when Mon Mothma declares that "many Bothans died to give us this information" in *Return of the Jedi*, you get to kill the Bothans; you even get to set Admiral Akbar's famous trap. But I always resented what you don't get to do - *spring* the trap, blow the Millennium Falcon to smithereens, destroy the last best hope for the rebels. Why not? Because that would interfere with 'the canon'.

Star wars is a very important film. It is, first of all, a turning point in Hollywood cinema, coming at the end of a period when the last great generation of auteurs were essentially given free rein to spend studio money. The runaway success of *Star wars*, coupled with the tanking of films like Michael Cimino's *Heaven's gate*, put paid to that era, and brought into being a new age of ruthless commercialism, whose ultimate issue is the present-day tyranny of the comic book franchises over the box office. *Star wars*, in retrospect, is just as much a "sprawling, meaningless but still reassuringly finite universe" as the Marvel or DC Comics alternatives (to use Alan Moore's excellent description of the latter).

William Goldman, the screenwriter and novelist, famously said that "in Hollywood, no-one knows anything". He was wrong: one thing that *everyone* in Hollywood (and, frankly, also in remote peasant villages in Sierra Leone) knows is that it is *prima facie* unimaginable that a *Star wars* film will tank. The justly reviled *Phantom menace*, as noted, was not so reviled at the time, and indeed made a billion dollars. (Now the spell is broken, it is quite striking to watch it again and see *quite how bad it actually is*; even that thing pulled in a \$900 million profit.)

Secondly, it was the first franchise to introduce fandom to the mainstream, and was so successful in doing so that activities which would in any other



There to make money

context be derided as the height of the kind of frightful, sad nerdiness that ought to condemn one to a life of unblemished virginity pass muster as ordinary behaviour. Many people dress up as *Star wars* characters who would not even be able to spell 'cosplay'. The result is the aforementioned obsession with canonicity, which extends beyond the usual small ranks of angry nerds. It is striking that Quentin Tarantino, in *Inglourious basterds*, can rewrite the history of World War II so Brad Pitt can kill Hitler in a Paris cinema, but nobody would dare retcon the *Star wars* mythos (except George Lucas himself, who constantly tampers with the material in DVD re-releases and so on, to dubious ends).

Thus the problem of *Rogue one* - an immediate prequel to the first film (or episode 4, or whatever you like). The latter begins with Princess Leia, played by the late Carrie Fisher, trying to get the Death Star schematics to the rebellion; *Rogue one* sends a plucky band off on a suicide mission to retrieve the damn things for her in the first place. I would give a more thorough plot summary, but frankly none is necessary, or indeed possible. We know how the thing ends, because we have seen the other films. Can we really imagine that surprises will be permitted along the way? In the very early days of cinema, films were sold by the yard; *Rogue one* may be a digital production, but it is basically half a mile of *Star wars*, as regular and predictable as bank holiday rain.

I have seen a lot of comparisons between *Rogue one* and *The empire strikes back*, which, being as it is a perfectly competent and tightly plotted space-opera, is far and away the best of the films so far. Unfortunately, the more appropriate comparison is *The phantom menace*. *Rogue one* is a preposterous dumpster fire of a film: it is wildly uneven in tone, and weighed down with tedious fan service (most egregiously in the form of a computer-generated young Carrie Fisher in a cameo as Princess Leia, and a computer-reanimated Peter Cushing as Grand Moff Tarkin, by far the most disturbing cinematic spectacle of the year).

The big problem, however, is the script, which is unutterably awful. Dialogue in this movie consists, with very few exceptions, of people hammily hurling clichés at each other like a Christmas dinner food-fight between squabbling relatives. Motives are unsophisticated. Minor characters are

restricted to the laziest stereotypes (Donnie Yen as a blind Oriental martial arts expert in particular makes Jar-Jar Binks look like a Spike Lee protagonist). You know who the evil ones are, because they all look and sound a bit like Alan Rickman.

Squandered

There is a truly remarkable aspect to all this, which is the squandered talent. The men responsible for this atrocious screenplay are Tony Gilroy, whose *Bourne* films revitalised action cinema at its nadir, and Chris Weitz, who has turned in competent genre pieces like *Antz*, *American pie* and *About a boy*. Neither are ever going to win comparisons to David Mamet, but not even the most superfluous *American pie* sequel can compare to *Rogue one* for dunderheaded subtlety. Director Gareth Edwards debuted with the excellent *Monsters*, an indie sci-fi road-trip film with a hint of Tarkovsky about it. Felicity Jones plays Jyn Erso, the lead character here, with a voice always on the edge of a fake theatrical tear, like somebody whose idea of acting was based entirely on parodic portrayals of over-excited thespians in stage-door musicals; but she has done fine work in the past.

The same could be said of most of the rest of the cast, with the exception of Forest Whitaker, who does an enjoyable bit of scenery-chewing as a mentally cracked, mutilated rebel guerrilla, and Alan Tudyk, who voices the sarcastic android sidekick. People just love the sarcastic android sidekick, but the overall effect is disorienting: after 10 minutes of everyone else humourlessly mewling clichés at each other, or shooting each other to death, Tudyk will step up and all but clear his throat and tell everyone to listen because there is a funny joke imminent.

Leaving the script aside for a moment - for nobody ever went to see a *Star wars* film for the script - there is the matter of the spectacle. It should be said that the aforementioned *Empire* comparisons are ultimately down to the darker tone of this film, and in some respects *Rogue one* is shockingly violent. There are a couple of action sequences that are very well-choreographed (a guerrilla ambush early on in particular); and a great horror movie moment with Darth Vader. The action sequences, however, are blighted paradoxically by not being violent enough; hundreds or even thousands die in the course of this merry band's little trek through the heart of enemy

territory. They are shot, sometimes while wounded and prone (let the Force sort 'em out!); they are beaten to death; they are blown up by grenades and airstrikes.

Yet throughout all this absurd carnage, nobody bleeds.

There is an odd feature of film censorship orthodoxy, which leads the British Board of Film Classification, Motion Picture Association of America and so on (especially the former) to come down heavily on scenes of violence that linger on pain and otherwise focus on its traumatic consequences. This always struck me as morally perverse, for it has as its corollary the idea that it is just fine for kids to watch scenes of spectacular brutality, so long as it is presented as basically all so much good fun. Such is the absurdity of the bourgeois cult of childhood innocence.

Rogue one is an especially acute case; watching yet another massacre of Imperial stormtroopers, in their glossy, plasticky uniforms, one almost feels one is watching a small child smashing his action figures together. Everything looks stupid, fake, plasticky. Old gimmicks, like the distinctive trebly voices of the stormtroopers, feel more affected than ever. Edwards' *Monsters*, on a budget of \$500,000, had far more convincing special effects sequences than *Rogue one* manages to screw out of \$200 million.

I want to emphasise that, while many of *Rogue one*'s deficiencies are typical of big-ticket Hollywood fare, on this particular point it is certainly possible within the confines of the system to do better. Christopher Nolan's *Batman* films, though hardly perfect, have some moral complexity to them; the same might be said of the better *X-men* films. In particular, *The hunger games* did as good a job as could be expected at a 12A certificate of adapting a book where - in the BBFC's formula - "strong bloody violence" is both frequent and utterly unromantic. It was not a risky film to make - the books were already mega-sellers, and unsurprisingly the film made its money back eight times over, with the franchise as a whole worth close to \$3 billion. Only in the *Star wars* franchise, apparently, is narrative complexity unimaginable.

What do we learn from all this? Merely that with sufficient bureaucratic power, and a sufficiently overawed cast and crew, any number of creative sparks can be extinguished in the pursuit of a zero-risk billion-dollar movie. Yet it need not be so. Audiences *expect* more than off-the-peg Manichean idiocy in their popcorn-munching movies nowadays. The risk-averse character of modern Hollywood consists in only doing things that have already been successful (as books, as comics, as earlier films ...); in many cases, those things are successful *because* they dare not treat people like mouthbreathing five-year-olds.

Unfortunately, in the case of *Star wars*, things are different; films in this franchise alone exist exclusively to indulge those parts of middle-aged men which are mere survivals of the most sociopathic tendencies of their childhood selves. The *Star wars* fanboy, whatever his age, is forever a seven-year-old; he is only entertained by being pandered to. Anything with more depth would violate the canon.

All culture in class society is contradictory, even in its most mechanised forms (Hollywood films, triple-A video games); *Rogue one* stands out as an atypically pure representative of one pole of the contradiction, and stands as a demonstration of that which is degraded and degrading in mass popular culture today ●

Harley Filben

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 capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

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

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

■ 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

**Moderate
opposition
is now pure
fiction**

After the fall of Aleppo

Opposition to imperialism does not mean support for Assad, argues Yasmine Mather

Before the death of ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani on January 8 (an event that has dominated Iranian politics and news), Iranian clerics and leaders of Iran's Revolutionary Guards had been competing with each other in making exaggerated claims about the significance of the fall of Aleppo: it was a victory against "heresy" and for the "ascendancy of Shia Islam". One cleric called on Iranians (presumably he meant the Revolutionary Guards already in Syria) to clean up Aleppo, as the 12th Shia Imam would soon be paying a visit!

This, together with the triumphalism during the inspection of the ruins of east Aleppo by major general Qasem Soleimani (credited with commanding Iranian troops in Syria's recent battles), should be condemned. The intervention of Iran and Russia in Syria has cost the lives of thousands of civilians. All such foreign intervention - be it by the US, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran and Russia - should be condemned, and Iran and Russia cannot be exempt from this on the basis that they were invited by the Syrian regime.

Having said that, we now have a clearer picture of the final days of the battles in and around east Aleppo. The latest round of 'peace talks' between some rebel groups and Turkey, Iran and Russia gives an indication of who backed the main armed rebel groups. Most of these groups, far from being democratic, secular forces, were close to Turkey's Islamic nationalist president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The extended participation of Syrian Kurds on the same side as those fighting against 'rebels' in Aleppo (in other words, on the same side as Hezbollah and other Shia groups) demonstrates that accusations of Turkish involvement in arming and sponsoring a section of the rebels in east Aleppo should be taken seriously.

By all accounts, at least since 2015 the claim that the Free Syrian Army represents moderate or secular forces has been untenable.

It is worthwhile repeating what Ben Hall, in his book, *Inside Isis: the brutal rise of a terrorist army*, tells us. The FSA leading light, Abdul Jabbar al-Oqaidi, who was promoted by the US ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford, has never denied his support for jihadist groups - to the embarrassment of the US authorities. After the battle for Al Menagh, al-Oqaidi's victory speech is quoted by many to show that, while he was on the US government's Syria support payroll, he fought alongside and publicly praised IS fighters, calling them "heroes".

Robert Fisk gave us a similar view in 2015, when he wrote about claims that the Syrian regime was not fighting IS:

This rubbish has reached its crescendo in the on-again, off-again saga of the Syrian 'moderates'. These men were originally military defectors to the FSA, which America and European countries regarded as a possible pro-western force to be used against the Syrian government army. But the FSA fell to pieces, corrupted, and the 'moderates' defected all over again, this time to the Islamist Nusra Front or to

Isis, selling their American-supplied weapons.

Washington admitted their disappearance, bemoaned their fate, concluded that new 'moderates' were required, persuaded the CIA to arm and train 70 fighters, and this summer packed them off across the Turkish border to fight - whereupon all but 10 were captured by Nusra and at least two of them were executed by their captors. Just two weeks ago, I heard in person one of the most senior ex-US officers in Iraq - David Petraeus's former No2 in Baghdad - announce that the 'moderates' had collapsed long ago. Now you see them - now you don't...

False claims

In a letter to the *Weekly Worker* published on December 22, Hannu Reime made a number of claims in relation to my article, 'Reaping the harvest' (December 15), and I will attempt to reply to some of his points. He wrote:

Yasmine seems to argue - obliquely, but still - that the Syrian uprising against the Assad tyranny was almost nothing else but a US, Saudi and Qatari regime-change scheme and had very little in common with the Arab spring in other countries of the Arab world, Egypt in particular.

Nothing could be further from the truth. I have written extensively on the importance and legitimacy of opposition to Bashar Assad, notably the protests of 2011 and 2012 and the opposition to the implementation of neoliberal economic policies by the Assads (father and son). I have also written in support of the Kurdish peshmergas, who were for a long time the only forces fighting IS and Al Nusra, and criticised their subsequent rapprochement with Russia and later the United States.

I am also very clear in my December 15 article that no-one should doubt the legitimacy of the opposition to Assad in 2011 and 2012. However, I believe that the deliberate destruction of Syria and the defeat of the genuine opposition to the Assad regime - after Saudi Arabia got involved and Turkey, Qatar, etc, intervened, supported by the United States - played an important role in changing the balance of forces among those fighting the regime, leading to the dominance of jihadist groups and forcing the secular opposition into exile. This is also the opinion of Syrian socialists in exile and what comrades I know in Beirut are saying. The population of eastern Aleppo had no allegiance to Al Nusra or



Robert Fisk: first you see them, then you don't

pro-Turkey groups fighting in the city and it was right to express concern about the people of the city. That is why I opposed Russian air raids and opposed Iranian intervention in articles and in a number of interviews/debates on BBC Persian TV.²

Moreover, I do not equate calling for no-fly zones with pro-imperialist posturing. I just do not think it is a rational or practical suggestion. However, the 'socialists' mentioned in my article have called unambiguously for 'humanitarian' imperialist intervention. That is what I am arguing against. Imperialist intervention is part of the problem and will play no role in strengthening or saving the Syrian secular opposition. Any illusions the Kurds had about such interventions have been shattered in recent months.

In the last few weeks leftwing Syrian exiles have given a number of interviews, reminding us that there was a genuine opposition to Assad in 2011-12 and I agree with what they say. My only additional comment is that, once Saudi Arabia and the United States got involved in the conflict, it was inevitable that the much weaker secular opposition would be ignored by the 'international community'. On a far larger scale the

same is true of Iran, where tens of thousands of workers have protested against the neoliberal economic policies of the clerical rulers, but there is no mention of their protests in most of the western media. This is not the kind of news they are looking for.

In the case of Syria's contemporary history, the constant betrayal of the 'official' Communist Party, its support for Hafez al-Assad and later his son, and the absence of an alternative left, meant that the working class movement was in a much weaker position when the conflict started. That is why I agree with those on the Syrian left such as Yassin Al Saleh, who says:

For 30 years, the Ba'ath Party has made a project of crushing all political life in Syria. So, when the uprising came, we had no real political organisations - only individuals here and there. Islam, in our society, is the limit of political poverty. When you don't have any political life, people will mobilise according to the lowest stratum of an imaginary community. This deeper identity is religion. When you have political and cultural life, you can have trade unions, leftist groups, and people are able to organise along any number of identities. But when you crush politics, when there is no political life, religious identity will prosper.³

Of course, we should blame the dictatorial regimes of Assad and Saddam for suppressing all secular opposition and paving the way for jihadist dominance. However, it remains the case that the main countries currently funding these groups are imperialism's allies in the region: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the emirates of the Persian Gulf.

I also disagree with those who argue that the US should have provided the heavy weapons required by Syrian rebels to defend themselves against the regime's air attacks. We have seen enough leaked documents to know that the US turned a blind eye when the Saudis and Qataris armed and financed jihadi groups, and we also know that such weapons have ended up in the hands of IS or Al Nusra.

Even if the weapons were 'defensive' - ie, anti-missile or anti-aircraft - the fact remains that they would have lengthened the military life of the murderous jihadists. Al Qaeda's origins in Afghanistan should give some indication of how CIA anti-aircraft missiles not only saved the group from air attacks, but encouraged them to believe they had defeated one superpower - the Soviet Union - and they could do the same to the rest of the infidel world. In Syria any weapons supplied

to non-Islamist groups have either been captured by jihadists (who were stronger and better armed than smaller groups, courtesy of the west's main allies in the region) or handed over by rebels who left the ranks of the 'moderate opposition' to join Al Nusra or IS. The idea that imperialism would have considered supporting secular, democratic forces within the Syrian opposition, as opposed to relying on Saudi Arabia, the emirates and their jihadist protégés, is both naive and contrary to the history of colonialism and imperialism - not only in Syria, but in the entire Middle East.⁴

It is understandable that, faced with the current devastating situation in their country, individuals in the Syrian opposition, including some socialists, still have illusions about western intervention. However, internationalist socialists have a duty to say they are mistaken. The battles in Syria are part of a bigger war, engulfing all of the Middle East. They are the direct result of the situation created after the collapse of Saddam's regime and subsequent Israeli and Saudi paranoia about Iran's Islamic Republic. Assad's Syria's remains a target for regime change, not because he is a progressive secular leader, as the Syrian Communist Party tells us, but because, if there is an Israeli air strike against Iran's nuclear installations, Syria and Hezbollah could facilitate Iranian retaliation. The pro-Zionist 'left' I was referring to is well aware of this and its advocacy of western intervention is in fact support for the state of Israel - such people could not care less about Syrian progressives.

Of course, that does not mean we should tone down our opposition to Assad or his allies in Iran. I am in favour of the overthrow of the Islamic Republic of Iran and I have no sympathy with the Shia clerics' ally, the Assad regime. But the reality is that US failed attempts to overthrow the clerical regime in Iran and to impose regime change from above on its ally, the Syrian regime, have only strengthened both Damascus and Tehran ●

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Notes

- www.independent.co.uk/voices/syria-s-moderates-have-disappeared-and-there-are-no-good-guys-a6679406.html
- The last of these was on December 22 and can be seen at www.youtube.com/watch?v=SO6oQn49It4&feature=youtu.be
- https://theintercept.com/2016/10/26/syria-yassin-al-haj-saleh-interview
- See my article, 'The fall of the Ottoman empire and the current conflict in the Middle East' in *Critique*: www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03017605.2014.972151.

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