

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



**Grassroots Momentum
report and interview: we
need a socialist programme**

- NHS under attack
- Labour Party polemic
- Iran's prospects
- Arming February 1917

No 1146 Thursday March 16 2017

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

£1/€1.10

NEW FAKE NEWS



LETTERS



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

Open war

On January 22 2017 Left Unity's national secretary received a draft for an open letter to Jeremy Corbyn on rights of the Scottish people. On February 9 the LU executive committee replied - they decided not to write to Corbyn on this matter. The idea was raised at the conference of Respect, Independence, Socialism and Environmentalism (Rise) on March 4. Rise took a similar view and rejected any such letter or a campaign.

The letter was drafted through consultation between three members of Rise and Left Unity with the intention that it would become a joint letter signed by both organisations. At least both anti-unionist organisations did not fall out. If we cannot unite to do something at least we can unite to do nothing.

It was an opportunity missed. It is always a good idea to get ahead of the game rather than follow sheepishly along in the wake of battle. A battle royal was surely about to kick off. This week it did, when the elected Nicola Sturgeon stole the thunder from the unelected Theresa May by declaring the intention to hold a second Scottish independence referendum.

May is fighting for a hard Tory Brexit. The Tories will be screwed if Scotland and Northern Ireland remain in the European Union. Scotland, having previously voted to remain in the UK and the EU, cannot now do both. One way to solve this contradiction is force - forcing Scotland out of the EU against its will, as expressed in the 2016 referendum.

Force starts with imposition and ends in war. The Tories want to block or prevent a consultative referendum. But they are realists. If they can't stop it, they will delay it to a time of their choosing. If they can't do that, they will mobilise all their forces in the state, the loyalist parties and the media to prevent the end of the UK. It would be an irony if the unintended consequence of Brexit was a new Anglo-Welsh world superpower.

Letters are neither here nor there. It is the politics that counts. Open letters are a long established method of political struggle connected to the united front. Left Unity and Rise would jointly declare war on the Tory government and the policy of the Labour Party. But this is only part of the story. The open letter is aimed at a united front between Corbyn's socialist Labour, Left Unity, Rise and Momentum - and indeed the rest of the left - to fight the Tory Brexit.

The main enemy identified in the letter is the Tory government, which is determined to impose a hard, anti-working class, Tory Brexit on the whole UK. They gerrymandered the referendum by excluding sizable groups of voters. The letter does not identify Corbyn with the Tory enemy, but appeals to him saying, "The Tory referendum on the EU presents us with the challenge of finding a progressive democratic and internationalist way out of the mess they have landed us in."

Opposition to an anti-unionist united front comes from the Tories, the UK Independence Party and the right wing of Labour committed to the interests of the British ruling class. They are demanding Corbyn joins their popular front to defend the UK. The socialist wing of the Labour Party is thus caught on the horns of a dilemma. Should they back the Tories, as Gordon Brown did, whilst trying to keep a safe distance to deceive the working class? Or should they adopt a novel or indeed 'revolutionary' approach? Left Unity and Rise have to show they are relevant to this battle if they are to be relevant at all.

One explanation for the reluctance of Left Unity and Rise to unite and fight the class enemy is simply that both organisations are not ready to fight or

are simply too weak. We can respect that if it is honestly admitted, but not if it is concealed by excuses and general flim-flam.

The other obvious reason is sectarian politics, which rejects the fight for the united front. In Scotland a strong opinion among ultra-lefts and sectarians is that Corbyn is irrelevant. This is parochial nationalism of the worst type. Corbyn is still seen as potentially dangerous, because he encourages working class action. There is no doubt that Corbyn is connected to the working class and trade union movement in England, where by far the largest section of the working class is concentrated.

International socialists in Scotland recognise this fact and it figures in their calculations about building an anti-unionist alliance with international socialists in England. Anti-unionism has to be fought both sides of the border and especially among the English working class, as does the inevitable growth of national chauvinism, especially in England.

Left Unity and Rise are embryonic anti-unionist, socialist parties. They are stronger campaigning together and weaker apart. This open letter did not bark. It is a wake-up call. There is no future for parties that are not ready or able to fight over the big political issues of the day. There is no bigger issue than the very future of the kingdom.

Steve Freeman
Left Unity and Rise

Differences

At the Grassroots Momentum networking conference last Saturday, the differences came out around two motions on the way forward. Motion 2 was from the Wrackite wing (Matt Wrack and Nick Wrack, supported by Red Flag/Workers Power, etc), which acknowledged that a split had already happened and we needed to gather together those excluded by Lansman to mobilise the base. The second, backed by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and CPGB, wanted to fudge the question, to pretend a split had not happened and to keep that base in check.

And it was all about genuinely mobilising the base - those mobilised in the first and second Corbyn surges to fight austerity. Now using them simply as a stage army to get Corbyn elected in 2020 and not to fight austerity, including that imposed by Labour councils, will ensure he *won't* get elected.

That was the difference between motions 2 and 3. Motion 2, of course, could have been better formulated (the conference itself could have been better organised), but clearly No2 did not seek a bureaucratic cap on the movement in case it would embarrass Corbyn to the same extent as No3.

Crucially No2 proposed that "Local groups meet as normal, but affiliate to Grassroots Momentum", which should have a proper democratic structure: "All affiliated groups send two reps to meet quarterly at a forum for networking and discussing good practice, perspectives, policy, campaigning priorities, etc. (This replaces the current NC)."

The AWL and CPGB did not want a split. As if it had not already happened and the clear choice now was whether to capitulate or fight. No3 wanted the fudge and it won by 89 votes to 83 - to much whooping from AWL youth. (It turns out that only 134 registered at the door and the delegates voted right at the start to abandon the delegate structures, so everyone got to vote. There were floods of AWL student youth in the seats in front of me.)

But this is unsustainable, as demonstrated by the West Lothian question for Grassroots Momentum: what happens to the expelled members from Labour in July, when they are automatically expelled from Momentum? In practical terms to whom do I pay my £1 a month, if Grassroots Momentum is not a separate organisation with its own

bank account and structures by then? It irks me to have to pay it up to July, as it goes into the pocket of a private company, owned by the corrupt, bureaucratic millionaire/property speculator monster, John Lansman, but I will do so until then.

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

Command economy

Thanks to Rex Dunn for his informative and stimulating piece on post-1917 Russian art and the pressures of western intervention on the progress of the October Revolution ('Mayakovsky and the avant garde', March 9).

Last week I happened to visit the Royal Academy for its latest exhibition, *Revolution: Russian art 1917-32* (which continues till April 17). I was impressed with the diversity of work from the 1920s, though disagreed with some of the curators' views. There was Malevich, the abstractionist; the ambitious constructivists and the militant Proletkult: Isaak Brodsky, the very model for the socialist-realist style of the 1930s; alongside domestic painters, colourful ceramists and designers like El Lissitzky. I left in no doubt that much of this was the work that influenced western modernists well into the 50s and 60s.

This flowering occurred in the circumstances of civil war and the threat of invasion and starvation. But the thing was that there was also a 'civil war' between the different groups of artists. Even some of the most famous avant-gardists seemed to think there should only be one 'revolutionary' style: theirs. But Bolsheviks like Lenin and Trotsky didn't think like this: Lenin had certain preferences, but he only pressed these for party literature - for analysis and propaganda, not art and design. Trotsky proposed in 1919 that craft workers should join industrial combines, but he didn't insist on dishes looking a certain way. He wrote *Literature and revolution* (1924), which, when I came to read it, surprised me by not being a manifesto, but just a survey of pre- and post-1917 culture.

Yet this maelstrom of robust activity was brought to an end not by the emergence of one popular style or even just a return to tradition - Isaak Brodsky had shown, in his 'conventional' paintings of Lenin and Russian crowds, that socialist realism can have a power which we associate with exploratory and effective art. No, the robust diversity of the 20s, where artists could promote production and explore the problems of everyday life (in films too), was contained by a command economy: artists had to start looking over their shoulder: Is my work 'socialist realist' enough? Is it optimistic and proletarian? Will it do?

There's an example in the RA show of the sort of style that finally claimed supremacy over the rest. It's entitled *Collective farm team leader* (1932) and you can guess the sort of thing it presents: a placid worker-organiser at the centre of some agricultural activity, which indicates no difficulties or interruption of command between heroic central allocation and bright fulfilment. Here is the art of reassurance.

The early process of revolution facing outwards to the world, which might indeed have consulted workers and consumers, had given way to the state-led modernisation of one nation in which an insecure bureaucracy was arbiter of everything from imaginary wheat production to the approval of art.

Mike Belbin
email

No platform

The Sun is the bloody rag of Hillsborough, and the persecutor of my friend (yes, still my friend), Tom Watson. *The Times* employs Oliver Kamm, the tormentor of my friend, Neil Clark. But try as I might to work myself up about Rupert Murdoch's

attempt to purchase the rest of Sky, I cannot bring myself to do so. What would such an acquisition make any worse?

The BBC gives little or no platform to those who understand the lesson of the EU referendum result in the United Kingdom, and of the election of Donald Trump in the United States - which is that the workers, and not the liberal bourgeoisie, are the key swing voters. The BBC gives little or no platform to those who locate identity issues within the overarching and undergirding context of the struggle against economic inequality and in favour of international peace. The BBC gives little or no platform to those who welcome the fact that the EU referendum was decided by those areas which voted 'leave', while voting Labour, Liberal Democrat or Plaid Cymru for other purposes, and which have thus made themselves the centre of political attention (except, of course, on the BBC).

The BBC gives little or no platform to those who celebrate the leading role in the defence of universal public services of those who would otherwise lack basic amenities, and the leading role in the promotion of peace of those who would be the first to be called upon to die in wars. The BBC gives little or no platform to those who have opposed from the start the failed programme of economic austerity. The BBC gives little or no platform to those who opposed Tony Blair's privatisation of the national health service and other public services, his persecution of the disabled and his assault on civil liberties - all of which have continued under every subsequent government.

The BBC gives little or no platform to those who have opposed every British military intervention since 1997. The BBC gives little or no platform to those who oppose Britain's immoral and one-sided relationship with Saudi Arabia, and who reject the demonisation of Russia. The BBC gives little or no platform to those who have the real eyes to realise real lies, recognising that the truly fake news is propagated in support of the economic policies of neoliberal austerity and the foreign policies of neoconservative war.

The BBC gives little or no platform to those who reject any approach to climate change which would threaten existing or potential jobs, workers' rights, the right to have children, travel opportunities or universal access to a full diet. The BBC gives little or no platform to those who seek to rescue issues such as male suicide, men's health, and fathers' rights from those whose economic and other policies have caused the problems. And the BBC gives little or no platform to those who refuse to recognise racists, fascists or opportunists as the authentic voices of

the accepted need to control immigration.

Over-concentrated media ownership, especially by a foreign national who is not based in this country, is inherently problematic. But in the very great scheme that is these things, the biggest problem is not Rupert Murdoch. He already owns a lot of Sky, on which the much-maligned RT does indeed provide these platforms. He now also owns Talk Radio, on which they are provided by the much-maligned George Galloway, whom Murdoch has not sacked, and who is a friend and comrade of mine and of Neil Clark's. As the proprietor of the whole of Sky, Murdoch might even do some good.

David Lindsay
County Durham

Tribute

Thirty-six people packed into the Red Shed meeting room in Wakefield last Saturday (March 11) to discuss the Spanish Civil War and to remember those who so bravely fought against fascism.

The first speaker was the author and campaigner, Granville Williams. Granville noted that the Soviet Union, through the Comintern, was urging young workers to go to Spain. However, between 1936 and 1938 there were massive purges in the Soviet Union. This "terror in the Soviet Union was projected into Spain", with the "persecution and extermination of Trotskyists". Granville paid particular tribute to POUM (Workers Party of Marxist Unification), which had "brilliant leaders" and activists, who had led struggles, including mass strikes.

The second speaker was Bob Mitchell, a former councillor and mayor of Wakefield. He said the "democrats of Spain were defending an elected government" and "defending reforms against a fascist and military coup". All was generated poetry, he said, but the Spanish Civil War in particular spawned an "immense body of work". Bob then read a moving selection of poetry by John Cornford, Frank Ryan, Frank Edwards and others.

The final speaker was the environmental campaigner, Tim Padmore. Tim spoke in particular about a new production of the play, *Dare devil rides to Jarama*, which tells the story of two volunteers, Clem Beckett and Chris Caldwell, who went to fight with the International Brigades in Spain.

The event was organised by the Wakefield Socialist History Group. Our next event is on Saturday April 1 at 1pm, again at the Red Shed, when Dr Martin Crick and Paul Bennett will speak at a meeting on 'British socialism and World War I'.

Alan Stewart
Wakefield Socialist History Group

Fighting fund

Spot on

"Your coverage of Corbyn and Labour is spot on," writes comrade TS. "Just the right balance between support for Jeremy and criticism of his retreats."

TS mentioned in particular last week's paper, where Lawrence Parker, Tony Greenstein and Paul Demarty all touched on different aspects of Labour's internal battles - what else could he do but write us a cheque for £20 to show his appreciation?

Apart from that, I have to say that last week was not one of our best when it came to raising cash for our monthly £1,750 fighting fund target. True, JP clicked on our PayPal button a couple of times to donate a total of £65 (!), while SP added another fiver in the same way. But it wasn't a good week for standing orders - only £80 came

in (thank you, comrades KC and LN). It must be that time of the month again.

Anyway, our fighting fund benefited to the tune of £170 all in all, taking our total for March up to £1,317. But, of course, that still leaves us another two weeks to raise the extra £433 we need - not to mention an extra £100 or so to make up for January's deficit!

How about some more of you web readers chipping in? There were 3,280 of you last week, but only the two mentioned above thought of making a donation. There's no time like the present! ●

Robbie Rix

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

NHS

Worse than it appears

Why go for open privatisation when you can quietly administer concealed poison? James Linney describes the reality of underfunding

don't know if you've heard, but the national health service is in crisis. Well, given how much the crisis has been in the media this winter, the only way you could not have heard is by walking around with headphones over your ears and a bag over your head - not something to be recommended and likely to lead you to witnessing the crisis first hand.

Headlines such as *The Sun's* 'Third world A&E'¹, *The Daily Mail's* 'Thousands dying of thirst on NHS'² or *The Guardian's* 'NHS faces humanitarian crisis'³ have left little doubt that the NHS is sinking. The media have long been telling us that each crisis represents the final nail in the coffin for the NHS - a coffin that by now must be so well secured that you can't see the wood for all the nails. For those of us that work in the NHS, that feeling of trepidation in late autumn, when airborne viruses start their seasonal peak, will be all too familiar. It led to us walking around like characters from *Game of Thrones*, whispering to each other in a hushed voice: 'Winter is coming ...'

But there is far more to the current situation than the usual sensationalised headlines and this year has certainly been one of, if not the most, challenging for the NHS. Accident and emergency department waiting times are the worst they have ever been,⁴ there is a critical shortage of beds, leading to patients spending hours on trolleys in A&E, and even when they are admitted they may have to be put on a ward that has inadequate staff and training to deal with them. After the deaths of two people were attributed to waiting for hours on A&E trolleys in Worcestershire Royal Hospital in January, Mike Adamson, the chief executive of Red Cross, described the situation in the NHS as a "humanitarian crisis".

The reason for this abysmal situation is undisputedly chronic underfunding. The consequences of which were recently highlighted in research by the University of Oxford London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, which concluded that in 2015 30,000 unnecessary or premature deaths were the result of cuts in health and social care.⁵ For evidence that this horrible situation is only going to get worse we need only look to the Tory spring budget published on the March 8. In it Philip Hammond announced a total of £425 million in extra funding for the NHS over the next three years, with another £2 billion for adult social care over the same period. You do not have to be the chief executive of NHS England (in fact, as we shall see, it helps if you are not) to realise that £425 million is a drop in a very large ocean. And if we look in detail as to how this money is going to be spent, we see the situation is even worse than it first appears.

Of the total £425 million, £100 million will be allocated to A&E departments - "to help them manage demand ahead of next winter [and] provide more on-site GP facilities".⁶ This amount of funding is clearly not going to have any impact - perhaps if you allocated £100 million to each large A&E in the country you might get somewhere. And, even if A&E departments were able to build state-of-the-art on-site GP facilities, they would remain largely empty, because, as BMA council chair Mark Porter pointed out, "the government also needs to explain how it will fund and recruit GPs to work on site at



NHS celebrated, London Olympics 2012

hospitals ... Many are already working in practices with permanent vacancies which they are unable to fill."

'Transformation'

The remainder of the NHS budget allocation (£325million) will be ring-fenced for investment in the controversial 'sustainability and transformation plans' (STPs). If the budget was the first you heard of STPs, then you are not alone - according to a recent BMA survey, 59% of doctors had never heard of them either and 85% of consultants had not received any information from their NHS trusts about them.⁷ The STPs were rush-published last year and are championed by NHS England's chief executive, Steven Simons. This is the same Steven Simons that health secretary Jeremy Hunt hired in 2014 - the ex-president of global operations for United Health of America - to help Hunt enforce his crippling NHS cuts ... sorry, I mean 'efficiency savings': all £22 billion of them.

The STPs split the NHS up into 44 areas of the country called 'footprints', and each area has published an STP that sets out its aims for the next four years. These very lengthy documents are essentially an echo chamber for Jeremy Hunt's "five-year forward view" plan for the NHS. Like this document these STPs are a mixture of aspirational corporate-speak without any basis in reality and loosely veiled plans for further savings. Each plan has to outline the area's current estimated 'overspending' and set out how it aims to reduce it - 44% of them include hospital closures. The BMA sent a freedom of information request to the 44 STPs, enquiring as to how much up-front capital would be needed to implement them and received 37 responses. The total came to £9.53 billion - that £325 million really isn't going to go very far.

For campaign groups such as 38 Degrees these STPs represent the end of the NHS as we know it and they see them as a secret plan for devolution that will lead directly to full privatisation, based around the American-style insurance networks called health maintenance organisations (HMOs). In fact Jeremy Hunt made a telling slip in 2016, whilst being questioned about STPs by the health select committee: he stated that we may have to find a way "forward to budgetary arrangements you would have in Valencia or Kaiser Permanente".⁸ Kaiser Permanente being one the largest HMOs in America.

All of this can only lead us to one obvious conclusion: the Tories' claim that their budget represents a much needed boost for the NHS - an NHS that they allegedly remain committed to - in fact represents something very different. To everyone but the most naive the NHS budget allowance confirms that the Conservatives have no desire to tackle the serious crisis. Behind all the talk of finance, the need to reform and

'modernise', the efficiency saving and the STPs, lies a political ideology that is in opposition to the very idea of free healthcare and welfare. This ideology is not limited to the Tories: it is embedded within capitalism. Yet, as we know, capitalism's genius is its adaptability and ability to compromise when forced to.

The NHS represents one of those compromises. Created after a devastating world war, when the working class, having paid the price in the form of mass devastation and the deaths of millions, was ready to fight for a more equal society, the NHS was born. Yet almost from the beginning capitalism has been slowly eroding the NHS's status as being protected from the market. The STPs are simply a continuation of this long, subtle, erosive process.

But the working class still holds the NHS dear and is still ready to put up a fight whenever its existence is openly threatened. According to the much-used quote from then minister of health Aneurin Bevan in 1948, "The NHS will last as long as there are folk left with the faith to fight for it." This was visible on March 4 when the demonstration to defend it saw around 200,000 people take to the streets of London. This is the reason why the Tory government, whilst being opposed the NHS, will not come out openly for its privatisation. Why call out a risky open duel, when you can quietly administer concealed poison? This privatisation by stealth needs the NHS to be in continual crisis to demoralise its workforce and convince the public that more 'efficient' ways of doing things are needed.

Yet, despite the erosions and its many imperfections, the NHS still represents a very special organisation - its very existence is a hint towards the possibility of a different kind of society, where people are valued and provided for according to their own needs, as opposed to those of capital. But the will to fight alone is not enough: the working class also needs to have the means to fight effectively. This means more than just demonstrations: we need organisation and a party.

That is why the best hope for the NHS lies in the struggle to transform the Labour Party and building a real fighting party of the working class ●

Notes

1. www.thesun.co.uk/archives/news/6235/third-world-ae.
2. www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2403501/Thousands-dying-thirst-NHS-Watchdog-forced-issue-guidelines-giving-patients-water.html.
3. www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jan/06/nhs-faces-humanitarian-crisis-rising-demand-british-red-cross.
4. See www.qualitywatch.org.uk/indicator/ae-waiting-times.
5. http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0141076817693600.
6. www.gov.uk/government/news/spring-budget-2017-21-things-you-need-to-know.
7. www.bma.org.uk/news/2016/november/doctors-unaware-of-stps-finds-survey.
8. www.youtube.com/watch?v=0HyL-riKqgc.

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday March 19: No forum.

Sunday March 26, 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 10 ('The sickness of Labourism'), section 3: 'The battle for the Labour Party'.

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

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday March 21, 6.45pm: 'Tracing the palaeolithic origins of world mythology'. Speaker: Julien d'Huy.

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: http://radicalanthropologygroup.org.

March against racism

Saturday March 18: National demonstration.

Assemble: 12 noon, (BBC) Portland Place, London; 11am, Holland St, Glasgow; 11am, Grange gardens, Cardiff. Supported by the TUC. Organised by Stand Up To Racism: www.standuptoracism.org.uk.

Labour Heritage

Saturday March 18, 1.30pm to 5pm: AGM, followed by public meeting, Conway Hall (Brockway room), 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sessions on 'Reflections on Aneurin Bevan'; '100 years of the Cooperative Party'; 'The Labour Party in the 1920s'.

Organised by Labour Heritage: labourheritage45@btinternet.com.

By Marx's graveside

Sunday March 19, 2pm: Annual oration at Karl Marx's grave, Highgate Cemetery, Swain's Lane, London N6. Oration by Venezuelan ambassador Rocío Maneiro.

Organised by Highgate Cemetery: http://highgatecemetery.org.

Fly kites, not drones

Tuesday March 21, 12.30pm to 6pm: Politics and recreation day, junction of Temple Way and Temple Back East, Bristol BS1. Kite making and awareness raising about Bristol's connection to the arms trade.

Organised by Bristol Against the Arms Trade: www.facebook.com/bristolagainstarmstrade.

Momentum Teesside

Tuesday March 21, 7pm: Organising meeting, St Mary's Centre, 82-90 Corporation Road, Middlesbrough TS1.

Organised by Momentum Teesside: https://en-gb.facebook.com/MomentumTeesside.

End the special relationship

Tuesday March 21, 7.30pm: Meeting, 12 Jesus Lane, Cambridge CB5. Speaker: Stephen Bell (Stop the War national officer).

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

Remember JD Bernal

Friday March 24, 6pm: Public meeting, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. A celebration of John Bernal - socialist, scientist and peace campaigner.

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

Global terrorism and peace

Saturday March 25, 10.30am to 5pm: Conference, Wesley's Chapel, 49 City Road, London EC1. Registrations and other info:

vijay@vmpeace.org. Organised by Uniting for Peace: www.unitingforpeace.com.

Race to war?

Tuesday March 28, 6:30pm-8pm: Public meeting, Old Fire Station, 84 Mayton Street, London N7.

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

British socialism and World War I

Saturday April 1, 1pm: Public meeting, Red Shed, Vicarage Street, Wakefield WF1. Speakers: Dr Martin Crick (author of *The history of the Social Democratic Federation*) and Paul Bennett (Socialist Party of Great Britain). Admission free. including light buffet.

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

Another Europe is Possible

Saturday April 1, 11am to 5pm: National conference, Museum of Science and Industry, Liverpool Road, Manchester M3.

Organised by Another Europe is Possible: www.anothereurope.org.

Remember Tony Benn

Sunday April 2, 7pm: Remembrance night, Seven Dials Club, 42 Earlham Street, Covent Garden, London WC2.

Organised by Let's Celebrate Corbyn's Birthday: www.facebook.com/Lets-celebrate-Corbyns-birthday-278287529172743.

Yemen: rise of a chaos state

Wednesday April 5, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, Lechlade Road, Faringdon SN7. 'What's going on in Yemen Today?' Speaker: Jonathan Puddifoot (ex-director, Care International).

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

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

Against Lansman, for what?

On March 11, Grassroots Momentum met at Conway Hall in central London. Simon Wells and Carla Roberts report

Over 200 Momentum members attended the first gathering of the newly established Momentum Grassroots network. It could have easily been much bigger, had it not been built as a 'delegate' event - a decision which was overturned at the beginning of the meeting by a clear majority of the branch delegates (see interview opposite).

The organised left was there, of course: there were about two dozen members and supporters of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty/*The Clarion* and a handful of supporters each of Workers Power (*Red Flag*), Socialist Appeal and Labour Party Marxists. The Labour Representation Committee and Nick Wrack's Labour Party Socialist Network had a few members present, though neither seemed to make a coordinated intervention.

It is, of course, long overdue for the left within the Labour movement to start to get organised. But, on the day, GM's main political problem became more and more evident: it has been set up as a *reaction* to Jon Lansman's January 10 coup, when he simply abolished all elected Momentum bodies and imposed a bureaucratic constitution. All GM supporters are united in their opposition to this highly undemocratic manoeuvre. However, when it comes to the *way forward*, there were - at least - three different viewpoints present on March 11:

- Some want a clean split from Momentum - the sooner, the better. There are, naturally, differences over with whom to split, to form what exactly and on what political basis.

- Some want to continue to work in Momentum for now, while at the same time almost replicating the official body - with parallel structures and similar political limitations, but on a lower level: similar campaigns, similar leadership elections, etc.

- Some - and LPM belongs to this third group - agree that we should continue to work within Momentum for the time being, but with a clear understanding of its limited shelf life, openly criticising its exceedingly pinched political outlook and subordination to the politics of Jeremy Corbyn's 10 pledges.¹

How not to

Unfortunately, the GM conference made no attempt to clarify where GM as a whole might stand in relation to those three main options. In fact, we did not get a chance to *discuss* anything much at all, let alone serious politics.

To put it mildly, the organisation of the event was a shambles - reflecting, of course, the ideological and political poverty of much of the left. As is now common at such leftwing gatherings, we were presented with a stuffed agenda, which included speeches from strikers - but we had no time for proper, meaningful discussion or decision-making. Of course, we support the Picturehouse workers struggle for a living wage and are with the teaching assistants in Derby in their strike against the Labour council. But should the founding conference of GM really have devoted so much time to hearing their representatives, when contributions from the floor were limited to a measly two minutes?

An exception was made for Matt Wrack, leader of the Fire Brigades Union, who was allowed six minutes, but this was not enough to outline a set of serious proposals. Comrade Wrack had personally sponsored the conference with a "large contribution" - since his election as general secretary of the FBU, he has been "setting aside a portion of my wages to help fund the labour



Not in Birmingham: *Clarion* supporter addresses Grassroots Momentum

movement".

It would have helped if we had started the day with this comrade's contribution, but it was not until just before lunch that he spoke. He explained that the FBU "continues to keep an open mind" about Momentum and Grassroots Momentum, but had so far declined the offer to take up a seat on Lansman's national coordinating group. He spoke about the need to democratise Labour, fight for the selection of socialist MPs and for socialist policies - and said that in fact "we are making almost no progress in any of these areas". He quite correctly stated that "the right is running rings around the left at conference" and "expulsions for political reasons are not being challenged". He was also right to say that "Corbyn will lose, unless he faces these challenges head on".

The biggest problem was the agenda, which really was the wrong way round. We were to discuss campaigns first (see interview), then democratising the Labour movement, and only then were we supposed to have a discussion on "the way forward for GM", including how to elect some kind of a leadership. This last item was supposed to last just over an hour and a half. But clearly there were a lot of disagreements in the hall.

What kind of leadership?

LPM supporter John Bridge successfully challenged the agenda and after lunch we went on to discuss the future of GM. This challenge turned out to be quite crucial, as that discussion went on for the rest of the day. Clearly, conference should have started with it. And maybe then we would have had time to debate this question *politically*, rather than just decide on a method of electing a new leadership.

On this issue, we were presented with three options, which were put together by the former chair of the (now abolished) conference arrangements committee, Alec Price - himself a supporter of option 2 (incredibly, he also started chairing the session, but

after a challenge from the floor sat down again).

- Option 1 was not very serious: keep things as they are, with the remaining members of Momentum's official national committee (also abolished), who were elected many months ago, continuing to meet. Only one or two people voted for this.

- Option 2 was favoured by the ex-CAC members and was given by far the most time: local groups would affiliate to GM and send two representatives each to a leadership meeting every three months. Plus, conference was to directly elect a 'coordinating group' of six named positions. These two bodies would work together in perfect harmony, with the national meeting of branch delegates supposedly being the superior committee. But this is obvious nonsense. In practice the six directly elected officers would be unaccountable little Bonapartes - an all too common practice of the left and fervently opposed by LPM. Much to the consternation of the top table, after a couple of recounts, option 2 was defeated with 83 for and 89 against. Those who had already divvied up the six jobs between themselves were visibly stunned. For a good five minutes they literally did not know what to do.

- Option 3 was textually the briefest and allowed for "15-20 people" elected at conference to form a "steering committee" that "can elect an executive if they wish". This was successfully carried with 88 for and 68 against.

In general, option 2 was supported by comrades who want a politically narrower leadership (specifically in this case excluding the AWL/*The Clarion*) - about half the conference. As we had no proper discussion on this issue, it was projected onto the 30-second (!) hustings contributions by the 40-plus candidates who put themselves forward for the 20 national committee places. Without any consultation, let alone a vote, the chair announced that a least half the committee had to be female (ie, the quota system loved by liberal bureaucracies everywhere). And it

is no surprise, especially given the numbers they had mobilised, that the AWL candidates did well. They make up around a quarter of the committee (that despite the fact that in the morning session they badly lost out when they spoke against the proposal to include in GM's basic platform opposition to the bogus 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' witch-hunt).

The left within Momentum is, though, surely split on the most crucial question before us: what is it we hope to achieve in the Labour Party.

Is it about following the masses into Labour and building this or that social movement? Is it about splitting off a leftwing minority to form the core of a future revolutionary 'party' - ie, one of the sects writ large? Is it about working for a Labour government and hoping that Jeremy Corbyn manages to hang on till 2020? Is about fighting for a left-reformist Labour government that will carry out a limited range of progressive measures within the confines of the existing monarchical constitution?

Or, on the contrary, is it about transforming the Labour Party into a permanent united front of the entire organised working class, a party programmatically committed to republican democracy and a new, socialist, clause four? If it is the latter - which is certainly the case with LPM - then this means recognising that taking such a course will ensure that Labour remains a party of extreme opposition for many years to come. We prefer that to forming a government that has no chance of carrying out the full programme of Marxism. Hence we envisage the taking of power not just in Britain in isolation, but as part of a worldwide movement of working class self-liberation that has Europe as its decisive point of departure.

There is clearly no real political coherence among the comrades involved in GM at this stage. This is something we shall seek to rectify through a process of debate, discussion and involvement in what should be our common struggle to influence Momentum's 22,000 members. This

means that, in our view, GM should as a matter of tactic, not principle, remain a part of Momentum - just so long as we can make our voice heard in it and there are people to listen.

That does *not* mean we politically subordinate ourselves to Jon Lansman or, for that matter, Jeremy Corbyn. Of course not. But, if we arm ourselves with principled politics, we will have the opportunity, in however limited a way, to win many thousands to the cause of socialism. For example, LPM secretary Stan Keable stood in the recent Momentum elections to the national coordinating group for the South East constituency. He won a respectable 458 votes on a Marxist platform, which included a strongly-worded condemnation of the Lansman coup, naturally. Where is the downside of that, exactly? ●

Steering committee

The following were elected:

Matt Wrack, 137
Sahaya James, 95
Tracy McGuire, 93
Jackie Walker, 93
Nick Wrack, 89
Simon Hannah, 82
Delia Mattis, 63
Kevin McKenna, 80
Jill Mountford, 75
Graham Bash, 71
Rosie Woods, 71
Rida Vaquas, 69
Lee Griffiths, 69
Alec Price, 67
Pete Radcliff, 64
Ed Whitby, 63
Tina Werkmann, 61
Jan Pollock, 58
Richard Gerrard, 56
Joan Twelves, 53

Further results: www.grassrootsmomentum.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Grassroots-Conference-Steering-Committee-Election-Results.pdf

Notes

1. www.jeremyforlabour.com/economy.

Much confusion, little clarity

William Sarsfield spoke to Labour Party Marxists supporter Tina Werkmann, who was elected to the Grassroots Momentum steering committee

Was there a good turn-out?
There were about 200 people present, including Sahaya James and Rida Vaquas, both newly elected onto the Momentum's official national coordinating group (NCG), which - and what a coincidence! - met for its first gathering on the same day in Birmingham. The two comrades chose the Grassroots event instead, which is not necessarily the choice I would have made. But they both got elected onto the new Grassroots steering committee too (farcically, Rida then resigned and then withdrew her resignation!). In any case, I'm sure they will have some interesting discussions with Jon Lansman, who, I hear, has just been 'elected' as chair of the Momentum NCG.

The Grassroots event was bigger than I had expected. Especially as the conference arrangements committee had the remit of organising a delegate conference. There were, in fact, 70 or so official delegates from branches. Members in Momentum branches with pro-Lansman majorities were supposed to participate as observers with speaking, but no voting, rights. As a member of Sheffield Momentum, one of the many branches that is split 50:50 over the coup, I thought that was a really poor decision. As it was, there were no official delegates from Sheffield, York, Manchester, Leeds - and those are just the branches I know of. Unfortunately, the organisers had simply ignored our various calls before conference to allow such minorities to fully participate.

However, when we arrived at conference, it actually transpired that there was a big difference on the organising committee about this issue. The final meeting of the subsequently abolished Momentum national committee, which met on January 28 in London, had decided to entrust the running of the March 11 event to the pro-democracy members of the (also abolished) steering committee and conference arrangements committee. But, although the two groups continued to meet, it seems they did not really work together. I was told that the remaining members of the SC decided that every Momentum member should be able to attend and vote at conference - but the CAC overruled this at its own meeting the day after.

So there are political differences between the two groups?

Definitely. This is reflected in Grassroots Momentum as a whole: Those left on the old steering committee included Alliance for Workers' Liberty supporters Michael Chessum and Jill Mountford (plus Fire Brigades Union leader Matt Wrack and Jackie Walker); the CAC is made up of Jackie Walker, Alec Price and Delia Mattis (Josie Runswick resigned early on and was replaced by Lee Griffiths). The CAC took control, chaired the whole day and tried to totally sideline the AWL.

Jackie Walker and her supporters hate the AWL with a passion, of course.

And I totally understand why. The ugly truth is that AWLers have actively participated in the 'anti-Semitism' witch-hunt against her. They supported Jon Lansman in sacking her as Momentum vice-chair in September 2016. In effect, this was a dry run for the next coup - the 'big one' on January 10 - when Lansman crushed any democracy in the organisation and simply imposed a new, crassly undemocratic constitution.

It was clear at the GM conference that the AWL has really made a lot of



Defend Corbyn against the right, yes - but defend our principles against Corbyn

enemies in all of this - just to add to those of us who already opposed their pro-Zionist social-imperialism. There was a great deal of hostility against them on display - and it only increased during the day. I must confess, I almost felt a bit sorry for them. Almost ...

Because the few proposals on display were presented so out of context and in a truncated manner, AWL members tried to make various 'points of order' throughout the day. Some were more useful than others; some were presented more coherently than others. The AWL's Rosie Woods, who had taken up a position near the stage, was greeted, after she'd been on her feet a few times, with a rather sectarian chorus of "Sit down, sit down" (led by Gerry Downing, of all people - he's been on the receiving end of people's displeasure a few times, so probably should know better). But to claim that they "disrupted" the conference, as some comrades have since done on Facebook, is seriously misleading and excuses the CAC's role in the often disorganised and muddled way conference was planned and conducted.

Actually, it reminds me of the way Jon Lansman, Owen Jones and Paul Mason have tried to blame 'the Trots' (ie, the left) for the failures of Momentum to take off. Not a healthy response ...

How was it that everyone present got the right to vote and not just the minority of branch delegates?

It was actually me who suggested that everybody present should be allowed to vote and I told conference of how in Sheffield we have been unable to choose delegates, as the pro-Lansman right is pretty strong. I was surprised that the chair simply put it to conference without any discussion and delegates supported the proposal by 43 votes to 24.

Afterwards, other LPM comrades disagreed with me for making this point of order. In general, I am very much in favour of delegate decision-making and I agree with my comrades that there was a democratic problem, in that some people at the conference definitely represented an organised branch, while others simply showed up as individuals.

On the other hand, the planning of this conference was appalling. A lot of people from a lot of branches were not represented. So I think it was fair to challenge the voting criterion. To be honest, I don't think it made much difference to the outcome - delegates and observers seemed to have been of a similar political composition.

Was this the only problem with the conference?

Hardly. For a start, contributions from the floor were limited to two minutes, which is simply ridiculous. At the election hustings at the end, we got 30 seconds each. Nobody can make any coherent political point in that amount of time. But unfortunately we did waste almost the entire morning putting amendments to a 'motherhood and apple pie' statement on what GM should be 'campaigning' on. In its report of conference, Socialist Appeal rather weirdly calls this GM's "constitution".¹ It clearly is nothing of the sort.

I spoke against compiling a long list of statements on worthy causes and argued that GM should not replicate campaigns that the Labour Party itself can organise far more effectively. I said that we should focus on the fight to transform and democratise Labour. A fair number of speakers supported the proposal and it is now part of a very long document.²

I think it was Tony Greenstein who suggested that we also speak out against the fake anti-Semitism witch-hunt

in the Labour Party and Momentum, and not just against "the factionally motivated and unjust suspensions/expulsions/exclusions", as was the previous formulation. Leading AWLer Sacha Ismail spoke - in vain - against this amendment. But then he would, wouldn't he? His flimsy arguments that it would "complicate" things and "make a mess" of conference were rejected by the overwhelming majority in the room, and the amendment was passed.

Tell us about the discussion over choosing a new leadership. It didn't go to plan for the organisers, did it?

Not at all. I have to say though that this whole discussion was far more fractious than it had to be. For some reason, the chair, Delia Mattis, ruled that no amendments would be allowed and, even when it became clear that many people favoured a combination of option 2 and 3 - for example, when it comes to calling regular meetings of GM branches and members - she was unwilling to amend either option.

The three proposals all fit comfortably on an A4 sheet, which is never a good sign. But they had to be moved in two minutes and could therefore not be explained properly. No context was given and, crucially, neither option featured any method on how to change things: for example, how to get rid of anybody elected onto any leadership position.

It was clear that the CAC had expected option 2 to win. I have no doubt that they had already made decisions on dividing up positions on the new leadership. But it was not to be ... They were very clearly gobsmacked with the vote and didn't know how to proceed. A woman in the audience quite rightly interjected: "Obviously, you didn't expect this result. But conference has made it - now get on with implementing

it." Around 45 people put themselves forward as candidates and everybody got 30 seconds to whizz through an election pitch. That took up almost all the remaining time.

What option did you go for?

I supported option 3, as it is the most flexible and simple. There seemed to me two serious problems with option 2: firstly, it would have meant that members in groups with pro-constitution majorities like my own would have to split from Momentum in order to get fully involved and "affiliate" to GM. Also, Jon Lansman would have had a very easy time simply dissolving all those Momentum groups who officially affiliate to Grassroots Momentum. Option 2 was the splitters' option.

Secondly, there was no proposal on how we could ever replace the 'coordinating group' directly put in power by conference. It just smacked too much of a version of a Lansman-style stitch-up to many people in the room.

So a good conference? Bad? Indifferent?

I didn't get the impression that the day inspired many with great confidence that GM is now on the verge of impressive forward steps. But clearly there is an urgent need to properly organise the left in Momentum and the Labour Party. I think the jury is still out on whether GM can play an effective role within that struggle. Half of the new steering committee is made up of people from organised groups: there are six supporters of the AWL, two from the LRC and one from Workers Power.

I hope the hostility between those people does not stop GM from organising members effectively and democratically. For instance, quite a few people (among them AWL members) are now bemoaning the fact that Gerry Downing was allowed to attend conference and stand for the steering committee.

Others don't want the AWL involved - something I have sympathy for, but would not pursue at this point. Also, to fight Lansman's witch-hunt with more witch-hunts seems, well, spectacularly dumb in my view. Yes, there should be no relenting in criticising the AWL's pro-imperialism and pro-Zionism - let's make it as uncomfortable as possible for them. But at this time I would argue against throwing them out of GM or keeping them off leading committees - the AWL should be fought in GM with politics, not crude, bureaucratic stitch-ups.

What is the key lesson you take away from all of this?

I think we should make sure that GM does not try to recreate Momentum on a smaller, much less effective scale. In my view, Grassroots Momentum can, however, act as a leftwing pressure group within the official body.

We need to keep this in mind when it comes to Momentum's March 25 conference. I'm hoping that the new GM steering committee will agree with what I'll be pushing for - that is, to make an organised intervention. We must speak to these comrades and make the case that we need to seriously up the fight against the Parliamentary Labour Party right wing, to thoroughly democratise the party from top to bottom and to win an overwhelming majority for genuine working class politics ●

Notes

1. www.socialist.net/radical-energy-at-grassroots-momentum-conference.htm.
2. www.grassrootsmomentum.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Who-We-Are-What-We-Fight-FOR-FINAL-AS-AMENDED-BY-CONFERENCE.pdf

POLEMIC

Labour and the left

In supporting Jeremy Corbyn, groups like Labour Party Marxists share some of the illusions of the right, argues **Efraim Nashe** of the Platypus Affiliated Society



In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it ... *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious (Walter Benjamin *Theses on the philosophy of history*, No6).

A recent panel event on 'Corbyn, Labour and the radical left' at the Oxford Radical Forum¹ put forward a number of symptomatic propositions. The panel description suggested that with Corbyn the far left feels triumphant and the Labour Party is more socialist than any time since the 70s. But what would it mean for the left to triumph? And what is socialism? The left's reorientation towards Labour raises the issue of Labour's history. This article relates this history to the history of Marxism from 1848 to World War I, particularly the 'revisionist dispute'. On the ruins of this history appears the apparent plethora of 'left' orientations to Labour today.

Bonapartism and reformism

In their respective criticisms of revisionism in the revisionist dispute of the Second International, Luxemburg and Lenin argued that the revisionists had *regressed* to pre-Marxian socialism, to liberalism and petty bourgeois democracy, liquidating the need for socialist leadership. Lenin and Luxemburg sought to advance beyond the impasse by returning to the high point of consciousness in Marx's recognition of the lessons of the failed revolutions of 1848. Unlike the revisionists they did not have a linear-progressive view of history.

The 1848 revolutions failed to deliver the 'social republic'. As Marx wrote, the bourgeoisie were no longer able to rule and the proletariat not yet ready.² The state had to intervene to manage the

self-contradiction of bourgeois society: that is, capitalism. Louis Bonaparte filled this vacuum of power by appealing for support to the discontents of all classes in society and expanding state institutions of welfare and police as tools for controlling contradictions. So Bonapartism led the discontents of the masses to politically reconstitute capital through the state. This was an international phenomenon, affecting all the major capitalist countries, including the United Kingdom.

For Marx, the lesson of 1848 was the necessity of the political independence of the working class from petty bourgeois democracy - or the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the absence of this independent political leadership, the masses would be led by the right, as they were by Bonaparte.

In *Reform or revolution*, Luxemburg argues that social reforms do not socialise production, leading piecemeal to socialism, but socialise the *crisis* of capitalist production. The workers' bourgeois demands for work and justice needed a proletarian party for socialism to "achieve the consciousness of the need to overcome labour as a commodity, to make the 'objective' economic contradiction, a 'subjective' phenomenon of *politics*"³ - "to take its history into its own hands"⁴. In Lenin's terms, the revisionists 'tailing' of trade union consciousness dissolved the goal into the movement, liquidated the need for the political party for socialism.

In the failed German revolution of 1918-19 the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) liquidated the working class's struggles into a bulwark of capitalism. Or, as political scientist and Rosa Luxemburg biographer JP Nettl put it, the SPD became the "inheritor party" of the German Imperial Reichstag - for which it appeared to posterity to have been preparing all along.⁵

Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party can be seen as another deadly trap for the left. Or can Marxists apply some of the analysis developed by Lenin to conditions a hundred years ago?



It is in the context of Bonapartism, the critique of the revisionist dispute and the problem of socialist leadership that we need to place the Labour Party and the left's relationship to it.

Creation of Labour

The last great act of the Chartist movement was to translate the *Communist manifesto* in 1848.⁶ By this time it had already exhausted itself politically. In the second half of the 19th century working class politics found expression in trade unions, which sought the amelioration of their working conditions and to consolidate these gains via the Trade Union Congress (formed in 1868), pressuring the Liberal Party into parliamentary reforms. The trade unions sought to defend the interests of labour within the framework of capitalism. As in other advanced capitalist countries post-1848, Britain's state was Bonapartist, appealing to multiple discontents in society to form the political constituencies for the state's administration of capital. This included the simultaneous growth in the UK of welfare, labour reform and the police state. Disraeli's "one nation" conservatism is a good example of this.

In 1899, the Labour Representation Committee was formed. As well as trade union affiliates, there was the Social Democratic Federation, the Independent Labour Party and the Fabian Society. These groups had little influence, but sought to connect to the working class. The LRC became the Labour Party in 1906.

This was the extension of trade union politics into parliament. In this sense the Labour Party was no break with bourgeois politics. It sought to do the job of the Liberal Party in representing the interests of labour, only better. Could we say, in JP Nettl's terms, that Labour was to be an inheritor party to the Liberals in managing the capitalist state? It certainly

seems that way from posterity.

It is no coincidence that the development of the Labour Party in this manner paralleled the revisionist dispute in the Second International. Lenin pointed out as much in *What is to be done?*, when he elucidated the international character of revisionism, from Bernstein in Germany to Millerand in France, from the economists in Russia to the Fabians in England.

Like Bernstein the leftwing ILP thought that the achievement of trade union reforms in work, legal status and political rights would gradually lead to socialism. But for Marxists, like Lenin and Luxemburg, the ILP's attempt to use the existing state as a forum to abolish the inequalities and injustices of capitalism could only deepen the *crisis* of capitalist production. In the absence of socialist leadership for the dictatorship of the proletariat, the discontents of the working class could only constitute the political support for the state's administration of capitalism, no matter who was in government.

Writing in 1917, British Marxist William Paul explained how a false conception of socialism had misled workers:

Any demands, such as the reduction of taxes, the extension of tramway car systems, opening of municipal pawnshops and burying-grounds, have been advocated as 'socialistic' legislation ... a modern statesman could say, 'We are all socialists nowadays'.⁷

In 1918, in response to working class support for the Bolsheviks in Russia, Labour adopted clause four, to try and offer an anti-Marxist alternative to the British working class. In the ILP, "class consciousness" was replaced by

“community consciousness”.⁸ As Marx wrote of Lassalle’s “state socialism”, this was in fact state capitalism, or Bonapartism. The Labour Party’s “community consciousness” was already a parallel to Disraeli’s “one nation”. Labour Party state socialism reconciled the working class to capitalism.

Many on the left today justify their activity with reference to Lenin’s call for the Communist Party of Great Britain to enter Labour in 1920. But this needs to be understood in the context of a number of factors: ultra-leftism internationally, the relative youth of the Labour Party and the existence of a completely independent Communist Party and the Third International. The idea was to expose the bourgeois politics of the Labour Party to its mass base - as Lenin put it, “so that the masses may be more quickly weaned away from their last illusions on this score”.⁹ The aim was to win workers *en masse* away from Labour in order to build an independent working class party.

But there has been no independent movement for socialism since the failure of the Russian Revolution to spread and Marxism self-liquidated in Stalinism in the 20s and 30s - as Trotsky put it, generations thrown into discard.¹⁰ In such an absence, critical support turns out to be uncritical support for Labour.

Administered state

In the 1930s, the Labour leadership moved further away from its working class base, through the liquidation of working class politics into ‘national solution’ politics. Recall again Disraeli’s Bonapartist “one nation”.

In the inter-war years, clause four became a promise for better management of capitalism, like Roosevelt’s New Deal. This set the tone for the “spirit of 45”, in which the Labour government’s welfare state restructured the economy in the post-war global realignment under American hegemony. Conservatives and liberals recognised a need for the state to take on a greater role in administering capital. Thus the left could feel like its watchwords of welfare and nationalisation were being realised, but all the while change was being led by the right. The welfare state was the new political consensus.

This was to leave Labour trailing in the 1950s boom. As the Socialist Party of Great Britain wrote after Labour’s election defeat in 1959, “When the pioneers of the Labour Party dreamed of placing themselves at the head of a grateful army of electors by enacting social reforms, they never thought of a possibility of a Tory Party that beat them at the same game.”¹¹

There was no socialist leadership to grasp how such reforms actually deepened the socialisation of the *crisis* of capitalist production. There was no goal to constitute the class struggle.

As Labour tried to adapt under Gaitskell, the Labour left, despite appearing opposed to Gaitskell, only disagreed on the ratios of distribution and tax and the degree of nationalisation, because fundamentally it agreed that ‘socialism’ was an issue of state administration. After the defeat of 1959, the Labour left fought to retain clause four, against Gaitskell’s attempts to ‘modernise’. The left was successful ... in defending that which had been introduced to draw workers away from revolutionary politics. Small Trotskyist groups, like those around the journal *Labour Review*, sought to break up the Stalinist Communist Party, so that its members who “desire to fight as real communists” could enter Labour and “gain powerful support from the rank and file”.¹² After all, the *Labour Review* editors wrote, “the day-to-day experiences of the working class are continuously vindicating Marxism”. Therefore, they thought they could struggle within the Labour Party to win the rank and file “for Marxist ideas”, to form a new Marxist leadership and to “open the way for the development

of socialist policies within the Labour Party”. But, as has been the case for nearly a century, the Labour Party used the radical left rather than the other way around.

In the 1960s, in the absence of any real efficacy, the left of Labour turned more and more to issues of foreign affairs, anti-colonialism, anti-nuclear and social justice, etc, on which they could either have no real impact or on which ‘progressive’ policies could be implemented by the right. The movementism of the 60s new left was taken up by Trotskyist groups like the International Marxist Group and the International Socialists (later the Socialist Workers Party) aiming to push Labour to the left, from inside and/or outside the party. The *victory* of the Labour left in retaining clause four in 1960 signalled its *defeat*. Under these circumstances arose the disintegrated antinomy of parliamentary and non-parliamentary work. The most astute observation in Ralph Miliband’s essay, ‘The sickness of Labourism’,¹³ is his choice of epigraph: “It is a very difficult country to move, Mr Hynband, a very difficult country indeed, and one in which there is more disappointment to be looked for than success” - Disraeli, 1881.

‘Parliamentary’ and ‘non-parliamentary’ work would need to be mediated by a mass working class socialist party, in which theoretical disputes could be conducted in a dialectical relation to practical tasks, in which the demands of workers for their bourgeois right, for reforms, could be used to educate the working class in the necessity of its political independence, of taking power in the dictatorship of the proletariat - only then could the struggle for socialism begin. We are a long way off.

Blairism

For nearly a century, the Labour Party has used the radical left to preserve and reproduce itself in crises. In 1978 the Revolutionary Communist Tendency critiqued the left’s orientation to Labour and attempts to ‘fight the right’ through Labour, arguing that, in the absence of an independent alternative,

... far from being an alternative to Labour, militant activity can actually sustain illusions in reformism ... The radical left fails to understand that ... the working class will not spontaneously reject the reformist programme.¹⁴

Spiked Online maintain that Labour has become anti-working class, arguing that today we need something totally new.¹⁵ However, today the impetus towards a non-Labour alternative has slipped away - for example, in Left Unity’s virtual dissolution - and most groups on the left attempt variously to orient their activities towards the Labour Party. The disintegrated antinomy of parliamentary and non-parliamentary work is reproduced. There is no break with Labour on the horizon.¹⁶

Post-SWP groups like Counterfire and Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century continue to advocate protest movements - eg, anti-austerity marches - to support Corbyn from the outside. The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty has taken a more hands-on approach within Momentum, and now Grassroots Momentum, where interesting fissures have appeared over democracy and organisational structure between leftwing community activists and Marxist groups trying to organise within the party. Given the general consideration on the left that Blairism had put an end to the long chapter of the left’s struggles within Labour, what has changed with Corbyn? And what if the apparent change masks continuity between old Labour, New Labour and the present?

Many on the left saw Blair’s transformation of Labour and abolition of clause four as a qualitative change from

a contradictory ‘bourgeois workers’ party’ to a pure capitalist party, in which no such contradiction existed.¹⁷ For example, *Workers Hammer* argued that Blair’s Labour was not the kind of “mass reformist workers’ party” to which “revolutionaries can consider extending critical support”.¹⁸ Thus, many on the left ‘critically’ supported or tried to work within Arthur Scargill’s Socialist Labour Party, which split with Blair in 1996 over clause four - an all but forgotten episode in the left’s history with the Labour Party.

Twenty years later, Corbyn seems to have reversed the spell with his talk of “socialism, trade union rights, immigrants’ rights and opposition to Nato”.¹⁹ Although by supporting ‘remain’ in European Union referendum Corbyn failed to represent the interest of working people,²⁰ in the fight against the Blairites, he is said to represent “the grievances of the working class, minorities and the impoverished”.²¹ There is a “class war” within Labour, in which Marxists should have taken Corbyn’s side.²² If the Blairites can be driven out, the hope is, Labour will be transformed back into a “parliamentary socialist Labour Party”²³ with Corbyn at the helm.

However, *before Blair*, in Tony Benn’s 1988 leadership contest against Neil Kinnock, *Workers Hammer* advocated “no support for either side”.²⁴ It is worth quoting the argument in full:

Benn’s campaign has been portrayed by the bourgeois press and most of the ostensibly socialist left as a David and Goliath battle for the ‘socialist soul’ of the party against Kinnock/Hattersley’s overt scabbing and ‘new realism’. But the Labour ‘lefts’ indulgence in the time-worn reformist rhetoric of the parliamentary road to democratic socialism, ‘unilateralism’, non-alignment, disarmament and nationalist ‘little England’ protectionism is no alternative to Kinnock’s more reactionary agenda for class peace in Thatcher’s Britain. Indeed, this contest reflects the classic and historic symbiotic relation between the Labour ‘left’ and right that has maintained the party for decades as the primary obstacle to proletarian revolution on these isles.

The Leninist also observed the dangers of communists supporting the Labour left against the right. Shortly after Benn’s defeat, Jack Conrad argued that the Labour left serves simply to divert popular protest into “safe parliamentary channels”. He warned: “We must never let the heat of these arguments obscure the fact that ultimately the relationship between the Labour left and right is symbiotic - they both need each other. This is the absolute and general law of Labourism.”²⁵

If Corbyn successfully wins control of the party and removes the Blairites, then will his party be “a mass reformist workers’ party [that] stands independently of bourgeois parties, and ostensibly in the interest of working people”?²⁶ Or does Corbyn’s struggle represent the “historic symbiotic relation” between the left and right of Labour?²⁷ At least one thing is clear: as in 1988, Corbyn’s contest is “portrayed by the bourgeois press and most of the ostensibly socialist left as a David and Goliath battle for the ‘socialist soul’ of the party”.²⁸ It seems Blair dissolved the “historic symbiotic relation between the Labour ‘left’ and right that has maintained the party for decades as the primary obstacle to proletarian revolution”²⁹ to such an extent that the recrudescence of some version of the old Labour ‘left’ constitutes a ‘class war’.

Labour Party Marxists similarly argue that “the civil war raging in the Labour Party is a *highly concentrated* form of the class struggle” and therefore “an unparalleled historic opportunity” to re-found the Labour Party as a genuine “political party of

the workers”.³⁰ They see their task as the democratisation of the Labour Party to create the conditions for a Marxist section to affiliate to Labour and struggle within to develop a Marxist leadership and implement a new *Marxist* (not the old ‘state socialist’) clause four.

James Marshall of LPM bases his argument on Lenin’s speech regarding affiliation to Labour in 1920, in which the characterisation of a party is said to be dependent not on its working class base, but on the politics of its leadership. For Lenin, this meant that the Labour Party was

a thoroughly bourgeois party, because, although made up of workers, it is led by reactionaries, and the worst kind of reactionaries at that, who act quite in the spirit of the bourgeoisie. It is an organisation of the bourgeoisie, which exists to systematically dupe the workers with the aid of the British Noskes and Scheidemanns [the executioners of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht].³¹

This analysis still applies, argues Marshall, but with a difference:

Instead of a two-way contradiction between the leadership and the membership, we now have a three-way contradiction. The left dominates both the top and bottom of the party.

That is, Corbyn’s leadership is not a bourgeois-reformist leadership, attached to a workers’ base, but rather both are “left”. The hated PLP is the ‘bourgeois party’ imbedded within. It is the PLP, and not Corbyn’s leadership, Marshall argues, to which Lenin’s assessment of Labour’s bourgeois political leadership still applies.

But what does it mean to say that a base or leadership is “left” with regard to Lenin’s argument? If the PLP is “bourgeois”, what does that make Corbyn? Can Lenin’s concern with bourgeois v socialist leadership be so easily assimilated to contemporary, or even historic, ‘left’ v ‘right’ divisions within Labour?³² For nearly a century, the Labour Party has used the radical left rather than the other way around. What would it mean for it to be otherwise today?

Change

In the present, capitalism is reconstituting itself politically through change. Corbyn’s leadership and the membership swell are, of course, phenomena of this moment. But it is hard to tell *how* exactly they relate to the wider changes we are seeing. The latest YouGov polls show Labour in third place amongst working class voters, with whom the Tories poll nearly twice as high as Labour.³³ Trade union activity is at a historic low.

Workers Hammer has argued that revolutionaries should defend Corbyn because the “capitalists” could never agree to his proposed reforms on infrastructure, manufacturing and “putting the population back into productive work”.³⁴ But this supposes that Corbyn’s policy is so far-reaching as to be a fantasy that could never be implemented within the capitalist state. Bonapartists have successfully implemented deep reforms to better manage capital and discontents in the past, always amidst political opposition.

Hillel Ticktin has argued recently in the *Weekly Worker*³⁵ that, as capitalism is changing, there is actually greater scope for reforming in the interest of capital. Moreover, Corbyn is far less radical than Trump, or May, in terms of what he is proposing: “While Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell both talk about socialism, they are not even very radical, let alone socialist.” The Labour right, however, stigmatises McDonnell’s meagre policies as ‘socialist’. Ticktin notes: “... this shows the nature of rightwing Labour - it does not understand the system it is

supporting.”

What does it show about the left today that they share the same fantasy? ●

Notes

- Oxford Radical Forum 2017, held at Christ Church College, Oxford, March 3-5 2017. The panel description in question read: “When Corbyn was first elected leader of the Labour Party, it was largely viewed as a moment of triumph for the far left, and an opportunity for socialists, anti-racists and peace campaigners to begin building a national movement capable of wielding influence in parliament itself. Hundreds of thousands of new members poured into Labour, and several socialist tendencies which had previously campaigned against the party now committed to supporting it under Corbyn’s leadership. One and a half years on, the far left has achieved a greater degree of influence in party politics than it has for decades, in a Labour Party that is clearly more socialist than any since 1983 - and perhaps even earlier. On the other hand, however, Corbyn’s Labour has slipped in the polls, appeared to compromise on principles such as free movement, and failed to properly challenge the liberal bureaucracy present under Blair, Brown and Miliband. This leaves open the very real possibility that Corbyn will leave his post, having achieved nothing, and bequeath a party which in no meaningful sense differs from the one so vociferously opposed by the left from 1997-2010; albeit now with a much diminished chance of election. In this panel we will debate whether the left has been right to place so much hope in Corbyn, and whether or not we must now turn to pursue socialism by non-parliamentary means.”
- K Marx *The civil war in France* 1871.
- C Cutrone, ‘Sacrifice and redemption’ *Weekly Worker* July 14 2016.
- R Luxemburg *The Junius pamphlet* 1915.
- P Nettl, ‘The German Social Democratic Party 1890-1914 as a political model’ *Past and Present* No30, 1965, pp65-95.
- D Black, ‘The elusive “threads of historical progress”: the early Chartists and the young Marx and Engels’ *Platypus Review* No42, December 2011-January 2012: platypus1917.org/2011/12/01/elusive-threads-of-historical-progress.
- W Paul *The state: its origin and function* 1917.
- “The watchword of socialism is not ‘class-consciousness’, but ‘community consciousness’” - Ramsay MacDonald *Socialism and society* 1907.
- VI Lenin, ‘Theses on fundamental tasks of the Second Congress of the Communist International’, 1920.
- L Trotsky, ‘To build communist parties and an international anew’, July 1933.
- ‘Future of the Labour Party’ *Socialist Standard* No664, Vol 55, December 1959.
- Editorial, ‘Labour and leadership’ *Labour Review* 3:1, January-February 1958.
- New Left Review* No1, January-February 1960.
- M Freeman and K Marshall *Who needs the Labour Party?* Revolutionary Communist Pamphlets, No3, 1978.
- T Slater, ‘Who can save Labour? No-one’ *Spiked Online* September 12 2016.
- ‘Labourism rebooted’ *1917 Journal of the International Bolshevik Tendency* September 28 2015: www.bolshevik.org/1917/no38/ibt_1917_38_10_labourism_rebooted.html.
- See, for example, ‘Spartacist League statement’ *Workers Hammer* No156, May-June 1997.
- Ibid.*
- ‘Class war in the Labour Party’ *Workers Hammer* No233, winter 2015-16.
- ‘Brexit: defeat for the bankers and bosses of Europe!’ *Workers Hammer* No234, summer 2016.
- ‘Class war in the Labour Party’ *Workers Hammer* No233, winter 2015-16.
- Ibid.*
- ‘Let Jeremy Corbyn run the Labour Party’ *Workers Hammer* No236, autumn 2016.
- ‘Kinnock, Benn: no choice’ *Workers Hammer* No98, May-June 1988.
- J Conrad, ‘Build the communist alternative’ *The Leninist* No71, November 1 1988.
- ‘Spartacist League Statement’ *Workers Hammer* No156, May-June 1997.
- ‘Kinnock, Benn: no choice’ *Workers Hammer* No98, May-June 1988.
- Ibid.*
- ‘Kinnock, Benn: no choice’ *Workers Hammer* No98, May-June 1988.
- J Marshall, ‘After Corbyn’s second victory’, September 24 2016: labourpartymarxists.org.uk/after-corbyns-second-victory.
- VI Lenin, ‘Speech on affiliation to the British Labour Party’, Second Congress of the Communist International, August 6 1920.
- “Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the working masses themselves in the process of their movement, the only choice is - either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course (for mankind has not created a ‘third’ ideology and, moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or an above-class ideology). Hence, to belittle the socialist ideology in any way, to turn aside from it in the slightest degree means to strengthen bourgeois ideology. There is much talk of spontaneity. But the spontaneous development of the working class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology, to its development along the lines of the Credo programme; for the spontaneous working class movement is trade unionism, is *Nur-Gewerkschaftlerei*, and trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie” (VI Lenin *What is to be done?* 1902).
- www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/labour-third-most-popular-party-working-class-voters-behind-tories-ukip-latest-yougov-poll-stoke-by-a7578641.html.
- ‘Corbyn landslide, Blairite backlash’ *Workers Hammer* No232, autumn 2015.
- H Ticktin, ‘Confused reformism’ *Weekly Worker* November 24 2016.

USA

True fake news

Perhaps there is another agenda lurking behind Trump's travel ban, muses Mike Macnair



Donald Trump imagined by Andrew Kong Knight

Donald Trump had been pushed out of the UK news headlines in the last week by the manoeuvres round the Brexit article 50 bill and Nicola Sturgeon's call for a second independence referendum. But he hit the online headlines again briefly on the morning of March 15 when part of his 2005 tax return was leaked to the press. It showed that in that year he paid 25% of the tax he owed (and only paid that much because of a rule intended to limit tax dodges, which he pledged in his campaign to abolish).¹ But he was pushed off the lead position again by lunchtime by the UK budget U-turn on self-employed national insurance contributions.

Of course, in the US matters are different. Trump-stuff remains headline news, along with the Congressional Republican majority's efforts to repeal 'Obamacare' and reduce the availability of healthcare to those among the elderly and long-term sick who are not massively wealthy.²

Trump has abruptly sacked 46 federal attorneys - public prosecutors - appointed by the Obama administration, without having replacement appointments ready. The jobs are regularly appointed on a 'spoils' basis (to political friends), but it is unusual to sack so many all at once or without being ready to replace them.³

Trump's new Environmental Protection Agency chief believes CO₂ emissions are not the major cause of global warming; and the president is about to abolish fuel economy standards for carmakers and restrictions on coal-fired power generation.⁴

And, as from March 6, there is a new 'Muslim travel ban'.⁵ The administration has, of course, now claimed that the new ruling is not directed against Muslims as such, but merely enhances control on entry to the US from "countries that had already been identified as presenting heightened concerns about terrorism and travel to the United States." But it has also drawn back pretty radically

from the previous instrument, in three fundamental ways.

The first is that the new order no longer affects people who already hold visas for entry to the US, or *a fortiori* those who hold 'green cards' allowing them to live and work in the US. This removes the fundamental reason for the federal courts' willingness to strike down the first order: that it denied due process rights to existing passport holders.

The second is that Iraq has been removed from the list of affected countries. This is pure politics rather than law. It should be obvious from the alleged *motivations* of the order - that terrorists may use US legal immigration rules to infiltrate the US - that Iraq *should* be on the list, as one of the main bases of Islamic State. Indeed, the logic of the order is certainly that Saudi Arabia should be on the list: after all, it was Saudi citizens who were mainly involved in 9/11. However, the US has allies in Iraq and troops on the ground, and the original order could be mocked as more *obviously* antagonistic to the US's military interests.

Thirdly, the original order contained a provision for discretionary waivers by the secretary of state and for members of minorities facing religious persecution in their countries of nationality. On its face this appeared liberal, but in its context it amounted to saying that the ban affected only the *Muslim majorities* of Muslim-majority countries, and could thus be used to show that the ban violated the establishment clause of the US constitution. This little feature was, though, very much less important in the actual judicial decisions than Trump's statements in his election campaign that he would bring in a "Muslim travel ban". It is replaced by discretionary waiver power in special cases, without reference to the specific feature of religious persecution.

Several states and others have commenced, or are immediately contemplating, litigation over the new

travel ban.⁶ Washington in particular applied to Judge James Robart, who issued the temporary restraining order (TRO) against the first ban, claiming that the new version was still affected by that order. He initially rejected the application pending further argument due later on March 15. While it is not excluded that Robart will reimpose the TRO, US legal commentary makes it look unlikely. In particular, the exclusion of current visa-holders means that the states probably no longer have a present interest to give them standing to sue the federal government. Moreover, the argument about 'due process' affecting existing visa-holders is gone, and this was a much stronger argument, both legally and politically, than the 'establishment clause' argument about religious discrimination.⁷

Sleight of hand

All of these 'Trump news' items are, in principle, true. They are not 'fake news' in the same sense as the story that "Hillary Clinton is running a child sex ring out of a pizza shop" was. But they are fake news in another sense. That is, at least some of them are put out there to distract attention from something else. They are in this way a political form of the stage magician's sleight of hand, which directs our attention to one action, while something else is happening behind the scenes.

The Cameron government expertly used this technique in relation to its privatisation policies, concealing them behind the rhetoric of 'austerity', while in reality engaging in Keynesian stimulus - money-printing - on an unprecedented scale. By campaigning to oppose 'austerity' as its prime objective, Labour and the left *effectively failed to oppose* the actual privatisation policies hidden behind the rhetoric.

The problem is to make some sense of which bits of the news are real and which are this sort of 'true fake news', designed to attract opposition and thereby divert attention from real policy. What

the Trump administration's policy really is remains extremely obscure. It is, therefore, possible that what the news stories are concealing is an *absence* of policy. But we can probably draw at least some inferences.

In the first place, back in January I argued in this paper that 'Trumpism' *might* turn out to represent a major change in US geopolitical orientation.⁸ We have had several indicators since then that this is not the case: the absence of any steps against Saudi Arabia in relation to the 'Muslim travel ban'; Mike Flynn's February 13 resignation over contacts with the Russian embassy; Mike Pence's February 18 Munich NATO speech, reaffirming US commitment to eastern Europe; encouragement of Israeli annexations in the West Bank; the more or less open threats of war against Iran with a view to 'regime change'.⁹ All these indicate that the Trump administration's foreign policy is drifting towards being mainly the return of the neocons.

Two caveats have to be made in relation to this. The first is that Trump and his advisors continue to talk up protectionist measures in world trade and bilateral trade deals. This is a marked change from the last 40 years, in which the US was all for 'free trade' and multilateral agreements as a sleight-of-hand cover for US unilateralism and protectionism (under cover of various 'sanctions' arrangements and other forms of non-tariff barriers and hidden subsidies). For the US to act on the basis of *open* protectionism and bilateralism would legitimate retaliation by other countries, and be a big shift away from the regime of 'globalisation'. How far this will last is unclear - *Fox News* reports a 'rift' between Trump's 'chief strategist', economic nationalist Steven Bannon, and the White House National Economic Council director, Goldman Sachs man Gary Cohn, over precisely this issue, and it would not be that surprising to see the 'extremist' Bannon (against whom there

have been many liberal scare stories) shafted over it.¹⁰

The second caveat is that, while Pence has reasserted the importance of NATO and the (illusory) 'Russian threat', Trump's *anti-European Union* rhetoric and 'Brexitteering' has not been dialled back by any part of the administration. Angela Merkel's intended visit to Washington this week (delayed until March 17 by bad weather) *may* turn out to be an occasion for some pro-EU speech; but it is, frankly, pretty questionable. The administration is quite possibly waiting on the results of the Dutch (March 15) and French presidential (April 23/May 7) elections before deciding whether to welcome the destruction of the EU, or to find some *modus vivendi* with a surviving continental bloc.

In addition, Trump's domestic policy looks increasingly like a completely ordinary Republican policy. 'Obamacare' is to be killed (somehow). The budget cuts targets are all conventional Republican hates; military spending is to be increased.¹¹ The tax proposals would massively favour the rich.¹² The 'border adjustment tax', which is central to the House Republicans' reform proposals - besides being a pure and unqualified protectionist tariff policy to charge imports and subsidise exports, leading to retaliatory action - would very probably worsen the budget deficit.¹³

Hence, it is *possible* that if we focus our attention on the razzamatazz around the border wall and immigration, around the 'Muslim travel ban' and the litigation about it, and about the gender issues (particularly Trump, the serial indecent assault man, and the attacks on abortion rights), and all the more if we imagine Trump as a fascist, we may be taking a radically false step. We may be playing into the hands of a very conventional Republican administration, for which these are dog-whistle issues, which allow it to distract its constituents' attention from the fact that it is *actually* merely concerned to put money in the pockets of the rich. We would thus be diverting attention from the fact that this administration will deliver razzamatazz on gender and race issues to its supporters, while changing nothing else of substance and actually worsening the economic position of those workers and petty bourgeois (American 'middle class'), who were conned into voting Trump in November 2016. ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-39275838.
2. Eg, 'GOP senators suggest changes for healthcare bill offered by House' *New York Times* March 14.
3. www.vox.com/2017/3/10/14890546/trump-us-attorneys-resigned.
4. 'EPA chief doubts consensus view of climate change' *New York Times* March 9; 'Trump using Detroit as stage for loosening Obama's fuel economy rules' *New York Times* March 15.
5. www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar/06/the-full-text-trump-revised-travel-ban.
6. 'Donald Trump's revised "Muslim travel ban" under scrutiny by US federal courts day before introduction' *The Independent* March 15.
7. On the litigation on the old ban see Howe Cheatem, 'Put not your trust in judges' *Weekly Worker* February 16.
8. 'The new president and the new global order' *Weekly Worker* January 26 2017.
9. See Yasmine Mather's articles in recent issues of this paper.
10. www.foxbusiness.com/politics/2017/03/15/cohn-vs-bannon-feud-escalating-over-trumps-tax-economic-policy.html.
11. 'Trump's first budget will test GOP's ability to keep promises' *Denver Post* March 12.
12. 'Donald Trump's tax plan would mean huge breaks for millionaires like Trump' *Washington Post* March 15.
13. 'The fatal flaw that may spell death for Trump's tax plan' *Fortune* March 8.

IRAN



Massive inflation has eroded the pensions of the 1979 generation

Predictions amidst uncertainties

Yassamine Mather looks behind the rhetoric of the ‘resistance economy’

According to the latest International Monetary Fund report on Iran, after years of sanctions the country’s economy seems to be on the road to recovery - at least on paper.

The report, dated February 24, sums up the situation as follows: “The Iranian economy has had an ‘impressive recovery’ following sanctions relief last year, though uncertainty regarding the fate of the nuclear deal and relations with the US threaten to undermine it.”¹

On the face of it this is good news for Iran’s capitalists and the state. After all, “Growth is expected to be 6.6% in the calendar year ending March 20, reflecting the rebound in oil production and exports, and stabilise at 4.5% “over the medium-term, as the recovery broadens.”² Yet the warnings are also clear. Most of the economic forecast is directly dependent on the continuation of the Iran nuclear deal and that deal is seriously threatened, given the position of the new US administration. Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu and the US president are firm allies.

The IMF is very clear on the subject: “If the agreement is derailed, the economy could risk recession.” Of course, Iran’s economy has also benefited from higher oil production, but growth is expected to ease to 3.3% in the next year. However, the questions over the nuclear agreement could “deter investment and trade with Iran and short-circuit the anticipated recovery”. And if sanctions were to be reimposed, that would “lower direct investment and capital inflows, and disconnect Iran from the global financial system”.

Jafar Mojarad, IMF executive director for Iran, has stated: “Regrettably, remaining US sanctions and related uncertainty have hindered the return of global banks to the Iranian market and continue to hamper large-scale investment and trade.”³

Almost four years ago, president Hassan Rouhani came to power on a promise to pursue nuclear negotiations with western governments, with the sole aim of improving the country’s economic situation. As we approach the next Iranian presidential elections in May 2017, ordinary Iranians are seeing little benefit from the lifting of sanctions and

the positive rates of growth. In the last few weeks, as the Islamic parliament in Tehran discussed the minimum wage for the coming year, workers have stepped up protests against low wages, short-term and ‘white’ contracts (where the employee signs a blank page to be filled in later by the employer), unpaid wages and lack of job security.

Retired teachers, nurses and state employees have mounted relatively large demonstrations on the issue of pensions, the funding for which is facing a major crisis. Some Iranian papers have reminded us that the retirees are the generation of 1979 revolution, who will not accept government excuses about the world economy, uncertainty amongst international investors, etc. They have paid every month into pension funds that are now worthless - not least because of the astronomical rates of inflation in the last years of Ahmadinejad and the first years of the Rouhani government.

Ironically the pensioners’ protests are a reminder that the February uprising of 1979 did not start with calls to establish an Islamic republic, but with demands for political and economic rights. Probably wary of such sentiments, Iran’s supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, used a nationwide TV broadcast last week to criticise Rouhani’s economic policies: “Of course, the government has taken remarkable steps, but if the resistance economy had been implemented fully and widely, we could witness a tangible difference in people’s lives.”

On the face of it you might think he was talking about a third-worldist economy, in opposition to western transnationals, and pursuing the kind of vision put forward by non-aligned countries in the late 1960s and 1970s. Sections of the Iranian left and the nationalist opposition to the shah were very forceful on the subject of disowning the ‘comprador bourgeoisie’ and building the national economy, and, of course, Khamenei remembers some of those arguments. However, do not be fooled: his “resistance economy” has nothing to do with those (albeit misguided) aspirations. As usual in Iran’s Islamic Republic, rhetoric and sloganising is used to disguise the

opposite of what is being said. Our religious leader is a staunch defender of “capital and entrepreneurship”: he knows that Iran’s capitalist economy has no option but to work within the confines and under the dominance of global capital.

Neoliberal

So what is this “resistance economy”? A few years ago Rouhani declared the key objectives presented in this policy and they have been repeated in the last few days in the conservative press and media in Iran:

- Domestic capacity building with maximal utilisation of the country’s resources.
- Promotion of a knowledge-based economy.
- Increased efficiency in economic activity, improvement of economic competitiveness.
- Improve Total Factor Productivity based on the empowerment of domestic human resources through skills education.
- Promotion of domestic production, especially in strategic products and services and the consequent reduction of dependence on imports.
- Consumption management based on the promotion of consumption of local products parallel to the qualitative improvement of domestic production.
- Comprehensive reform of the financial system to respond to the country’s needs.
- Targeted promotion of exportable goods and services through legal and administrative reform as well as the promotion of foreign investment for export purposes.
- Increase the economy’s resistance through regional and international economic collaboration, especially with neighbours but also through diplomacy.
- Reduce vulnerability of oil and gas exports through the selection of strategic buyers and involving the private sector in diversifying sales channels.
- Increase oil and gas strategic reserves and production to have an impact on international markets.
- Implement reforms to rationalise government costs, increase tax revenues

and reduce dependency on oil and gas export revenue.

- Increase transparency in financial matters and avoid activities that pave the way for corruption.⁴

Contrary to the claims of both the exiled rightwing opposition and the diehard supporters of Khamenei, his declarations have nothing that distinguishes them from the general aspirations of any capitalist country. In fact some of the statements fit in with elements of a neoliberal economic plan.

Khamenei might not like all the publicity about the widening gap between the rich and the poor in his country, 38 years after the February uprising. However, the truth is that for more than three decades he has been the supreme leader of a country where most elements of neoliberal economic policy, dictated by international organisations such as the IMF - privatisation, casualisation, end of state subsidies, a rise in the price of petrol, etc - are adhered to by both ‘reformist’ and conservative factions of the Shia state.

No wonder the World Bank praises Iran for its economic policies:

Iranian authorities have adopted a comprehensive strategy encompassing market-based reforms, as reflected in the government’s 20-year vision document and the sixth five-year development plan for the 2016-2021 period. The Iranian government has implemented major reforms of its subsidy programme on key staples such as petroleum products, water, electricity and bread, which has resulted in a moderate improvement in the efficiency of expenditures and economic activities.⁵

So how do you get World Bank and IMF approval when you are the leader of an Islamic regime, calling for “resistance economics”?

Well it is true that the government has made major savings by cutting almost all subsidies, but it is ordinary Iranians who are paying the price of these cutbacks. The policy of implementing cash subsidies has been a total disaster, producing a whole new web of corruption based around the distribution of this type

of subsidies. In 2015-16 the government asked “comparatively well-off citizens” to voluntarily opt out. Although 2.5 million Iranians did so, 73 million did not. Clearly the voluntary withdrawal had limited effect on the country’s growing budget deficit - and last year a bill was passed that will exclude 24 million people (almost one third of the population) from subsidies.

However, Iranian newspapers are full of stories about how relatively well-to-do Iranians with connections to government ministries, mosques or Islamic charities have been able to remain on the cash subsidy list, while the poor lose out. In one example a middle class beneficiary used the money to buy an expensive car! Maybe this is what the supreme leaders means by “jihadist entrepreneurship”.

In the meantime, crumbling pension funds, banking troubles, budget deficit and unemployment are amongst the major challenges faced by Iran’s economy, according to a senior economic adviser to Rouhani. Of course, Rouhani’s response since the election campaign of 2013 has been to blame previous administrations. This from his advisor, Masoud Nili, last week: “Today we are grappling with water shortage and air pollution, and have inherited banking and budgeting problems from the past decades.”⁶

So on the eve of the Iranian new year that will see presidential elections, workers are fighting for unpaid wages, pensioners are asking what has happened to their pensions and young people face a highly uncertain future. All this when the prospect of further sanctions and even war are very real ●

yassamine.mather@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. www.bloombergquint.com/business/2017/02/28/iran-s-impressive-recovery-clouded-by-uncertainty-imf-says.
2. *Ibid.*
3. www.financialexpress.com/world-news/imf-says-iran-rebounds-after-nuclear-deal-but-dangers-looms/570002.
4. www.ima.ir/en/News/81182566/Politic/
5. www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran/overview.
6. https://financialtribune.com/articles/economy-domestic-economy/61014/presidential-advisor-outlines-6-challenges-of-iran-s-economy.

ECONOMY

Creating a level playing field

How is the law used to protect the interests of capital? Michael Roberts discusses the tension between competition and monopoly

Financial markets may be booming in the expectation that the US economy will grow faster under president Donald Trump. But they forget that the main emphasis of Trump's programme, in so far as it is coherent, is to make America "great again" by imposing tariffs and other controls on imports, and forcing US companies to produce at home - in other words, trade protectionism. This is to be enforced by new laws.

That brings me to discuss the role of law in trying to make the economy work better for bourgeois interests - an area that has been badly neglected. How is the law used to protect the interests of capital against labour; national capital interests against foreign rivals; and the capitalist sector as a whole against monopoly interests?

Last year, there were a number of books that came out that helped to enlighten us both theoretically and empirically on the laws of motion of capitalism. But I think I missed one. It is *The great leveler* by Brett Christophers, a professor in human geography at Uppsala University, Sweden.¹ His book looks at the nature of crises under capitalism from a refreshingly new angle. He says that we need to examine how capitalism is continually facing a dynamic tension between the underlying forces of competition and monopoly. Christophers argues that, in this dynamic, law and legal measures have an underappreciated role in trying to preserve a "delicate balance between competition and monopoly", which is needed to "regulate the rhythms of capitalist accumulation".

He reckons this monopoly/competition imbalance is an important contradiction of capitalism that has been neglected, or not developed enough. It may not be the only contradiction, but it is an important one that the law (imperfectly) works on. Indeed, uneven and combined development is an inherent feature of capitalism.

Christophers argues that corporate laws swing from one aim to another, depending on the needs of capital in any particular period. Thus, in certain periods, anti-trust legislation (breaking up monopolies) dominates legal economic thinking; at others, it is patenting and protecting 'intellectual property' (monopoly rights). The law is a "great leveller", aiming to keep a balance between too much competition and too much monopoly.

I am reminded of the recent period prior to the global financial crash and the great recession. The tone of the day was to 'deregulate', particularly in the financial sector, to allow new financial products (derivatives) to expand 'financial diversification' (competition). The dangers of this 'excessive risk-taking' and uncontrolled 'competition' were brought to the attention of the 'powers that be' at the annual Federal Reserve Jackson Hole central bankers symposium of 2005 by Raghuram Rajam,² then a professor at Harvard and later head of the Reserve Bank of India. He presented a paper³ that questioned the reduced banking controls introduced by Clinton's advisors, Robert Rubin and Larry Summers⁴, in the late 1990s. Immediately he was attacked by Summers as a 'Luddite', who was holding back progress and competition. Of course, after the great recession, Summers became a leading supporter of banking regulation and of the Dodd-Frank banking regulation laws.

The balance between competition and monopoly is the main theme of Christophers' book. In my view, contrary

to the view of the *Monthly Review* school, which follows Paul Sweezy's characterisation of modern capital as 'monopoly capitalism', monopoly is not the dominant order of capitalism: competition is⁵ - at least what Anwar Shaikh calls "real competition",⁶ in his huge *Capitalism: competition, conflict, crises*.⁷ The continual battle to increase profit and the share of the market means monopolies are continually under threat from new rivals, new technologies and international competitors. The history of capitalism is one where the concentration and centralisation of capital increases, but competition continues to bring about the movement of surplus value between capitals (within a national economy and globally).

Brett Christophers understands well this dialectical dynamic in capitalism. In his excellent theoretical chapter 1 on competition, he rejects the monopoly capital theory: "Monopoly produces competition; competition produces monopoly" (Marx). The law plays a key role in trying to achieve a balance between the inherently unstable and precarious forces of centralisation and decentralisation that Marx prognosticated.

Massaging?

However, Christophers seems a little ambiguous, or 'soft', on the theoretical explanations offered for the inherently unstable nature of capitalism. He appears to accept the view that the (underlying) causes of capitalist instability cannot be found in the capitalist mode of production, but, as Marxist David Harvey has argued,⁸ must really be found in the full circuit of capital (production, distribution and circulation). To emphasise, as Marx did himself, the production of surplus value at the core of crises and imbalances is to be "productivist" (Jim Kincaid⁹) and to exclude the "chaotic singularities of consumption" (Harvey). The "anarchy of capitalism" is to be found in competition and exchange, not in the exploitation of labour in production (Bob Jessop).¹⁰

Well, maybe, but this leaves Christophers open to the massaging of Marx's value theory, so that no marks are left. First, he appears to accept that value can (possibly) be created in exchange or consumption (p74). Second, he appears to follow the view of post-Keynesian Michał Kalecki that profits are the result of the degree of monopoly or 'rent-seeking',¹¹ thus dismissing Marx's clear view that new value only comes from the exploitation of labour, not from monopolistic power. Then there is the reference to the work of mainstream economist Edward Chamberlin's theory of imperfect competition - an extension of the neoclassical 'marginal equilibrium' theory. Marx's value theory as the basis of the laws of accumulation of capital and competition among capitals has been ignored or chipped away by these authors.

But this is perhaps another debate. The theme that Christophers highlights is the role of the law in evening out the anarchic swings between excessive monopoly and ruinous competition in different periods of capitalism. This is a new insight. As he says, this is a "work of levelling, not plugging", to achieve "ongoing growth - in a relatively stable fashion". Even that seems a generous concession to the efficacy of competition law between capitals in maintaining stable expansion and accumulation. Do we not note over 50 slumps or recessions in the last 200 years and three huge depressions under the capitalist mode of production, where legislation on banking, corporate monopolies, patents

and intellectual property did not work in preserving 'harmony'?

In a series of well-researched chapters, Christophers outlines the detail in the swings between monopoly and competition, according to the conditions of capitalist development. He makes a convincing case for arguing that the first case of 'legal levelling' began at the outset of 20th century after a period of excessive competition threatened to drive capitalism into a deflationary spiral. Legal support for monopoly powers to protect profits dominated between the world wars. After the World War II, competition came to the fore in order to help innovation and new industries. In turn, in the neoliberal period from the 1980s, the laws of patent and intellectual property increasingly superseded the anti-trust legislation of the 'golden age' of the 1960s and 70s.

This is a powerful narrative, but it is also raises questions of causation. Should we not see company and competition laws as reactions to changes in the health of capital accumulation, rather than something that (successfully?) evens out the upswings and downswings of capitalist expansion? Christophers reckons that the profitability of capital has been "remarkably consistent" since 1945, with an average of corporate profits to GDP of 10% in the last 70 years, which "rarely strayed far from this mean" (p2). But profits to GDP are not the measure of the profitability of capital (at least in Marxist terms) and even so there has been a wide divergence (6%-14%). All the proper measures of US profitability show a secular decline since 1945, not stability; and in particular, a fall from the 1960s to the 1980s followed by a rise during the neoliberal period into the 2000s - and a small decline, subsequently to date.¹²

This suggests to me that corporate and competition law is more like another counteracting factor designed to react to the health and profitability of capital in the same way as globalisation, attacks on the trade unions and privatisations that we saw from the 1980s - in an attempt (partially successful) to raise profitability of capital as a whole. After all, it is the level of profitability for capital as a whole that is key to the degree and frequency of crises, rather than the sharing out of profit among capitals.

Marx argued that, as capital accumulates, it will experience regular and recurring crises of production and exchange - slumps, we call them. They occur because accumulation leads, over time, to a fall in profitability and profits, forcing capitalists into an investment 'strike'. However, Marx also outlined several counteracting factors to this law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall: greater exploitation, cheaper technology, expanding foreign trade, speculation in financial assets. Legislation could be seen as another counteracting factor, introduced to curb either the excesses of 'ruinous competition' in driving down prices and profitability (ie, helping to protect superprofits from innovation or monopoly power); or to break down too much 'monopoly control' that could hamper profitability for more efficient, smaller capitals or from new technology.

Labour law

Indeed, an area of law that is missing from Christophers' otherwise comprehensive analysis is labour law. One big area of capitalist law is designed to ensure the dominance of capital in the workplace and over the production and control of surplus value. These are even more important to capital than the laws designed to level

the playing field between capitalists.

As we approach the 150th anniversary of the publication of volume one of Marx's *Capital*, we can remember that Marx spent much time recounting the role of law and regulation (inspector reports) in the struggle to protect and improve the conditions and hours of workers in Victorian factories and workplaces. The battle for the 10-hour day and getting children out of 'dark, satanic mills' and mines, etc.

It is no accident that the Trump administration is looking to deregulate banking and reduce environmental regulations - not to help small businesses against monopolies, but instead business in general against labour and the cost of people's health. Take the right-to-work laws of the last 30 years or more. Following decades of declining membership, unions face an existential crisis as right-to-work laws being pushed at state and federal levels would ban their ability to collect mandatory fees from the workers they represent - a key source of revenue for organised labour.¹³ In their first weeks in office, the new Republican governors of Kentucky and Missouri have already signed such laws,¹⁴ making them the 27th and 28th states, respectively, to ban mandatory union fees.

On the first page of his book, Christophers rightly highlights the comments that Keynesian guru Paul Krugman made on his blog back in 2012.¹⁵ Inequality of incomes had risen sharply in the neoliberal period and the average wages of non-supervisory workers had stagnated. The share of value going to capital had risen. So, as Krugman stated,

the story has totally shifted; if you want to understand what's happening to income distribution in the 21st century economy, you need to stop talking so much about skills, and *start talking much more about profits and who owns the capital*. Mea culpa: I myself didn't grasp this until recently. But it's really crucial.

The immiseration of the working class, as Marx called this relative poverty, appeared to be borne out. As Krugman said, "Isn't that an old fashioned sort of Marxist discussion?"

As Christophers explains, Krugman offered two possible reasons for this immiseration: either growing monopoly profits of 'robber barons' (the Kalecki argument) or technology displacing labour with the means of production (the Marxist argument of labour-saving and 'capital bias'). The latest research on the causes of the long-term fall in US manufacturing employment alongside rising output shows that the Marxist explanation is more convincing than the Kalecki 'monopoly rents' one.¹⁶

It is not monopoly power or rising rents going to the 'robber barons' of the monopolies that forced down labour's share: it is just ('real competition') capitalism. Labour's share in the capitalist sector in the US and other major capitalist economies is down because of increased technology and 'capital bias', from globalisation and cheap labour abroad; from the destruction of trade unions; from the creation of a larger reserve army of labour (unemployed and underemployed); and from the ending of work benefits and secured tenure contracts, etc (labour laws). Companies that are not monopolies in their markets probably did more of this than the big firms.

Christophers only deals with international trade law in passing, as his

perceptive analysis concentrates on concentration and centralisation within national economies. But 'the Donald' is concentrating his enviable skills and focus on international law to revoke trade agreements, control the movement of labour across borders and impose tariffs and restrictions on rival powers' exports, etc. The irony is that this will do nothing to restore manufacturing jobs and incomes in the US - quite the contrary. No great levelling there.

Perhaps the real great leveller under capitalism is not so much laws designed to level the playing field among competing capitals - important as Christophers has shown that it is. The real leveller is capitalist crises themselves. In another new book, also coincidentally called *The great leveler*,¹⁷ Walter Scheidel, a Stanford University historian, argues that what really reduces inequality is catastrophe - either epidemics, wars or massive economic depressions. It is a simple and perhaps crude idea. But it is certainly true that the great depression of the 1930s cleansed capitalism of its unproductive and inefficient capitals and massively weakened labour, creating conditions for new levels of profitability. And the world war itself destroyed capital values (and physical capital) and introduced new military-induced technologies to exploit new layers of the global working class in the post-war boom.¹⁸ That was a great leveller of the capitalist landscape (in a literal sense) - to lay the basis for renewal of the profit-making machine from the 1940s through the 'golden age' of the 1960s.

So far the current long depression has not managed a similar 'levelling'. As Christophers says, it is unclear whether the law will be applied to reduce monopoly power, as it was after 1945. While the depression is unresolved, I doubt it. Indeed, as Christophers confirms, the balance between competition and monopoly has moved to the international plane, with the likelihood of a new imperialist struggle that we saw at the beginning of the 20th century.

Michael Roberts blogs at <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com>

Notes

1. B Christophers *The great leveler* Harvard 2016.
2. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2014/08/22/capitalism-stagnation-or-hypochondria>.
3. www.kansascityfed.org/publicat/sympos/2005/pdf/rajan2005.pdf.
4. See www.chronicle.com/article/Larry-Summersthe/124790.
5. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2016/07/05/john-bellamy-foster-and-permanent-stagnation>.
6. See <http://isj.org.uk/real-capitalism-turbulent/#footnote-10080-30-backlink>.
7. A Shaikh *Capitalism: competition, conflict, crises*. See my review at <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2016/04/04/capitalism-and-anwar-shaikh>.
8. See <http://davidharvey.org>.
9. <https://readingsofcapital.com>.
10. www.lancaster.ac.uk/sociology/about-us/people/bob-jessop.
11. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2012/06/13/keynes-the-profits-equation-and-the-marxist-multiplier>.
12. See my book, *The long depression* (Chicago 2016).
13. See www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2015-04-03/rand-paul-s-favorite-union-buster.
14. www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-02-16/unions-are-losing-their-decades-long-right-to-work-fight?cmpid=socialflow-twitter-business&utm_content=business&utm_campaign=socialflow-organic&utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social.
15. As discussed by myself at <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2012/12/12/apples-robots-and-robber-barons>.
16. Discussed at <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2016/12/10/trump-trade-and-technology>.
17. W Scheidel *The great leveler* Princeton 2017.
18. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2012/08/06/the-great-depression-and-the-war>.

1917

Culmination of the February revolution

‘1917: the view from the streets’ - leaflets of the Russian Revolution, No6

One hundred years ago, on March 12 (February 27) 1917, socialists in Petrograd distributed the following appeal for an insurrectional general strike to bring down tsarism. That day, the culmination of the Russian February revolution, witnessed the crumbling of tsarist power.

The day after the demonstration by women workers on February 23 (March 8), more than 200,000 striking workers marched into the centre of Petrograd. Large numbers of students and middle class professionals joined the demonstrations on February 25 (March 10). Soldiers at first

hesitated to forcefully remove demonstrators, but on February 26, some soldiers followed orders to shoot at demonstrators, killing hundreds.

As the senior member of the Russian bureau of the Bolshevik central committee in Petrograd, Alexander Shlyapnikov encouraged workers to win soldiers over to their side during the first days of the February revolution, but felt that armed struggle by socialists against the government was premature. Preferring direct armed action, the Bolshevik Vyborg district committee scorned Shlyapnikov’s position as denying the revolutionary

character of the ongoing demonstrations.

The Petersburg committee of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party called for Bolsheviks to take practical measures to organise and accelerate the pace of revolutionary developments. Yet the Interdistrict Committee (Mezhrayonka) of the RSDWP may have had the most influence upon radical socialist workers and soldiers during the February revolution. It encouraged workers to prolong their strike and called upon soldiers to defend workers against the tsarist police’s attacks.

The mutiny of the Volynsky

regiment on February 27 (March 12) set an example for other soldiers to join the February revolution, which culminated that day, as duma liberals formed a committee that would become the nucleus of the Provisional Government, tsarist ministers resigned and socialists formed the Petrograd Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies.

The following proclamation of the Petersburg Interdistrict Committee was distributed on March 12 (February 27) 1917.

This series is edited by **John Riddell** and the leaflets have been translated and annotated by **Barbara Allen**.



Soldiers guard street barricade, February 27 1917

Petersburg Interdistrict Committee of RSDWP

For a general strike against autocracy

Proletarians of all countries, unite!

Comrade workers! They are shooting us down! Workers’ blood has been spilled on the streets of Petrograd! Hungry people rose to struggle, but the tsar made them eat lead. Just as on January 9 1905, when the servants of the autocracy shot down workers who went to the tsar for justice and mercy, on February 25-26 they shot down hungry workers who went onto the streets to protest hunger and the reigning arbitrariness.

Comrades! They have committed a terrible, senseless, monstrous crime. During these days of the people’s rage and also of merciless retribution against them, we were helpless against the policemen and handfuls of soldiers who were loyal to the tsar. We could not fight back against their blows or take a life for a life. We were unarmed. Our fists were clenched in impotent rage. They beat us with their swords, their horses trampled us, and the defenceless people fled with hatred in their hearts toward the enemy.

Comrades! During these difficult days, the working class saw more

clearly than ever before that without strong, powerful, proletarian organisations, without fighting detachments and without the army’s support for the people, we won’t break the enemy and destroy autocracy. Likewise, we learned during these days that our brothers, the soldiers, do not always obey orders to carry out fratricide. We hail the Cossacks who chased the mounted police from Znamenskaya Square. We hail and give fraternal thanks to the soldiers of the Pavlovsky regiment who shot at a detachment of mounted police near the Cathedral of Resurrection.

Soldiers are beginning to see the light. They understand that their enemy is not the starving, oppressed people, but the tsarist autocracy. During these difficult days for workers, only part of the soldiers, students and citizens supported us. The state duma, which is not truly representative of the people, is criminally silent. While the stones cry out for vengeance, the state duma is deaf and blind to the people’s woe.

Comrades! Not only do they shoot us down, but they also cast us onto the streets to suffer hunger and destitution. The Putilov and Trubochnyi factories have been shut

down. Fifty thousand workers have been deprived of a morsel of bread!

Comrades! Whoever still has a conscience and is neither a slave nor a pitiful traitor to the workers’ cause will hear our appeal and will join us to unanimously protest merciless international war.

Comrades! Bring activity in the city to a standstill. Let all the factories, mills, workshops, and printing presses come to a halt. Let the electricity go out. We summon you to a general strike of protest, to strike a blow against the despotic autocracy. We, the Social Democratic Bolsheviks and Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries, summon the proletariat of Petersburg and of all Russia to organise and feverishly mobilise our forces.

Comrades! Organise underground strike committees in the mills and factories and link districts to one another. Collect funds for underground printing presses and for weapons. Get ready, comrades! The hour of decisive struggle approaches. We will not fear general [SS] Khabalov [commander of the Petrograd military district], who dares to call us traitors. It is not we workers who betray the people, but

those traitors and murderers the [VA] Sukhomlinovs [war minister] and the Khabalovs. The state duma and the liberals betray the people.

Comrades! Khabalov orders us to go back to work on the 28th, but we summon you to struggle and to a general strike!

- Be brave! All for one and one for all!
- Long live the general political strike of protest!
- Always remember our fallen brothers!
- Down with war!
- Down with autocracy!
- Long live revolution!
- Long live the Provisional Revolutionary Government!
- Long live the Constituent Assembly!
- Long live a democratic republic!
- Long live the international solidarity of the proletariat!

Translated from **AG Shlyapnikov Semnadsatyi god Vol 1, 1923, pp337-38**

References

1. T Hasegawa *The February revolution: Petrograd 1917* Washington 1981, pp258-61.
2. SA Smith *Russia in revolution: an empire in crisis, 1890 to 1928* Oxford 2017, pp101-02.
3. RA Wade *The Russian Revolution 1917* Cambridge 2000, pp29-45.

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.

The **Weekly Worker** is licensed by November Publications under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Licence: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode>. ISSN 1351-0150.

weekly WORKER

Petty bourgeoisie kept alive for political reasons

Hammond's self-employed U-turn

The Tories know that they have to preserve the middle classes, argues Paul Demarty

Last week's budget was a dismal experience for many - more attacks on schools (except, of course, the grammar schools that Theresa May expresses such fanatical support for), an increase in national health service spending so wholly inadequate that it is little more than a joke.

The media agenda, however, homed in on a particular that seems, on the face of it, relatively minor. The self-employed were to see their national insurance contributions rise from 9% to 11% - a hit to be borne by some 4.8 million people, who currently enjoy the dubious benefits of 'being their own boss'. The hoo-ha over this was deafening, not least because among the 4.8 million are a significant proportion of journalists, but above all because it is in direct contradiction to the Tories' manifesto commitments not to raise NI, value-added tax or income tax.

Hammond protested that times have changed since 2015 - which is one way of putting it. He certainly did not begin the Tories' latest term as chancellor, that title instead belonging to George Osborne, who - we chuckle to remember - was in those days often described as a 'strategic genius' in the pages of the bourgeois press, but succeeded in the end only in destroying himself, his prime minister and the medium term political-economic stability of the country through his wizard wheeze of an in-out referendum on European Union membership. Hammond is the anti-Osborne - colourless, plainly at the mercy of the Tory leader, factionally unplaceable. There is no reason why he should be bound by Osborne's fatuous fiscal promises (after all, how many of his own book-balancing deadlines did unlucky Gideon miss?), with the circumstances now very much changed.

The interest lies rather in the fact that Hammond's NI increase was so hated by the Tories, never mind the Tory media; indeed, that there should ever have been such a manifesto commitment. That is a much more interesting tale.

Untangling the self-employed

The 'self-employed', to begin with, are an amalgam. It should hardly surprise us, of course, since this is a category of bourgeois economics (and not that, even - a category primarily for census-takers and psephologists). They may be found among the most desperate layers of the exploited, and also banging on the door of the bourgeoisie proper, and many other places in between. We must disentangle these layers to make sense of them.

The most common image of the self-employed in Britain is probably that of the practitioner of some skilled trade - the 'white van man'. He owns the van, the tools therein, and engages in commerce as an independent operator, advertising modestly in local paper classifieds and latterly their web-based usurpers. He does his own taxes (and perhaps does not object to being paid in cash, between friends). The skilled trades are useful to home in on, because the stratification of the self-employed as a whole is present in synecdoche. There is a 'bottom end', where individuals become utterly reliant on larger players



Books further out of balance

in the supply chain - a kitchen-fitter, say, who would go bust without a strong relationship with the local B&Q. There are others, however, who succeed well enough to become small-scale employers themselves (of apprentices, etc).

Many things divide these examples, but the most important is this - our struggler, hanging off the every word of B&Q, is in reality an employee. 'His' means of production - his van, say - can only be put into the productive process on the say-so of a capitalist firm: that is, can only function as capital when deployed by another. The firm has merely outsourced, ingeniously, some of the costs of maintaining and reproducing the means of production, and by the same ruse liberated itself from some of the obligations (sick pay, paid holiday, minimum wage levels) it would owe to a full employee.

The great contemporary example of this phenomenon is the 'gig economy' - above all the behemoth start-up, Uber, which puts 'self-employed' (honest, gov) drivers to work as part of a bargain-basement black cab service. An Uber driver works for fares calculated by Uber, guided around the city by Uber's navigation system, dispatched under the direction of Uber. Their car may well have been bought with a loan advanced by Uber, with repayments docked out of wages - ahem, sorry, invoices - automatically, by Uber. What a fine life it is, to be your own boss!

The whole thing, of course, is total hogwash - and so obviously nonsensical that Uber is frequently dragged to court on precisely this point, and is not always successful in defence - only one of many fronts on which the company, and its emetic CEO, Travis Kalanick, openly defy local laws. Yet the use of self-employed status for superexploitation, as a cover for a revival of putting-out, is used ever more widely outside of Kalanick's malfunctioning empire;

there is something of the spirit of the age in it. (On the whole, it is unlikely that exposure to labour laws will do for Uber. Rather, the minor matter that their 11-figure valuation is a grotesque fiction - and basically a giant Ponzi scheme perpetrated indirectly on the world's pension funds - will probably cause the company's demise.)

This was the line of attack used by the Labour front bench against Hammond, and understandably so. According to John McDonnell,

The challenge for the next Labour government and the whole labour movement will be in securing the balance between the best possible protections for those in work [ie, formal employment - PD] and recognising that the world of work itself is changing. The labour movement has risen to challenges like this in the past. It was born out of the struggle for decent pay and conditions, when new technologies were ripping up existing ways of working. We need that same spirit and vision again.

The dream

There are two things wrong with this response. The first is that it subtly casts technological progress as the agent of changes in the "world of work". It would be more accurate (if a little over the top) to say it was the other way round - changes in the "world of work" (that is, the prevailing relationships of class power) rather dictate the shape that some given scientific advance takes, when it is embodied in a material-technological item of capital. Blaming computers and automation is a cop-out.

The second problem, which is more pertinent to the current discussion, is that it misses the reason for the success of current 'self-employment' practices. There are many ways to chain workers to a machine and drive down their living

standards. You can simply enslave them directly; you can organise fascist bands to conduct terror against trade unions and the left. Such measures have been deployed in the past and, if it comes to it, will be again - if the current crop of CEOs and directors are not up to it, they will be replaced with men and women of sterner stuff. And, all things being equal, we would expect it, for it is inevitable on a long enough time-scale that the working class will seek to improve its conditions collectively - an endeavour squarely at odds with the interests of its exploiters.

Yet slavery is plainly not on the cards, and nor (in spite of everything) is generalised fascist violence. Violence, in the end, is expensive, and risky with it. Instead, day-to-day social peace must be maintained with the consent of the lower orders.

Capitalism inherits from earlier societies a class of small property-owners - the petty bourgeoisie - in the cities and countryside. The basic premises of Marxist political economy give us every reason to suspect that the petty bourgeoisie will disappear rapidly, dividing between the bourgeoisie proper and (mostly) the proletariat. That this did not happen can be explained, instead, with reference to the slower cadence of history, whereby forms of society themselves have life cycles, are born, mature, decay and die. As contradictions sharpen, the basic laws of that society are increasingly constrained by the very same evasive actions necessary to preserve their operation.

The preservation of a middle class has taken various forms - an emancipated peasantry, an urban petty bourgeoisie, later a layer of professionals ... In different ways, each is given a limited material stake in the persistence of the system of generalised private property. They can thereby be convinced, in many cases, of the justice of the system; and, in a great many more, to accept its inevitability. A sliver, a fig leaf of these

privileges, but more the idea of them - of 'independent means' - is offered to the people we met earlier at the bottom end of 'self-employment'. With it comes the possibility that these wider layers will identify themselves as property-owners first and plebeians second - and thus identify their interests more with Bob Diamond than striking train drivers or migrant bricklayers.

Hammond's blunder

It is this, in the end, that explains the furore about Hammond's policy, and what marks it out as an error. For his two measly percentage points on national insurance contributions amounts to an assault on the very basis of Tory power.

The Tories, in their contemporary form, have two faces - the one is as the guardians of high capitalism, the 'party of business'; the other is that of the party of English 'common sense', the custodians of this nation of shopkeepers. In the aftermath of the Brexit vote, and amid a general right-populist upsurge, the latter countenance has proven more convenient, and Theresa May wasted no time in adopting it after emerging from last summer's bloodletting in the top job. This minor adjustment in tax rates is a lurch in very much the wrong direction, according to the needs of the day. Nobody much should have been surprised when Hammond's boss and wiser cabinet colleagues force him into retreat on the issue.

As for us communists, the issue is simpler. We do not seek to preserve artificially a layer of petty property-owners; on this point, the fundamental tendency of capitalism to rid us of it is very much more historically progressive than the political exigencies that oppose it. Yet we do not favour the general immiseration of 4.8 million people in Britain alone as a means of achieving it - still less forcible liquidation after the fashion of 'dekulakisation' or the Khmer Rouge. The lot of the working class must be improved, by the organised and conscious collective action of the workers, together with as many of the contradictory middle class elements won to the cause as possible.

If Hammond really wants to make things 'fair', he should clamp down on the pseudo-self-employment scam used by the likes of Uber to force their *de facto* workers further into precarity and penury. It will be a cold day in hell before a Tory chancellor reaches for that as a first resort, however - whatever mask he is wearing ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

Subscribe			
	6m	1yr	Inst.
UK	£30/€35	£60/€70	£200/€220
Europe	£43/€50	£86/€100	£240/€264
Rest of world	£65/€75	£130/€150	£480/€528

New UK subscribers offer: 3 months for £10

UK subscribers: Pay by standing order and save £12 a year. Minimum £12 every 3 months... but please pay more if you can.

Send a cheque or postal order payable to 'Weekly Worker' at:
Weekly Worker, BCM Box 928,
London WC1N 3XX

Name: _____
Address: _____
Tel: _____
Email: _____
Sub: £/€ _____
Donation: £/€ _____

Standing order

To _____ Bank plc _____
Branch address _____
Post code _____ Account name _____
Sort code _____ Account No _____
Please pay to Weekly Worker, Lloyds A/C No 00744310 sort code 30-99-64, the sum of _____ every month*/3 months* until further notice, commencing on _____ This replaces any previous order from this account. (*delete)
Date _____
Signed _____ Name (PRINT) _____
Address _____