

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



# weekly **worker**



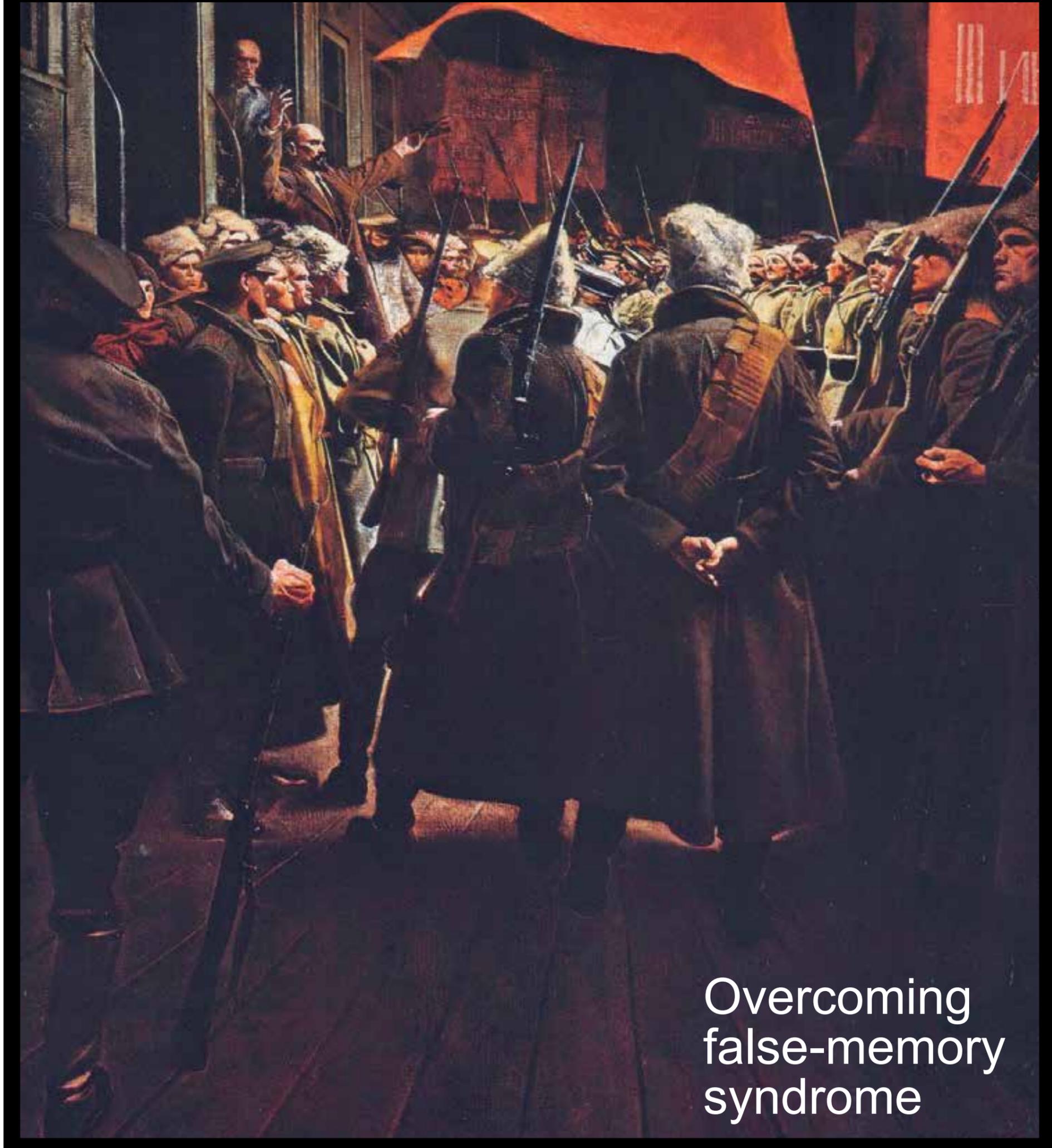
**Defend Ken Livingstone  
against the witch-hunt ...  
and leftwing appeasement**

- Letters and debate
- Trump and Syria
- Open letter to Corbyn
- Iranian elections

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Overcoming  
false-memory  
syndrome

# LETTERS



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

## Really Palestine

The battle over Palestinian rights and the oppression of the Palestinian people is being fought out in the Labour Party in the guise of an increasingly vindictive witch-hunt against Ken Livingstone. The Zionists - supported from the Israeli embassy and backed by the Tories, the Labour right, the BBC, the Jewish Labour Movement and Labour Friends of Israel - have mounted a campaign to damage Corbyn's reputation, weaken his leadership and divide the Labour left. They have settled on Livingstone as their prime target.

Last Saturday Left Unity's national council passed a draft resolution which "condemns unreservedly the witch-hunt against Ken Livingstone by the capitalist press, the right wing of the Labour Party and the supporters of Zionism in all parties." Hopefully the full statement will be published in the *Weekly Worker* next week. It is important that we all work together on this.

This is not just some internal Labour Party matter. If Labour cannot take on the Palestine witch-hunt issue and ends up eating itself in a Zionist whirlwind, socialists outside Labour have to step up to the front. This is an issue for the whole working class and for Jewish and non-Jewish workers alike. Already many Jewish socialists in the Labour Party have spoken out against the witch-hunt. But their voices are being ignored in the media.

Last Sunday I attended a timely meeting organised by the CPGB to oppose the witch-hunt. The meeting was addressed by Tony Greenstein and Mike Macnair, who examined the historical record of Nazi and Zionist politics in the 1930s and the political and legal aspects of the Livingstone case today. It was argued that most of the left had capitulated to the witch-hunt, beginning with Corbyn and Abbot, through Momentum and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty to the Socialist Workers Party. Tony Cliff would not be a happy with that.

The Zionists have deployed the weapon of 'fake news' to create the idea that 'anti-Semitism' has taken over the Labour Party since Corbyn was elected leader. Nobody had the effrontery to claim that Corbyn is anti-Semitic, so the story was fabricated that Corbyn has been soft and tolerated racism against Jewish members. Thanks to the BBC and the capitalist press, everybody has heard about the 'rise of anti-Semitism' now engulfing Labour.

Zionists and their allies began a witch-hunt to find leftwing alleged anti-Semites. After searching for victims and picking on Jackie Walker, for example, the hunters settled on Ken Livingstone. He has a record of support for Palestinian rights. When under attack by Zionists, he said, albeit in a slightly clumsy fashion, that Hitler and the Nazis had made agreements with Zionists to facilitate the emigration of German Jews to Palestine in the early 1930s, before the Nazis adopted the policy of mass extermination.

That is historically accurate. Stating the facts is not anti-Semitic. It is part of the historical experience of Jewish people and in the interests of democracy and free speech that such facts are widely known. The Ha'avara agreement involved the Zionist Federation of Germany and the Nazi government. No doubt it saved the lives of some German Jews sent to Palestine. But it saved the Nazis from a Jewish-led international economic boycott which was weakening them.

It is valid to ask whether Zionism

in the 1930s undermined the international anti-fascist movement. Yet this misses the point. This is not really about the 1930s. It is about Palestine and the policy of the Zionist Israeli government today. It is about a struggle to oust Corbyn and restore a rightwing, pro-Israel Labour Party. It is about campaigning to expel Livingstone as a lever against Corbyn.

Zionism is a set of beliefs which justifies colonial expansion, the oppression of Palestinians in the occupied territories and a Jewish supremacist state. The socialist answer is to condemn the witch-hunt against Livingstone unreservedly, defend the right for free speech on Israel and Palestine, and oppose Zionist ideology. Socialists have to turn the tables by transforming the witch-hunt into the biggest Palestinian solidarity campaign the Labour Party has ever known.

Corbyn has to be criticised for failing to bring Palestine into this battle and make racism against Palestinians the central issue for the Labour Party. In the early 1930s a 'boycott, divestment and sanctions'-type campaign nearly halted the Nazi regime - not least by giving encouragement to anti-fascist resistance in Germany. We must redouble our efforts to make sure the suffering of the Jewish people and their resistance to the Nazis can today inspire the Palestinian people and all who want justice and peace in the Middle East.

**Steve Freeman**  
Left Unity and Rise

## Fault line

The national constitutional committee's guilty verdict on Ken Livingstone has presented another fault line in the left in my Constituency Labour Party.

The politics and the personalities largely match those on the two sides following Jon Lansman's coup in Momentum. Rather than supporting Ken's stand for truth and confronting Zionist interference in the Labour Party, we've had comrades complain because the hearing's verdict clashed with the launch of the manifesto for the local elections. And then they applauded the shameful way that Jeremy Corbyn hung Ken out to dry and joined the calls for further disciplinary action.

These comrades want a Labour government at any price, and will back any compromise with the right if it will improve the poll ratings. The only change they want is for them to win rather than the right - the existing democratic structures and rules, the pro-Nato foreign policy, the economic policies developed under Ed Miliband - they can all stay, as long as Jeremy becomes prime minister. Even if fate delivered such an unlikely outcome, we've seen this kind of Labour government before - attacks on the working class followed by defeat at the hands of the Tories.

Before he became leader, Corbyn always fought Zionism - he should have made clear his support for Ken Livingstone right from the start. Instead of acquiescing while Ken was suspended, he should have thrown the book at John Mann and the others in the Parliamentary Labour Party who instigated the 'Labour is awash with anti-Semitism' myth. He should have launched a full inquiry into the Israeli embassy's interference in our party's affairs following the Al Jazeera expose.

There is opposition from the left in the CLP. Some of us realised that winning the leadership on its own could never deliver a new agenda. The party needs change at every level, and that requires battle rather than compromise. And there will be no quick fix this side of the general

election.

The hundreds of thousands who flocked into Labour's ranks in the wake of Corbyn's victory have not seen the socialist movement they expected. The membership has peaked, and already some are not renewing their subs. But the tasks are becoming clearer for those willing to join the battle.

**Ivor Bentley**  
Crewe

## No quarter

The notion that anti-Zionism is a form of anti-Semitism must be met with facts. We must not allow the fact-deniers to accuse Ken Livingstone of saying things he didn't say - for example, regarding the transfer (Ha'avara) agreement between the Zionist Anglo-Palestine Bank and the Nazi state in the 1930s.

But today's McCarthyism must also be met with an awareness of what's at stake. For a variety of forces are promoting the 'anti is anti' line - not all with the same programme, but all singing the same tune: Israel lobbyists of course, but also the Labour right hoping to implicate Corbyn; the government considering 'hate crime' law; Conservatives happy to call leftists racist; certain Jewish intellectuals and various inhibited or rightwing media outlets. Books have already been published and approved in review which proclaim that even anti-capitalism is a form of anti-Semitism and I know liberals who would not have supported the Iraq war and will not endorse a Trump hot war against Islamic State, but who sound ready to accuse any who would oppose Israel - say, in some future armed conflict with Iran - of being individual examples of a spreading anti-Semitism, which must be given no say or quarter whatsoever.

**Mike Belbin**  
email

## No-brainer

In relation to the ongoing penalties, punishments and restrictions imposed upon him by the Labour Party, it's an absolute no-brainer that all those on the genuine left should provide both resolute support for, and a fiercely principled defence of, Ken Livingstone. Precisely the same applies to Jackie Walker in her own circumstances of poisonous false accusations, deviously contrived suspension from Momentum, plus generalised persecution.

Having said all that, when Livingstone stands in front of the assembled hyenas of the bourgeois media, repeatedly to the point of abjectly, the comrade avoids developing his argument or position concerning the relationship between Hitler and Zionism - at least to any meaningful extent. As a result, no consciousness-raising clarity on that matter is generated for any potentially helpful audience, whether that audience comes from amongst the working class or intelligentsia.

This amounts to a deep and somewhat shameful failing on Livingstone's part, revealing his severe and indeed tragic limitations. Of course, 'Corbynism' in general is in exactly the same boat and an identical league in those respects.

Fortunately for readers of the *Weekly Worker*, in their articles 'Labour's Star Chamber' and 'Compulsory lies' (April 6), both Tony Greenstein and Mike Macnair home in on things in a far more knowledgeable and certainly less introverted manner, thereby providing an expansion of the topic, plus factual 'enlargement', that eludes comrade Ken.

None of these problems from the former mayor of London are really that surprising. Not if we recall how vigorously he encouraged

ultra-obscene global oligarchs and 'sovereign fund' oil wealth gangsters (such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and a host of nefarious operatives from China and Russia) to suck mega-profit from our capital city's elitist, exclusionary and uber-luxury housing and property investment market - apparently in the belief that that specific pathway would lead to increased health and prosperity and security in life for its working class population.

Central London's essential working force of nurses, bus drivers, hotel staff, etc cannot afford to live anywhere near their place of work or depot. Each day they are obliged to make long, stressful as well as costly commutes, in effect doing so past super-shiny enclaves of those spankingly attractive housing and property developments that mayor Livingstone originally enabled. In the omni-monetising language of their sales and marketing brochures, those being 'curated concepts' of 'boutique collections' nestling amongst 'exciting place-creating ventures', where a one-bedroom apartment typically costs a million pounds or more; a penthouse suite £25 million.

**Bruno Kretzschmar**  
email

## Deceit

Last month a US-led air strike killed 200 Iraqi civilians. They prevented journalists from attending the site of the bombings and later claimed that their bombs hit an arms dump belonging to Islamic State.

Last week a Syrian air strike alleged to contain chemical weapons killed 50-plus Syrian civilians. The Syrian government claims the attack struck chemical weapons being stored by IS. The United Nations was in the process of setting up an investigation into the incident and the US government decide to launch a pre-emptive strike before the investigation could take place.

A few years ago, the very same sources in both the White House and Downing Street told us of the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. That sparked a war that killed a million Iraqis via sanctions and military action. Despite the lies that were told then, the very same is happening today and some people are falling for the same old story.

I have no time for Assad or Trump, but, when it comes to lies and deceit, the US government are the worst culprits in the world for both - and for inflicting terrorism across the globe.

**Denis Doody**  
Wakefield

## Enemy at home

On April 7, I participated in the Stop the War Coalition's emergency protest outside Downing Street against Trump's attack on Syria.

No-one I met had any time for Assad. I didn't hear any conspiracy theories about the chemical attack being down to (takes deep breath) Mossad, Soros, the Illuminati, the Rothschilds, false flags, transmitters in dental fillings, Morris dancers or the second man on the grassy knoll. Instead, despite it being a nice, warm, sunny, early evening, the mood was very sombre.

The speeches I heard were about putting the longevity of the war and its viciousness down to intervention, not just from the west, but also from Papa Putin. There was also condemnation of the chemical attack itself.

When atrocities like these take place, sections of the left go OTT calling each other out for not being loud enough in their condemnation. That's when we're not accusing each other of either being Assad fan boys and girls or being tickled by the bigly hands of Trump and western imperialism.

Last month over 300 civilians died in attacks on Mosul and in Yemen. Last week nearly 100 civilians died in the chemical attack in Idlib. It isn't, or at least it shouldn't be, a competition as to whether we have enough sadness and compassion for these 'good' Muslims over here and none for the 'bad' ones over there. They are both victims of imperialism. (If anyone has got illusions in Assad being an anti-imperialist, I hope you won't mind me pointing out the fact he won the extraordinary rendition franchise from Tony Blair and David Miliband.)

In the interests of full disclosure and free speech, one guy, who claimed to be a Syrian, tried to muscle his way into getting to speak at the demo, even though the organisers had made it clear it was not an open mic. Ironically enough, he got lots of attention from the press who were there, so he got his wish to speak in the end.

The enemy is at home ... and our enemies here in the UK are the likes of Theresa May, Tim Farron, BoJo, Tom Watson and Hillary Benn, to name but some.

For American comrades, the enemies are Trump, Bannon and the Killera. For any nascent anti-imperialists in Russia, the enemy is Putin. For those, in Syria, who still have faith that a society that does not rely on the authoritarian man of destiny, it's Assad.

**Floyd Codlin**  
London

## Achievement

Given that the STWC demo was held just a few hours after the bombing of a Syrian airfield, it was unlikely that thousands would show up, and I would say that the 300-odd people who did so represented quite a good turnout. However, the mainstream media, including the BBC, put the figure at below 100. In all protests and demonstrations there is always going to be a disparity between the actual and reported numbers - sometimes even a mention is an achievement. And even if a demonstration is reported, getting a positive portrayal appears a Sisyphean effort.

What this little episode shows is the power of the media to control and shape public debate within the window of acceptable discourse. That is why it is important the left should have its own media - not just newspapers and the internet, but television and radio. But what passes for the left media is deficient and poor - weekly papers equivalent to the trashy morning free sheets given away in most metropolitan cities that lack both rigour and challenging news content, or are beholden to outdated modes of thought, reflect unthinking traditions and stifle imaginative thinking.

But back to the demo. Sometimes small demonstrations are good - usually only the most militant are prepared at short notice to drop other things and head down to Whitehall on a Friday evening, whereas the bigger and more diffuse demonstrations are often politically weak and good only for hawkers to sell their books and badges.

**Simon Wells**  
London

## Post-Keynesian

I was disappointed with Michael Roberts' article on Keynesianism ('Civilisation and the "long run"', April 6). Although he mentioned in passing the "Keynesians" and "post-Keynesians", the thrust of his criticism is towards the former. We on the left already know the problems of bastard Keynesianism or neoclassical synthesis!

The *Weekly Worker* has yet to produce an article that engages with the strengths and weaknesses of the post-Keynesian school(s). There are very good reasons why left Labourites like Jeremy Corbyn and

# ACTION

John McDonnell have lent their ears to the post-Keynesians. There are very good reasons why the Spanish United Left have lent their ears to the post-Keynesians. There are very good reasons why the *Jacobin* magazine folks have lent their ears to the post-Keynesians.

There are very good reasons why other Marxists have incorporated post-Keynesian policy into the minimum economic sections of their programmes.

**Jacob Richter**  
email

## Dark Ages

The great unintended consequence of capitalist competition is that it tends to drive down the rate of profit, as the percentage of labour time contained in each commodity drops in relation to the amount of used-up capital.

We have reached the point now where the rate of profit is so low that the capitalist system cannot reproduce itself, let alone grow. It is super-monopolised, as capitalists put each other out of business and charge monopoly profits to compensate for a low rate of profit by a greater mass and that, plus the low rate of profit that engendered it, creates a feedback loop that threatens to snuff out production altogether.

In the past, capitalism has been able to slough off the old political economic relations that characterised the previous period, but had now become an absolute fetter on its further development and, often through great violence, establish a new set-up that could give it a new lease of life. With super-monopolisation that is now global, that is no longer possible.

The current political-economic arrangements characterised by Pax Americana established after World War II are collapsing all around our ears and there are no possible alternative arrangements that could possibly replace them that would give capitalism a new lease of life. The unravelling of capitalist globalisation and the collapse of capitalism itself promises great violence and, if not transcended by world proletarian revolution, a new Dark Ages from which our species is unlikely to emerge with its life. 'Socialism or barbarism' was never truer than it is right now. The age of war and revolution, so long put on ice by the cold war collaboration of Stalinism and imperialism, is back on with a vengeance.

**David Ellis**  
Leeds

## Branding

As the Socialist Party candidate in Guildford West in this May's Surrey county council elections, I note that Paul Demarty is urging workers there to vote for the Labour candidate and his pathetic slogan of "Say no to 4.99% council tax increases" ('The Socialist Party's decision to stand candidates in May is delusional', April 6).

The Militant Tendency, (standing as Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition), has a candidate in Staines for these elections, but he is standing on the 'transitional demand' of capitalism in a slump without austerity, whereas we are standing on the socialist 'maximum programme' of the common ownership and democratic control of the means of wealth production, with production solely for use and distribution according to needs. The Socialist Party is also standing candidates in Kent and in East Sussex.

**Adam Buick**

Socialist Party of Great Britain

## Great unrest

Between the 1890s and 1920s, in many parts of Europe, the United States, Latin America and Australia there grew a distinctive group of social movements variously called 'revolutionary syndicalist', 'anarcho-syndicalist' and 'industrial unionist'. They had a shared aim: overthrowing capitalism through revolutionary industrial class struggle and building a new social order "free

from economic or political oppression".

These movements didn't look to parliament or the state to introduce or impose that new system. Rather, they looked to working class economic organisations - particularly to trade and industrial unions - to take the lead in coordinating direct action and general strikes. Granted, there were differences within syndicalism. In Europe there was an emphasis on converting existing trade unions. In America it was more about 'dual unionism' - creating entirely new revolutionary unions. And with anarcho-syndicalists there was a stress on decentralisation and a much more hostile stance *vis-à-vis* the state.

On Saturday May 13, the Wakefield Socialist History Group will be holding an event, 'Syndicalism and the great unrest', in the Red Shed, Vicarage Street, Wakefield WF1, starting at 1pm. There will be a range of speakers, including Robin Stocks and Alan Brooke. Admission will be free and there will be a free light buffet.

**Alan Stewart**

Wakefield Socialist History Group

## Library ticket

Unless I've missed it, I'm surprised that the *Weekly Worker* hasn't yet covered the controversy over Vanessa Beeley's talk at the Marx Memorial Library. One poster on the urban75 forum claims that the library was forced to issue the following statement:

"Marx Memorial Library accepted a commercial booking from the New Communist Party for a public meeting on March 1 2017 entitled 'Aleppo: fall or liberation?' organised by several socialist individuals and organisations.

"The library staff received a number of demands from individuals to cancel the meeting due to the controversial nature of the arguments over the current war in Syria. However, the library officers and trustees were mindful that it would have been a breach of contract to cancel an accepted booking, given that none of the organisations or speakers involved in the meeting were in breach of the library's own rules, which prohibit the hire of premises to organisations that hold racist or fascist views. In any event, it was felt that there should be public debate of the issues indicated in the title of the meeting in the interests of freedom of speech and information.

"Several members of Marx Memorial Library volunteered to assist with access to and security of our building at the public meeting and were subjected to

unwarranted abuse and provocations from an organised group of protestors who wished to prevent the meeting from taking place. Marx Memorial Library is grateful to all its members and supporters who freely give their time to ensure that our building remains an accessible and welcoming venue for socialists and anti-fascists."

**Jon D White**  
email

## Bye-bye

For many years, out of habit I picked up your paper from Housmans bookshop. For the first time last week I stopped doing so and will now only look at the online version.

Papers and groups have their time. It seems your time was the late 1990s and early 2000s. You had an edge, in that if a lefty wanted to know what was going on among the left, he took the *Weekly Worker*. The internet has made that redundant and you lost out. That's old history. Now, there is nothing much must-read about the *Weekly Worker*, given that I don't agree with you on much politically.

I am not alone in this. I know at least 10 people who got your paper regularly during the Socialist Alliance years in my area of the Socialist Party alone. Ask people in the Socialist Party now and they will only stifle a yawn. It's not much of a threat now you don't have a USP.

It gets worse. I'm afraid that when a *Weekly Worker* last got brought out after my branch meeting in the pub, it was the source of much derision - the awful layout, the squished text (that hurts my eyes to read!), the strange pictures that seem to have been selected by drug addicts. Not to mention the bizarre letters page. I get that you like debates, but having a bunch of eccentric fringe loonies isn't much of an improvement on the - also bad - letters page in *The Socialist*.

You need to wake up. Some of your rivals have professionalised their operations; they realised they had to keep up. You lot only seem determined to get more amateurish. For goodness sake, get an editor, get a designer, get a sub, get a proper website and get professional. I say that because I am not sectarian; if all the left is crap, it's bad for all of the groups.

But for me, I'm saying bye-bye to the *Weekly Worker* in print. If you start getting serious again, maybe you can win your old readers back. I doubt it.

**Victor Jenkins**  
email

## Fighting fund Good cause

"It's always nice to support a good cause," said a comrade who handed over a fiver for the *Weekly Worker* at last Sunday's London Communist Forum, entitled 'Defend Ken Livingstone'.

And I think that just about everyone among the three dozen comrades present were agreed that our paper is defending Livingstone in a principled manner - the meeting saw unanimous opposition from those who spoke to Labour's sham 'anti-Semitism' witch-hunt and there was certainly appreciation of the role of the *Weekly Worker* in this. Comrade PB donated a generous £20, while £35 in total was received from other comrades.

This week there were two PayPal donations - £10 from a stalwart in her 80s, comrade VB, and a lovely £50 from DS. They were among 3,321 online readers last week (and they're going to stay that way, as both declined my offer to send them the printed version).

Then there were two cheques - a handy £40 from comrade CT, plus a tanner added to BN's subscription. Finally, standing orders received in the last seven days amounted to £90 - thanks to RK and GD (£25 each), DV (£20), SM and AN (£10 each).

So all that added £255 to our April fighting fund, taking the running total to £567. But I'm afraid to say that this is well below par - not quite a third of the £1,750 we need each and every month with almost half of April behind us. In other words, I'm looking for a sharp acceleration over the next week or so. Who else wants to experience that nice feeling that comes with supporting a good working class cause? ●

**Robbie Rix**

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

## London Communist Forum

**Sunday April 16, 5pm:** Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Followed by open discussion and reading group: study of Ralph Miliband's *Parliamentary socialism*. This meeting: Postscript, section 2. Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk); and Labour Party Marxists: [www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](http://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk).

## End the trade in arms

**Saturday April 15, 11am to 5pm:** Meeting, Quaker Meeting House, 7 Victoria Terrace, Edinburgh EH1. Organised by Campaign Against the Arms Trade: [www.caat.org.uk](http://www.caat.org.uk).

## A Marxist history of Ireland

**Thursday April 20, 7pm:** Second of three-part series of talks, Brent Trades and Labour Hall, 375 Willesden High Street (Apollo Club), London NW10. 'The 1916 uprising to the end of the civil war in 1923'. Organised by Socialist Fight: <https://socialistfight.com>.

## Film against war

**Friday April 21 to Thursday May 18:** Film festival, Sands Films Studio, 82 St Marychurch Street, London SE16. A series of classic anti-war films created over the past 80 years: see [www.stopwar.org.uk/index.php/events/national-events/2483-21-april-18-may-rotherhithe-stop-the-war-film-festival](http://www.stopwar.org.uk/index.php/events/national-events/2483-21-april-18-may-rotherhithe-stop-the-war-film-festival). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

## Drop bass, not bombs

**Friday April 21, 8pm to dawn:** Music event, CLF Art Cafe, Bussey Building, 133 Rye Lane, London SE15. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

## Labour and the unions

**Tuesday April 25, 7pm:** Debate, room 137a, Goldsmiths University, Lewisham Way, London SE14. With Matt Wrack, general secretary of Fire Brigades Union. Organised by Lewisham Momentum: [lewishamforcorbyn@gmail.com](mailto:lewishamforcorbyn@gmail.com).

## We are many

**Wednesday April 26, 7pm:** Film screening and Q&A session, Blackburne House, Blackburne Place, Liverpool L8. Followed by Q&A with Murad Qureshi. Free tickets: [www.eventbrite.com/e/anti-war-film-screening-we-are-many-tickets-33112196471?aff=es2](http://www.eventbrite.com/e/anti-war-film-screening-we-are-many-tickets-33112196471?aff=es2). Organised by Merseyside Stop the War: [www.facebook.com/MerseysideSTW](http://www.facebook.com/MerseysideSTW).

## The struggle for Labour

**Friday April 28, 7pm:** Political discussion, Cock Tavern, 23 Phoenix Road, London NW1. Speakers: Gerry Downing (Socialist Fight), Tony Greenstein (Labour anti-Zionist), Andy Brooks (*New Worker* editor). Organised by Socialist Fight: <https://socialistfight.com>.

## Blood on the streets of Halifax

**Friday April 28, 5.30pm:** Guided walk through historical sites. Meet Central Library, Northgate, Halifax HX1. With Catherine Howe, author of *Halifax 1842: a year of crisis*. Free - donations welcome. Organised by Calderdale Trades Council: <http://calderdaletuc.org.uk>.

## Stop Le Pen

**Tuesday May 2, 7pm:** Rally, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Organised by Unite Against Fascism: [uaf.org.uk](http://uaf.org.uk).

## Banners for Spain

**Friday May 5 to Saturday July 8:** Display of socialist/republican banners plus a programme of related activities and events, Islington Museum, 245 St John Street, London EC1. Organised by Islington Museum: [islington.museum@islington.gov.uk](mailto:islington.museum@islington.gov.uk).

## Critique conference 2017

**Saturday May 6, 9.30am to 5.30pm:** Annual event sponsored by *Critique* journal, University of London student central, Malet Street, London WC1. Speakers include: Savas Michael-Matzas, Hillel Ticktin, Raquel Valera, Yasmine Mather. Organised by *Critique* journal: [www.critiquejournal.net](http://www.critiquejournal.net).

## Britain and the Spanish civil war

**Tuesday May 9, 6.30pm:** Talk, Islington Museum, 245 St John Street, Clerkenwell, London EC1. Speaker: professor Tom Buchanan, University of Oxford. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: [www.marxlibrary.org.uk](http://www.marxlibrary.org.uk).

## People's Assembly

**Saturday May 13, 10.30am to 6pm:** Annual conference, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. 'The NHS is in crisis, education is in crisis, the Tories are in crisis'. Organised by People's Assembly: [www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk](http://www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk).

## Labour, value and capitalist crisis

**Tuesday May 16, 7pm:** Political economy study, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. One of four classes by Simon Renton in the 'Labour, value and exploitation' series. £5. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: [www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk](http://www.marx-memorial-library.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.

**SYRIA**

# What happened to 'America first'?

Establishment opinion has welcomed the new 'sensible' Donald Trump, who has acted 'decisively' on Syria. **Eddie Ford** reports

Following the US attack last week on a Syrian airbase, something slightly strange has happened. Donald Trump, the subject of so much mockery and fear by mainstream and establishment opinion, has suddenly become a sensible statesman who defends western interests. Perfectly summing up this new attitude, the BBC's Jonny Dymond - who specialises in cruel, openly contemptuous, humour directed against the US president - now tells us that Trump has "suddenly got real", all because of 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles. They hated the non-interventionist Donald Trump who was prepared to do a deal with Vladimir Putin, but they really like the Donald Trump who cocks a snook at the Russian president and lands missiles on one of his clients.

Trump's military strike on the Shayrat airbase near the city of Homs was, of course, a response to the April 4 sarin chemical attack allegedly carried out by the Assad regime against the opposition-held town of Khan Shaykhun in the Idlib province - which left at least 89 civilians dead. However, what is surprising - if not alarming - is the unquestioning nature of the coverage and commentary. Following Saddam Hussein's WMDs that we were told could be deployed within 45 minutes, or the Libyan catastrophe, you would have thought that at the very least there would be more room for doubt. After all, this writer is not aware of any cast-iron proof that there was even a sarin chemical attack at all - there are those with technical expertise in this area that say it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that a Syrian air force bomb landed on a "terrorist warehouse" full of munitions - which happened to include a stash of the sarin chemical agent. In that sense, the Syrian army might have been carrying out a 'normal' military operation.

Therefore it is hard not to feel sympathy for some of the comments made by the former British ambassador to Syria, Peter Ford - or, as one headline luridly put it, "Truth bomb dropped live on BBC by British ambassador goes viral".<sup>1</sup> Obviously getting impatient with the uncritical and propagandist nature of his BBC host, or interrogator, Ford contested the idea that Assad's culpability was a "statement of fact" - rather, said Ford, it is a "myth" or "statement of non-fact". What is needed, he continued, is an investigation, because there are two possibilities as to what happened: one is the "American version" that Assad dropped chemical weapons on this locality and the other version is that an "ordinary bomb was dropped and it hit a munitions dump, where jihadists were storing chemical weapons". At this stage, Ford remarked, we do not know which of these two possibilities is the correct one. But unlike the mainstream media, quipped the ex-ambassador, "I don't leave my brains at the door when I examine a situation analytically. I try to be objective."

Ford also reminded us that in the run-up to the Iraq war "experts, the intelligence agencies, the politicians" produced "reams of evidence, photographs, diagrams" to convince us that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction - but "they were all wrong", and "it's possible that they are wrong in this instance as well". But instead, it seems, they are just "looking for a pretext" to attack Syria. Based on previous experiences such as Iraq, Ford went on, "we cannot take at face value what the so-called intelligence experts tell us when they have an agenda".

More controversially, Ford argued that Trump has given the jihadists a



**Mar-a-Lago war room: some advisors on the up, some on the down**

"thousand reasons to stage fake flag operations, seeing how successful and easy it is, with a gullible media, to provoke and lead the west into intemperate reactions". He also pointed out that Assad may be "cruel" and "brutal", but "he's not mad" - hence it "defies belief that he would bring this all on his head for no military advantage", as the site that was hit "had no military significance" - it merely "angered the Russians". The fact that Ford's comments are being promoted by various conspiracy websites, some of a far-right or anti-Semitic nature, does not invalidate his more pertinent observations.

## Unite

Though not a fail-safe method, it is always a good idea to ask about any incident or outrage, *who stands to benefit?* That does not lead us to think with regards to 9/11, for example, that George Bush must have been behind the attack because he obviously benefited from it. Conspiracies, especially on that scale, tend to get uncovered.

But it is clearly the case that the April 4 attack did not suit the interests of either Assad or the Russians. Firstly, as World War I and other conflicts proved, gas or chemical weapons are not particularly useful *militarily*: they can go in the wrong direction and are pretty indiscriminate - only civilians were killed at Idlib. Secondly, far more importantly, it has been a political-diplomatic disaster for Assad and his backers - it has allowed the west to *unite* around Donald Trump, no matter how improbable that seemed only a month ago, when he was damned for wanting to undermine Nato and the European Union. This time there has been no condemnation of Trump from western leaders, but near universal praise for his supposed "proportionate response", even though it did not go through the United Nations security council or even US Congress. As Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary, proudly told us, Trump had acted "decisively" on Syria.

So we have gone from the initial western consensus over the need to overthrow Assad to doing some sort of deal with him - then back again to the idea of regime change. So if Assad, or one of his subordinates, was responsible for a sarin attack then it was a very dumb move indeed.

Anyhow, communists are very sceptical about the sarin story - the first victim of war is truth, it being entirely legitimate to suspect that it was an own goal by whatever group or faction that

holds this town. Yet the response to the incident has been very revealing. True, Russia's reaction is not surprising - disappointment at ruining what seemed a promising relationship and hardening support for the Assad regime. President Vladimir Putin said that Moscow had information "from different sources" that the April 4 attack was carried out by rebel groups intent on dragging the US into the conflict. He also claimed to have information that a "similar provocation" is being prepared in other parts of Syria, including in the southern Damascus suburbs, "where they are planning to again plant some substance" and then accuse the Syrian authorities of using chemical weapons - such "fake attacks" would be used to justify further US missile strikes on the regime. Putin said Russia would ask the UN to carry out an investigation into the attack, and accused unnamed western countries of supporting the US strikes in a bid to "curry favour" with Donald Trump.

The days when Russian politicians talked enthusiastically about "better relations" and state television praised Trump as a "real man" seem to be over. A Putin spokesman stated on April 11 that there were no plans "for now" for the Russian president to meet the US secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, currently in Moscow. Not such a bromance between Trump and Putin, after all.

But in terms of the western reaction to Trump's new interventionist stance, especially in Europe, there has been near jubilation - even if G7 foreign ministers are at the moment divided over possible next steps and refused to back a British call for fresh sanctions against Russia. 'Welcome back, America' was the message - this is the sort of decisive leadership we are used to and want more of, thank you very much. This is the America we love, not the isolationist America that Trump seemed to represent at one point. Summing up the mood, the *New York Times* declared that the missile strike "restores our credibility in the world" (April 8) and the *Financial Times* praised Trump's "welcome show of US leadership" (April 7) - whilst *The Sunday Times* thought it had taught Russia, China and North Korea that "the Obama era of new world disorder is over" (April 9). The Liberal Democrat leader, Tim Farron, who had previously characterised Donald Trump as a threat to western civilisation, came out in support of the airstrikes, as he believes in the "doctrine of responsibility to protect and there can be no clearer-cut case in which to invoke that than the use

of these evil weapons".<sup>2</sup> Even liberals are becoming Trump fans.

Then we have to ask, why exactly did Trump authorise the strike? There are a number of theories. Given his low ratings in the presidential election, when he lost the popular vote by nearly three million, and sinking polls ever since his inauguration, this was a naked attempt to boost his popularity. BBC journalists wandering the streets of New York reported, as you would expect, that most non-Trump voters and Democrats backed the action - undoubtedly Hillary Clinton would have behaved in the same fashion, if not earlier and more eagerly. As the historian, Greg Grandin, writes in *The Nation* magazine, the object of Trump's Tomahawks was not Syria's capacity to deploy gas, but "domestic liberal opponents, who base their resistance to Trump entirely on the premise that he is anti-American because he is too close to Putin, and that he is a traitor to a bipartisan policy of humanitarian military interventionism" (April 7).<sup>3</sup> Now they are beginning to change their minds.

Then you have the explanation that Trump is a not a thinker or book reader, he just saw the pictures on TV or Twitter and was emotionally moved by them - which, actually, is quite believable and something that highlights the nature of this particular individual. Trump might have come out with a lot of campaign rhetoric on this or that subject, but there was nothing systematic about his programme. In other words, if his attitude towards Russia had been serious or considered, then he would not have done what he did. If he had been thinking strategically in any way at all, he would have called for a formal investigation into the sarin allegations and got on the phone to Putin - persuade him to sort out Assad and get the situation under control. Whilst Donald Trump might not be *entirely* unpredictable or politically unstable, it is certainly true that he can react in a manner that is deeply inconsistent with previous statements and positions.

## Upset supporters

There is also the seemingly undeniable fact that he was persuaded by voices in his Florida resort of Mar-a-Lago, which Trump has variously described as his "winter White House" or "southern White House". Various newspapers and media outlets have published pictures of the incident room in Florida, showing Trump surrounded by advisors.<sup>4</sup> What is most interesting if you are a Trumpologist, is that the US president has around him a

lot of experienced generals and *career insiders*. Even more notably, Trump's supposed chief strategist, Steve Bannon, is on the edge of the pictures - looking uncomfortable and removed from the inner circle.

Bannon, of course, has been removed from the national security council and by all accounts is due another demotion soon - at the Mar-a-Lago meeting, Bannon argued strongly against the airstrike on the grounds that it does not advance Trump's 'America first' doctrine - as opposed to Jared Kushner, Trump's close confidant and son-in-law, who maintained that the US needed to punish the Assad regime.<sup>5</sup> Though it is a bit too early to say for sure, Bannon - and his version of isolationism that appeared to have heavily influenced Trump - seems on the way out, to be replaced by a more traditional neocon/Clinton/Bush approach than you might have expected, given the initial messages coming out of the White House.

This has certainly upset Trump supporters both in the US and across the world. In a French television interview Front National leader Marine Le Pen commented that Trump was elected "by announcing that the United States would no longer be the policeman of the world" - yet look at what he has done in Syria, which is "appalling". Rather, she declared, there should have been an "international commission to conduct an independent investigation". Nigel Farage was unhappy too, thinking a lot of Trump voters "will be waking up this morning and scratching their heads and saying, 'Where will it all end?'" Yes, added Farage, the pictures were horrible - "but I'm surprised", for, "whatever Assad's sins, he is secular". Paul Nuttall, Farage's replacement as leader of the UK Independence Party, said the US bombing was "rash, trigger-happy, nonsensical and will achieve nothing", whilst the wretched rightwing columnist, Katie Hopkins, wanted to know, "Who stole my president?" Meanwhile, in a Facebook post in Italy, Northern League leader Matteo Salvini described the assault as a "bad idea, big mistake, and a gift to Isis". Closer to home, Senator Rand Paul fiercely condemned the "unconstitutional rush towards war" and, as for the odious white nationalist, Richard Spencer, credited with coining the term 'alt-right', his support for Trump was now "dead in the water". The US president, the messiah they had been so hoping for, was now part of the establishment.

Trump's neocon turn, insofar as you can call it that, has led to a serious ratcheting of tensions. With a certain logic, North Korea has argued that the US strike demonstrates precisely why the country *needs* nuclear weapons - otherwise it could be attacked with impunity, just like Syria. Similar sentiments have come out of Tehran. You cannot rule out the possibility that Donald Trump could be persuaded to go for a unilateral strike on North Korea, which could have the potential to unleash a regional or wider conflagration ●

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## Notes

1. <http://yournewswire.com/truth-bomb-bbc-british-ambassador>.
2. [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/apr/07/donald-trump-syria-strike-tim-farron-assad-chemical-weapons-theresa-may](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/apr/07/donald-trump-syria-strike-tim-farron-assad-chemical-weapons-theresa-may).
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4. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-39486617](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-39486617).
5. <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/04/trumps-syria-strike-is-sign-of-bannons-waning-influence.html>.

1917

# False-memory syndrome

Far from being disproved by 1917, the standing programme of Bolshevism found vindication, argues Jack Conrad

How to evaluate the 'old Bolshevik' programme before October 1917? Till recently a dull consensus has reigned. Though he was politically defeated in the 1920s, it has been Leon Trotsky's version of events which has been widely, almost unthinkingly, accepted.

Beginning with his *The lessons of October* (1924), Trotsky, argued that the standing programme of 'old Bolshevism', because it did not envisage immediate socialist tasks, proved entirely inadequate, given the challenges of 1917.

Under the duumvirate of Lev Kamenev and Joseph Stalin, which lasted only a matter of a few weeks, there was an unhealthy desire to achieve an unprincipled reunification with the Mensheviks. This version of events goes on to say that Kamenev and Stalin rejected demands to overthrow the provisional government. Instead they merely sought to pressurise it. A perspective, which, we are told, logically flowed from the deeply flawed theory of stages - a "scholastic parody of Marxism" that can be traced back to the Emancipation of Labour Group in the 1880s.<sup>1</sup>

This theory insisted that Russia would have to undergo two distinct revolutions. First stage - a bourgeois democratic revolution, which would sweep away tsarism and all its remnants. Second stage - after a considerable delay, the socialist revolution would come onto the agenda. Supposedly, "it is clear ... from all Lenin's writings up to 1917" that he expected a substantial interval to elapse between "the coming bourgeois revolution and the proletarian revolution".<sup>2</sup> In other words, Lenin himself advocated a "scholastic parody of Marxism". In actual fact, as I shall show, the theory of stages was held not by the Bolsheviks, but the Mensheviks.

Trotsky was, surely, the (inconsistent) originator of this version of history. Eg, only "after the arrival of Lenin in Petrograd", in early April 1917, was the "problem of the conquest of power" put before the party.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Trotsky even claims that Lenin "came out furiously against the old slogan of the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry'".<sup>4</sup> Though he never admitted it in any publication, speech, letter or telegram, Lenin adopted the theory of permanent revolution first elaborated by Trotsky in 1906.

Over the years, Trotsky's 1920s polemics - mainly against Zinoviev and Kamenev, but against Stalin too - have been elevated into an article of almost religious faith guarded over by leftwing popes as various as Gerry Healy, Ernest Mandel, Tony Cliff and Alan Woods. Given the horrors of the 1930s, maximising the moral distance between the left and Stalin is perfectly understandable. But this should not have gone hand in hand with maximising gullibility, when it came to his most famous contemporary opponent. What Trotsky wrote in the mid-1920s was far removed from dispassionate history. As with Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin, factional needs were always to the fore. However, even cold war warriors have willingly echoed Trotsky. Not with the intention of glorifying him, but with the intention of deriding, discrediting and diminishing Stalin (albeit for entirely different reasons, compared with the left).

Take Leonard Schapiro: he refers to the Bolsheviks' all-Russian conference held in March 1917 (the first since the fall of tsarism). Schapiro quotes, very sparingly, the agreed resolution on



Lev Kamenev: took over *Pravda* and argued for critical support for provisional government

the Bolshevik's attitude towards the provisional government (the reporter was Stalin). That resolution called for "vigilant control" over the provisional government and supported the Petrograd soviet as the "beginning of revolutionary power". Schapiro then proceeds, in the manner of Trotsky, to claim that Stalin's approach was "based on the assumption, which no-one questioned, that a long period of bourgeois middle class democratic government had now begun, and that the dictatorship of the proletariat only related to the distant future".<sup>5</sup> In other words, Schapiro, like Trotsky, accuses the Bolsheviks of *de facto* Menshevism.

Having been toppled from the summits of power in the mid-1920s, Trotsky began what has been called a 'literary war' against Zinoviev, Kamenev (and Stalin) over the history of the Russian Revolution. Note, Trotsky rather foolishly dismissed Stalin as little more than a grey blur. Stalin was, in Trotsky's eyes, a nonentity who was far less dangerous to the prospects of the revolution than, firstly, Zinoviev and Kamenev and, then, Bukharin. Of course, in 1926 there was a Trotsky-Zinoviev-Kamenev rapprochement. Together they formed the United Opposition. However, even in the late 1920s, Trotsky's slogan was: "With Stalin against Bukharin? Yes. With Bukharin against Stalin? Never."<sup>6</sup>

In the autumn of 1924 the state publishing house issued a two-part volume of Trotsky's speeches and writings covering 1917 (part of his never completed *Collected works*). *The lessons of October* constituted a barbed introductory chapter. Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin responded in kind with their own books and pamphlets. Though they lacked Trotsky's natural talent as a writer, when it came to the regrettable Lenin cult, he - that is, Trotsky - was objectively at a very distinct disadvantage.

Before 1917 he had been a dogged, albeit annoyingly brilliant, opponent of Lenin's. Having belligerently sided with the Mensheviks in 1903, Trotsky broke with them in 1904, but remained on friendly terms. Indeed he dismissed the Bolshevik-Menshevik split as a superficial phenomenon. In that semi-Menshevik spirit he became an inveterate unity-monger. In 1912 Trotsky brought together a motley crew

of Bundists, Menshevik liquidators and Bolshevik boycottists - the August bloc - in a direct attempt to sabotage the Sixth (Prague) Conference of the RSDLP. A move which Lenin angrily denounced as an attempt to "destroy the party".<sup>8</sup> Needless to say, it was the "uncultured", "barbaric", "sectarian", "Asiatic" Bolsheviks whom Trotsky considered the biggest obstacle to the unprincipled unity he was desperately seeking.<sup>9</sup>

By contrast, of course, Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin were loyal lieutenants. That said, in the crucial year of 1917, firstly Kamenev and Stalin, in April, had to be cracked into line by Lenin (though I believe there was a genuine Lenin-Kamenev convergence too). Then, in October, there can be no doubt that Zinoviev and Kamenev (and others) recoiled - took fright - at Lenin's increasingly agitated demand that the Bolsheviks had to go for 'all power to the soviets' (as it turned out, a Bolshevik-Left Socialist Revolutionary Party coalition government). Much to their later shame, just two weeks before it happened, Kamenev and Zinoviev publicly issued a letter condemning the well known Bolshevik plans for an insurrection. It was gleefully published in *Novaya Zhizn* (paper of the Menshevik Internationalists, headed by Julius Martov). Seizure of power by one party, the Bolsheviks, could only but split the worker-peasant camp and lead to needless bloodshed - so reasoned the frightened pair. Unwilling to take responsibility for the revolution of October 25, Zinoviev and Kamenev resigned from the Bolshevik central committee.

However, the problem with Trotsky's account is that to all intents and purposes it threw out the whole of pre-1917 Bolshevism in the attempt to rouse the post-Lenin membership of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) against Lenin's most trusted lieutenants. Even at the level of a 'literary war' Trotsky was, surely, bound to lose.

More to the point. Current leftwingers who dogmatically repeat Trotsky's version of history blind themselves - mostly unintentionally, but always stupidly - to the significance of Bolshevism: its lasting commitment to a minimum-maximum programme, its strategic vision of a worker-peasant alliance, its stress on the demand for

a democratic republic, its militant opposition to all forms of economism, its profound internationalism, its robust, open internal and external polemics, its unproblematic acceptance of factions, its deep social roots, its mass membership and its galaxy of trained and trusted local, regional and national leaders.

It amounts to false-memory syndrome. Instead of aiming for a programmatically guided, mass revolutionary party, most of the contemporary left is quite content with life as a confessional sect. The belief is that one fine day their 1917 will come ... the sect will rise from utter insignificance to lead the masses in storming the heavens. A perspective that sees the left discount the patient strategy of Marxism for an unacknowledged version of Bakuninism, which combines economic spontaneity with promoting the most extreme forms of opportunism: eg, Respect and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

## Dual power

Let us briefly sketch out the situation in early 1917.

As everyone knows, tsarism ignominiously collapsed with the February revolution (this article will stick to the Julian calendar because the key moments of 1917 are generally known by their old monthly dates). Political strikes by engineering workers, mass demonstrations on International Women's Day, army mutinies, the seizing of police arsenals, the arming of the people ... and high-command panic forced the abdication of Nicholas II.<sup>10</sup>

Prominent members of the fake-democratic fourth duma - there was a constitutionally inbuilt landlord-capitalist majority - then agreed a rotten deal with Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary leaders. A provisional government was to be put together and placed in the safe hands of prince Georgy Lvov - a Cadet and a potential prime minister under Nicholas II. Other top ministers included Pavel Milyukov, another Cadet, and Alexander Guchkov of the Octobrists. Needless to say, the Octobrists were loyal monarchists and the traditional party of the big capitalists and landlords. As for the Cadets, they too represented capitalist interests, but advocated a constitutional monarchy along the lines of a Britain or a Sweden. And behind these parties,

behind the provisional government, there stood the directing might of Anglo-French imperialism. The provisional government felt compelled to declare for press freedom, a republic and a just peace, but - and this was politically decisive - it remained firmly committed to the war with Germany-Austria. The human slaughter would therefore continue.

However, the provisional government could present a left face. Alexander Kerensky of the SRs agreed to become minister of justice, then minister of war (in July he was made prime minister). Other 'socialists' soon joined him around the cabinet table: eg, Victor Chernov, also an SR, and Irakli Tsereteli of the Mensheviks. This shift to the left happened both in response to mass pressure and in order to deceive the masses, who were moving to the left. The war with Germany-Austria was therefore dressed up as a defence of the gains of the February revolution - not the continuation of tsarist foreign policy in a new, democratic, republican, guise. In the first few months following February 1917 defencism was a widespread popular sentiment.

But the provisional government was not the sole centre of power. In fact, almost from the start, there was dual power. Years of education by the leftwing press ensured that the lessons of the 1905 revolution were well remembered. Workers and members of the armed forces therefore needed little prompting, when it came to establishing their own soviets (councils) in factories, on board ships, in barracks and in every city and urban district. Peasants followed and elected their own soviets. Moreover, in many ways the soviets - in particular the Petrograd soviet - were where real authority lay. Eg, soldiers would only obey orders if countersigned by the Petrograd military committee. Adding to the complexity of the situation, however, the SR and Menshevik majority in the Petrograd soviet were determined to strengthen the power of the provisional government. So there was a dual power that drained authority in the direction of the provisional government.

What of the Bolsheviks? Historically they were the advanced part of the working class (as proven by 1905, the mass support for *Pravda*, trade union elections and the last, 1912, elections to the tsarist duma, where its candidates won the entire workers' curia). So the Bolsheviks really were the majority wing of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. However, brutal tsarist oppression unleashed with the onset of World War I saw the Bolsheviks hit with particular savagery. All their duma deputies were arrested (the Mensheviks were left untouched). Members of their central committee based in Russia were put on trial - Siberian exile followed. Rank-and-file members were arrested by the score, were drafted into the army, kept their distance out of fear, or had to operate in the suffocating conditions of illegality. All this was punishment for Bolshevik opposition to the imperialist war in the duma and Lenin's ringing demand to turn imperialist war into civil war. By contrast social pacifists and social chauvinists were in comparative terms tolerated. Indeed the activities of Georgy Plekhanov and his right Menshevik group were "secretly subsidised" by the tsarist authorities.<sup>11</sup>

So, in February 1917, the Bolsheviks were very weak. Membership was considerably reduced - down to some 40,000 or 45,000<sup>12</sup> - committees were cash-strapped and many barely functioned. In terms of leadership they

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had to make do with the politically limited abilities of Alexander Shliapnikov and Vyacheslav Molotov. And, whereas even the small centrist faction, the RSDLP (Internationalist) - or the Mezhrainitsy, as they were commonly called - had, already, in January, obtained a printing press<sup>13</sup> (possibly due to German finance channelled through the 'merchant of revolution', Alexander Parvus), the Bolsheviks only began publishing *Pravda*, in Petrograd, and *Sotsial Demokrat*, in Moscow, after the February revolution. Unsurprisingly, Bolshevik delegates to the Petrograd soviet therefore constituted a minority, at least to begin with.

Meanwhile, the Mensheviks and SRs did their best to bolster the provisional government, all the while trying to give it a leftish image to please the masses. Not that this meant demanding the immediate abolition of landlordism and the distribution of the land to those who farmed it. Nor did it mean pulling Russia out of the imperialist war. Like the Cadets, the Mensheviks and SRs united around the slogan, 'Defend the revolution'. In other words, defend the continued rule of the landlords and capitalists and defend the continued alliance with Britain and France. Tsarism in a republican guise.

Yet, bizarrely, according to Tony Cliff, the Socialist Workers Party's founder-leader, the "existence of dual power" and the eminently predictable behaviour by the Mensheviks and SRs exposed the "bankruptcy" of the 'old Bolshevik' programme.<sup>14</sup> Hence Lenin, we are seriously told, was forced to carry out "a complete break" with what he had written up to 1917.<sup>15</sup> And, of course, what Cliff says here is still what passes for truth on much of the left.

## Democratic revolution

Let us take the argument forward by going back. From the outset - yes, from the foundation of the Emancipation of Labour Group in 1883 - Russian Marxists (eg, Georgy Plekhanov, Vera Zasulich and Pavel Axelrod) were agreed, contra the anarchists and narodiks, that the country was not yet ripe for socialism - if by that one means leaving behind commodity production and ushering in the communist principle of "From each according to their ability, to each according to their need". The autocratic state, the lack of capitalist development, the domination of the economy by a woefully backward peasant agriculture - all explain why the coming Russian Revolution was envisaged by all Marxists as having two stages. Trotsky was no exception - there could be no "jumping-over of the democratic stage of the revolution or any of its specific steps".<sup>16</sup>

It was the narodiks, and following them the SRs, who raised the slogan of an immediate socialist revolution. A politically illiterate position that deserved Lenin's unremitting mockery. In 1905 Lenin characteristically writes: "Only the most ignorant people can ignore the bourgeois nature of the democratic revolution which is now taking place."<sup>17</sup> Note that the SRs, formed in 1902, advocated a programme that included the "expropriation of capitalist property and the reorganisation of production and the entire social system on socialist foundations" (in truth a utopian peasant socialism).<sup>18</sup> Yet, though attracting a considerable popular base, above all in rural areas, the SRs placed their hopes not, as might be expected nowadays, on waging a protracted guerrilla struggle, but on individual terrorism and the assassination of tsarist officials.

What about the Menshevik (minority) wing of the RSDLP? As I have said, it was committed to a theory of stages, which inevitably resulted in tailism politically. According to the Mensheviks, the overthrow of tsarism had to be crowned by the class rule of the bourgeoisie and a western-style parliamentary government. Nevertheless,

in step with the subsequent growth of capitalism, the working class grows too. Eventually this class eclipses and finally replaces the peasantry in population terms. Only then does socialism become a feasible proposition.

If the forthcoming revolution against tsarism was bourgeois, then, agreed the Mensheviks in a conference resolution of April-May 1905, the working class and its party "must not aim at seizing or sharing power in the provisional government, but must remain the party of the extreme revolutionary opposition".<sup>19</sup> So, for mainstream Menshevik thinking, the immediate role of the working class was to edge, push or lift the bourgeois parties into their predetermined position as leaders of the anti-tsarist revolution.

Participating in a revolutionary government was therefore explicitly ruled out (obviously subject to violation after the February 1917 revolution). Why non-participation? Firstly, if the working class succumbed to the temptation of power, it would cause the bourgeoisie to "recoil from the revolution and diminish its sweep".<sup>20</sup> Secondly, without an already established European socialism, the working class party in Russia would be unable to meet the economic demands of its social base. Failure to deliver far-going changes would eventually produce demoralisation, confusion and disorganisation.

If the anti-tsarist revolution proved successful, the workers' party should, argued the Mensheviks, exit the centre stage, so as to allow the bourgeoisie to assume power. Obeying the 'laws of history', the workers' party then patiently waits in the wings until capitalism had carried out its preordained historic mission of developing the means of production. Hence, for the Mensheviks there had to be two, necessarily distinct, revolutions, the one separated from the other by a definite historical period.

While not including socialist measures in their minimum programme, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were resolutely opposed to handing power to the bourgeoisie, as the Mensheviks proposed. The bourgeoisie in Russia was both cowardly and treacherous. Despite occasional leftish flourishes, their parties sought a compromise with tsarism, not a people's revolution. Eg, the Cadet Party, the flag-bearer of the liberal bourgeoisie, committed itself to a constitutional monarchy. Russia therefore had no Cromwell, no Washington, no Robespierre. The only force capable of scoring a *decisive victory* over tsarism and pushing through the most radical changes objective circumstances permitted was the proletariat, in alliance with the peasant masses.

Naturally, because Russia was overwhelmingly a peasant country, the Bolsheviks paid particular attention to their agrarian programme. In fact, peasant interests set the limit on how far the revolution could go. Landlord power could certainly be destroyed and the land nationalised and given, according to their wishes, to the peasants. This 'black redistribution' was, of course, not a socialist measure for Lenin. It would though serve to uproot Russia's semi-feudal social relationship and allow capitalism in the countryside to develop along an "American path".

As an aside, Trotsky's programme was *not* limited by the interests of the peasants. While a hegemonic working class could take the peasantry along with it in the overthrow of tsarism, an irreversible split between these two popular classes was bound to occur. The peasants were, for Trotsky, "absolutely incapable of taking an independent political role".<sup>7</sup> They would gravitate either towards the rule of the proletariat or the rule of the bourgeoisie. And, because working class political domination is incompatible with "its economic enslavement", Trotsky reasoned, the workers' party would be "obliged to take the path of socialist policy" ... even if that risked a bloody "civil war" with the peasantry.<sup>21</sup> Thankfully

by the summer of 1917 Trotsky had undergone a Leninist conversion. If one reads him when he was the leader of the Left Opposition, it is obvious, despite accusations to the contrary, that he was painfully aware of the vital importance of keeping the peasantry onside. Eg, in the early 1930s he roundly condemned Stalin's drive to forcibly collectivise agriculture.

## Time

The fact of the matter is that the Bolsheviks were determined that the anti-tsarist revolution would see the fulfilment of the party's *entire* minimum programme - a democratic republic, the election of judges, free universal education, abolition of the police and standing army, a popular militia, separation of church and state, extensive democratic rights, decisive economic reforms, such as workers' commissions to inspect factories, an eight-hour day, etc. Such a package could only be delivered by establishing a *provisional* revolutionary government which embodied the interests of the great mass of the population. Lenin used a famous algebraic formulation to capture the essence of the majoritarian regime envisaged by the Bolsheviks: the democratic (majority) dictatorship (rule) of the proletariat and peasantry. Such a hybrid regime could not abolish classes and bring full liberation for the working class. That was impossible. Economically Russia would have to progress capitalistically - albeit under the armed rule of the working class and peasants. That meant the continuation of wage-labour, albeit with workers taking over abandoned factories, the nationalisation of the central bank, etc.<sup>22</sup>

How long was the provisional revolutionary government going to last? There are those who reckon that prior to 1917 Lenin envisaged it being nothing more than a brief moment. After the provisional revolutionary government had carried out its radical package of measures there would be elections to a constituent assembly that would then see the bourgeoisie come to power with the support of peasant votes.<sup>23</sup> Frankly, a thoroughly one-sided version of the Bolshevik programme. Yes, Lenin admitted the possibility that the first national elections might see the return of the workers' party to being a party of extreme opposition. It is also true, however, that Lenin extensively wrote about the revolution being *uninterrupted*.

Given that the provisional revolutionary government was going to be committed to the *full* minimum programme of the RSDLP, it was quite possibly conceived as being relatively long-lived. Why? Far from the provisional revolutionary government being imagined as a mere prelude to the bourgeoisie assuming power, the party of the working class had every interest in spreading the flame of revolution to Europe.

Lenin seems to have seriously contemplated war for the "purpose" of "taking" the revolution into Europe. One of his key slogans was for a "revolutionary army".<sup>24</sup> Depending on their success in furthering the *world socialist revolution*, the Bolsheviks looked towards a purely working class government in Russia and embarking on specifically socialist tasks. The fact that the tasks of the provisional government included uprooting every last vestige of tsarism, enacting sweeping land reform, putting in place full democratic rights, defeating bourgeois counterrevolution - and maybe even fighting a revolutionary war in Europe - explains why I have suggested that the provisional government might have been expected to last not a few brief months, but years.

However, my main argument is that the Bolsheviks were not committed to handing political power to the bourgeoisie, as were the Mensheviks. Of course, for the Bolsheviks, the international dimension was crucial. The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry in Russia could

not survive long in isolation. It would - it had to - "rouse Europe" and the socialist proletariat of Europe to carry through the "socialist revolution".<sup>25</sup> The United Socialist States of Europe would then, in turn, help Russia move in the direction of socialism (which requires definite material conditions in terms of the development of the productive forces). And a revolution uniting Europe and half of Asia had a realistic chance of rapidly spreading to every corner of the globe.

Inevitably, there would, within Russia, be a differentiation between the proletarianised rural masses and the emerging class of capitalist farmers. But *not* necessarily a specifically socialist revolution: ie, the violent overthrow of the state. Put another way, for the Bolsheviks there would not necessarily be a democratic or bourgeois stage and then a socialist stage at the level of regime. Democratic and socialist tasks are categorically distinct, premised as they are on different material, social and political conditions. But certain features can evolve and assume dominance. The revolution could, given favourable internal and external conditions, proceed *uninterruptedly* from democratic to socialist tasks through the proletariat fighting not only from below, but from above: ie, from a salient of state power. The revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry thereby *peacefully grows over* into the dictatorship (rule) of the proletariat. As the size, organisation and consciousness of the urban and rural working class grew, so would the strength of the workers' party. The necessity of a coalition government would at some point disappear. The tasks of the maximum programme then decisively come onto the agenda.

Lenin defended and elaborated his programme for the democratic revolution as being the shortest - in fact, the only viable - route to socialism in *Two tactics of social democracy* (1905).<sup>26</sup> A seminal pamphlet that armed the Bolsheviks with the political weapons needed, first to lead the "whole people" for a republic, and then lead "all the toilers and exploited" for socialism.<sup>27</sup> By any objective assessment Lenin and the Bolsheviks therefore had their own version of permanent revolution.

## Permanent

Too often comrades who should know better associate permanent revolution exclusively with Trotsky. Of course, the phrase long predates him, going back to the "literature of the French Revolution".<sup>28</sup> From there it spread far and wide, becoming a common "programmatic slogan" of European radicals, socialists and communists, including Karl Marx and Frederick Engels.<sup>29</sup> And, as Hal Draper helpfully explains, for Marx, the word "permanent" in "permanent revolution" describes a situation where there is "more than one stage or phase" in the revolutionary process. He usefully adds that the expression "retains its specifically French and Latin meaning". It does not mean perpetual or never-ending. It is employed by Marx to convey the idea of "continuity, uninterrupted".<sup>30</sup> Bearing this in mind, consider Lenin's "uninterrupted revolution". A typical example from 1905. Lenin declares: "We stand for uninterrupted revolution. We shall not stop halfway."<sup>31</sup> He wants to take the anti-tsarist revolution to the socialist stage through a process that does not halt at some *artificial* boundary. No, the Bolsheviks will push the revolution forward both from below and above (ie, employing *state power*).

Not without interest in this respect, when it came to Russia, Kautsky too can be cited as an advocate of permanent revolution. He was, remember, a close ally of the Bolsheviks in the years before World War I. Almost an honorary Bolshevik. Here is Trotsky's own - albeit rather self-serving - description of Kautsky's approach "when he was a Marxist":

At that time (true, not without

the beneficial influence of Rosa Luxemburg) Kautsky fully understood and acknowledged that the Russian Revolution could not terminate in a bourgeois-democratic republic, but must inevitably lead to the proletarian dictatorship, because of the level attained by the class struggle in the country itself and because of the entire international situation of capitalism. Kautsky then frankly wrote about a workers' government with a social democratic majority. He did not even think of making the real course of the class struggle depend on the changing and superficial combinations of political democracy.

At that time, Kautsky understood that the revolution would begin for the first time to rouse the many millions of peasants and urban petty bourgeoisie and that, not all at once, but gradually, layer by layer, so that, when the struggle between the proletariat and the capitalist bourgeoisie reached its climax, the broad peasant masses would still be at a very primitive level of political development and would give their votes to intermediary political parties, reflecting only the backwardness and the prejudices of the peasant class.

Kautsky understood then that the proletariat, led by the logic of the revolution toward the conquest of power, could not arbitrarily postpone this act indefinitely, because by this self-abnegation it would merely clear the field for counterrevolution. Kautsky understood then that, once having seized revolutionary power, the proletariat would not make the fate of the revolution depend upon the passing moods of the least conscious, not yet awakened masses at any given moment, but that, on the contrary, it would turn the political power concentrated in its hands into a mighty apparatus for the enlightenment and organisation of these same backward and ignorant peasant masses. Kautsky understood that to call the Russian Revolution a bourgeois revolution and thereby to limit its tasks would mean not to understand anything of what was going on in the world.

Together with the Russian and Polish revolutionary Marxists, he rightly acknowledged that, should the Russian proletariat conquer power before the European proletariat, it would have to use its situation as the ruling class not for the rapid surrender of its positions to the bourgeoisie, but for rendering powerful assistance to the proletarian revolution in Europe and throughout the world.<sup>32</sup>

I do not deny in the least that Bolshevik ideas, perspectives and expectations underwent change from 1905 to 1917. Far from it. It seems clear to me that with the outbreak of World War I Lenin and other Bolsheviks, maybe inspired by none other than Kautsky,<sup>33</sup> began to anticipate steps towards socialism in the immediate aftermath of the anti-tsarist revolution (Lenin's writings on this subject were later called by the Stalin and Bukharin duumvirate in order to pharisaically justify their theory of socialism in one country). No, all I insist on is programmatic continuity. Eg, Like a river that, added to by tributaries, broadens, and continues to flow towards the sea. There was no abandonment, no break.

## Lenin vs Trotsky

All in all, to any objective observer Trotsky's differences with Lenin are clear. Lenin wanted a majoritarian regime. Trotsky wanted a minority regime that would lead the majority. Different, but not that different. True, in *Results and prospects* and in Lenin's so-called replies there was a fierce polemic between the two men. However, factional interests often produced more heat than light. Eg, Trotsky dismissed out of hand any suggestion of a "special form of the proletarian dictatorship in the bourgeois revolution". He was, at the time, intent on rubbishing both the Mensheviks and

Bolsheviks, and equating the two. On the other hand, Lenin attacked Trotsky for “underestimating” the importance of the peasantry by raising the slogan, ‘Not a tsar’s government, but a workers’ government’.

Not least, on the basis of this slogan, Trotsky is no doubt right when he says that Lenin had “never read my basic work”. That slogan was proclaimed not by Trotsky, but his friend and collaborator, Alexander Parvus (yes, the very same man who went on to become an agent of German imperialism in World War I and who arranged the ‘sealed train’ which took Lenin and co from their Swiss exile to Petrograd in April 1917). “Never did Lenin anywhere analyse or quote,” says Trotsky, “even in passing, *Results and prospects*.”<sup>34</sup> Moreover, he goes on to cite the “solidarity” that existed between himself and the Bolsheviks during and immediately after the 1905 revolution. And for those idiots who demonise the term ‘stage’ and belittle Lenin because of it, Trotsky boasts that he “formulated the tasks of the successive stages of the revolution in exactly the same manner as Lenin.”<sup>35</sup> This should provide food for thought for those who permit themselves the luxury of thought. The same can be said for Trotsky’s proud affirmation about how “Lenin’s formula” closely “approximated” to his own “formula of permanent revolution.”<sup>36</sup> Despite that, we are told time and again that Trotsky’s theory was far superior to Lenin’s. Perhaps another example of dead generations weighing like a nightmare on the brains of the living.

Arguably, though, the idea of Lenin carrying through a “complete break” with the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry was hatched by Trotsky himself ... after Lenin’s death in 1924. No doubt he was desperate to counter the campaign against ‘Trotskyism’ launched by the triumvirate of Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev. By pretending, in effect, that Lenin had become a Trotskyite in April 1917, Trotsky could enhance his own standing and at the same time target the negative role played by his three rivals. We have already mentioned Kamenev and Stalin in March 1917, and Zinoviev and Kamenev in October 1917. Then there was the dispute over China in the mid- to late 1920s. Stalin and Bukharin advocated a bloc of four classes - workers, peasants, the intelligentsia and the national bourgeoisie. This class collaboration - the political subordination of the Communist Party of China to the Kuomintang - was, of course, excused under the orthodox ‘democratic dictatorship’ rubric. Opportunism is seldom honest.

However, Trotsky directly - and, at least in my view, incorrectly - dismissed Lenin’s formula, the ‘democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry’. He even claims Lenin’s authority for this. As already quoted, in his *The lessons of October* Trotsky maintained that in 1917 Lenin “came out furiously against the old slogan of the ‘democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry’.”<sup>37</sup> In fact, Lenin attacked not so much the ‘revolutionary dictatorship’ formula, but rather those who misused it - those who might be seen as showing a willingness to compromise with Menshevik and SR ‘revolutionary defencists’.

## March to April

As already argued, the provisional government acted in the interests not of the proletariat and peasantry, but of the capitalists and landlords (and behind them Anglo-French imperialism). *Ipsa facto* Lenin concluded that the proletariat and peasantry (in the form of the soviets) had “placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie”. And, though Alexander Kerensky’s ministry, formed in July 1917, contained many who had been hunted by the tsarist secret police - Matvey Skobelev, Irakli Tsereteli, Viktor Chernov, Nikolai Avksentiev, Boris Savinkov, Alexei Nikitin, etc - no

Marxist will find Lenin’s designation at all strange. Programme, policy and practice determines class content. Not only did the provisional government continue Russia’s involvement in World War I: it cynically prevaricated over peasant demands for land redistribution and fearfully delayed convening the constituent assembly.

What was Lenin’s approach during this “first stage of the revolution”? Did he junk his old call for the replacement of tsarism by a workers’ and peasants’ republic? Yes, of course he did ... in the same way as Trotsky junked his ‘Not a tsar’s government, but a government of the people’, and the followers of Parvus junked his ‘Not a tsar’s government, but a workers’ government’. Nor were the Mensheviks, the SRs or anyone else on the left unaware that one of their key demands had been realised. The Romanovs had fallen. Tsarism was no more. Russia had become a republic.

Common sense, let alone Marxism, requires recognition of such a development. If Trotsky had not made a “complete break” from his ‘Not a tsar’s government’ slogan, his close friends would have been well advised to seek out suitable psychological treatment for the poor fellow. Ditto Lenin’s friends, or anyone else’s for that matter.

Obviously the demand to overthrow the tsar was totally obsolete. Future progress lay in combating the “honest” popular illusions in revolutionary defencism, exposing the true nature of the provisional government and raising sights. The Bolsheviks were a minority in the soviets. Their task was to become the majority by agitating for ending the war, seizing landlord estates, introducing workers’ control, replacing the police with Red Guard units, demanding elections to the constituent assembly, etc.

This would prepare the “second stage of the revolution” and with it the transfer of all power into “the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants”. The “only possible form of revolutionary government” was a “republic of soviets of workers’, agricultural labourers’ and peasants’ deputies” writes Lenin.<sup>20</sup> Surely, a concrete application of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry’ slogan.

Lenin made no claims that the party’s “immediate task” was to “introduce” socialism. Only that the banks should be nationalised and production and distribution had to be put under workers’ control to prevent an economic catastrophe.

Do these formulations and the perspective of a workers’ and peasants’ republic indicate an abandonment or a development of Lenin’s theory in light of new and unexpected circumstances? I make no excuse for turning to Lenin himself for an answer.

In the article, ‘The dual power’, he says the following:

The highly remarkable feature of our revolution is that it has brought about a *dual power*. This fact must be grasped first and foremost: unless it is understood, we cannot advance. We must know how to supplement and amend old ‘formulas’ - for example, those of Bolshevism - for, while they have been found to be correct on the whole, their concrete realisation *has turned out to be* different. *Nobody* previously thought, or could have thought, of a dual power.<sup>38</sup>

Yes, Lenin got into a brief but very heated dispute with the ‘old Bolsheviks’: ie, the party’s Russian-based leadership and cadre. There are all manner of reports of Lenin angrily berating Kamenev and other top leaders on his arrival back in Petrograd. He was certainly unhappy with what he had read in *Pravda*.

Subsequent debate show that essentially there were five closely related bones of contention: (1) what attitude to take towards the provisional government; (2) revolutionary defencism; (3) unity with the Mensheviks; (4) the peasants; (5) socialism.

Lenin feared that under the direction of Kamenev and Stalin *Pravda* had gone soft on the provisional government. He intransigently demanded that the Bolsheviks should give no support whatever. Politically the provisional government was pro-capitalist, pro-imperialist and pro-war. Kamenev might well have veered in the direction of giving the provisional government *critical support* in his first *Pravda* editorial (March 14) - both the words “critical” and “support” appear. However, Lars T Lih interprets Kamenev’s editorial as saying that the Bolsheviks should be working to expose the provisional government and readying the masses for an “inevitable clash”.<sup>39</sup> So the emphasis was on ‘critical’ rather than ‘support’. And the ‘support’ was on its way to diminishing to the point of nearly vanishing. A judgement surely confirmed by the March All-Russian Conference of the RSDLP, where Kamenev is reported as saying this:

In Steklov’s resolution [Yuri Steklov’s resolution had been chosen by conference as the alternative to the one being supported by Kamenev - JC] the point dealing with support is absolutely unacceptable. It is impermissible to have any expression of support, even to hint at it. We cannot support the government because it is an imperialist government, because, despite its own declaration, it remains in an alliance with the Anglo-French bourgeoisie.

In the *Communist manifesto* there is a statement to the effect that we give support to the liberal bourgeoisie, but only in the event of its being attacked. But from Steklov’s report it is obvious that it is not they who are being attacked, but rather it is they themselves who are attacking the soviet of workers’ deputies.

In yesterday’s amendments to the resolution we stated that support at the present time is impossible. In view of the dual power, the will of the revolutionary people is embodied not in the provisional government, but in the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies [as we have seen a proposition that needs qualifying]; and also that the latter must be strengthened and that they must come to a clash with the provisional government. Our task is to point out that the only organ worthy of our support is the soviet of workers’ deputies. The task of the Congress [of the soviets] is to proclaim to all Russia that the sole expresser of the will of the revolutionary people is the soviet of workers’ and soldiers’ deputies, and that we must strengthen and support them and not the provisional government.<sup>40</sup>

What of Stalin? Opening the debate at the March conference, he began by speaking on behalf of the central committee, but then, in closing, expressed himself as being more inclined towards the resolution of the Krasnoyarsk Soviet of Workers’, Soldiers’ and Cossacks’ Deputies: “Support the provisional government in its activities only in so far as it follows a course of satisfying the demands of the working class and the revolutionary peasantry in the revolution that is taking place.”

So, on this question, there is more a difference of emphasis rather than substance between Lenin and Kamenev-Stalin. Lenin was far clearer, far more direct, far more aggressive and far more to the point.

It should, however, be pointed out that there was a very small rightwing Bolshevik faction which left the March conference over the question of defencism. True, Kamenev had written of soldiers staying at their posts, but, once again at the March conference (during the joint session with the Mensheviks), he says this:

To pose here the question of defencism and anti-defencism is to repeat the discussion which we have already had. We have come to the conclusion

that it is impermissible to vote for the [social-pacifistic] resolution of the executive committee [of the SR-Menshevik-dominated Petrograd soviet]. It is not a socialist resolution. The executive committee assumes in it the viewpoint of Henderson and Thomas [the Labour Party’s war ministers in Britain]. It is impossible to vote for a resolution which says nothing about peace, about the abrogation of the secret treaties left over from tsarism. Another resolution must be counterposed to it. Our task is to fuse the socialist-internationalists around the resolution.

Here we come to the unity of the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. Firstly, it should be appreciated that in the provinces the majority of party committees were joint committees. A situation that lasted beyond the October revolution in the remoter places. No less to the point, what Kamenev had his sights on was not unity with right Mensheviks such as Irakli Tsereteli (as alleged by Trotsky). No, the aim was to unite with left Mensheviks on the basis of the Zimmerwald-Kienthal conferences. In short a Bolshevik-Menshevik Internationalist unification. However, not surprisingly, Lenin would have none of it. He had already organised a distinct Zimmerwald left (with a view to establishing a Third International). The Menshevik Internationalists wanted peace, but also unity with the social chauvinist right. Therefore, what Lenin rejected was not winning the Menshevik Internationalists, but moving the Bolsheviks in their direction. Here was an issue of real substance.

We now come to the question of peasant limits and the possibilities of socialism. Kamenev feared that Lenin, because of his exile in Switzerland, had failed to fully grasp the actual state of play in Russia. Hence in *Pravda* Kamenev responded to the *April thesis* thus:

As for comrade Lenin’s general scheme, it appears unacceptable, inasmuch as it proceeds from the assumption that the bourgeois democratic revolution is *completed*, and builds on the immediate transformation of this revolution into a socialist revolution.<sup>41</sup>

Clearly, Kamenev was not seeking to strengthen the provisional government. No, he was demanding recognition of the necessity of winning the peasants and thus prepare the conditions for a second revolution. The peasants could not be “skipped”. The idea of playing at the seizure of power by the workers’ party *without the support of the peasantry* was not Marxism, he said, but Blanquism. Power had to be exercised by the majority. And Lenin, in some of his latest writings, seemed to be implying that the peasantry had gone over to social chauvinism and defence of the fatherland (not ‘honest’ revolutionary defencism). Therefore, perhaps, he had concluded that the peasantry had become a hopeless cause.

While Kamenev feared that Lenin was demanding an immediate transition to a socialist revolution, Lenin pointed out that he had explicitly warned against such a perspective: “It is *not our immediate task* to ‘introduce’ socialism ...”<sup>42</sup> Obviously there were misconceptions on both sides ... but - and this is surely what counts - unity was quickly recemented. In the case of the peasantry, Kamenev was clearly right and Lenin wrong. Subsequently, Lenin talks of the differences between himself and Kamenev being “not very great”. He also joins with Kamenev in opposing the leftist slogan of ‘Down with the provisional government’, as raised by the Petrograd committee of the RSDLP. The situation was not yet ready for the overthrow of the provisional government in April-May 1917. Hence, together with Kamenev, Lenin insisted that the “correct slogan” was “Long live the soviet of workers’ and soldiers’ deputies”.<sup>43</sup>

Things were, though, exceedingly

complex. Firstly, while state power had been transferred, that did not by any means meet the immediate programmatic aims of the Bolsheviks. The Romanovs had been overthrown. To that extent, argued Lenin, the programme had been fulfilled. But the ‘revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants’ in the form of the soviets had voluntarily ceded power to the bourgeoisie. Instead of coming to power, the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry existed side by side with, and had subordinated itself to, a weak government of the bourgeoisie (ie, the provisional government). Only once the Bolsheviks won a majority could they finish with dual power and complete the revolution.

The dictatorship (rule) of the proletariat and peasantry had therefore become interwoven with the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The Russian Revolution had gone further than the classical bourgeois revolutions of England 1645 or France 1789, but, in Lenin’s words, it “has not yet reached a ‘pure’ dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry”.<sup>44</sup> There can be dual power, but no dual-power state (whether it be a monarchy, a theocracy or a democratic republic). One or the other had to die ●

## Notes

1. L Trotsky *The challenge of the Left Opposition (1923-25)* New York 1980, p205.
2. T Cliff *Lenin* Vol 2, London 1975, p124.
3. L Trotsky *The challenge of the Left Opposition (1923-25)* New York 1980, p211.
4. *Ibid* p209.
5. L Schapiro *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union* London 1964, p162.
6. Quoted in SF Cohen *Bukharin and the Bolshevik revolution* Oxford 1980, p269.
7. Between 1924 and 1927, 12 volumes of Trotsky’s *Collected works* were published in Moscow and/or Leningrad by the State Publishing House. His writings, speeches, etc concerning the events of 1917 constituted volume 3 (see [https://archive.org/details/Trotsky\\_CollectedWorks](https://archive.org/details/Trotsky_CollectedWorks)).
8. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 17 Moscow 1977, p23.
9. [www.marxists.org/archive/kamenev/1924/11/trotskyism.htm#1912](http://www.marxists.org/archive/kamenev/1924/11/trotskyism.htm#1912).
10. For the role of the army high command see R Service *The last of the tsars* chapter 4, London 2017.
11. SH Baron *Plekhanov in Russian history and Soviet historiography* London 1995, p148.
12. Membership figures from *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* Moscow 1939, p183.
13. See the *Weekly Worker* series translated and introduced by John Riddell and Barbara Allen, beginning with the Petrograd Mezhrayonka leaflet of January 1917.
14. T Cliff *Lenin* Vol 2, London 1975, p127.
15. *Ibid* p124.
16. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 9, Moscow 1977, p32.
17. *Ibid* pp28-29.
18. <https://community.dur.ac.uk/a.k.harrington/srprog.html>.
19. Quoted in VI Lenin *CW* Vol 9, Moscow 1977, p245.
20. *Ibid* p128.
21. See LT Lih, ‘Democratic revolution in permanence’ *Science and Society* October 2012.
22. See VI Lenin *CW* Vol 8, Moscow 1977, p208.
23. See J Creegan, ‘April in Petrograd’ *Weekly Worker* April 16 2015.
24. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 9 Moscow 1977, p128.
25. *Ibid* p82.
26. See *ibid* pp15-130.
27. *Ibid* p114.
28. “Kautsky describes the policy of the *sans-culottes* in 1793-94 as one of ‘Revolution in Permanence’” - quoted in RB Day and D Gaido (eds) *Witnesses to permanent revolution* Leiden 2009, p537.
29. H Draper *Karl Marx’s theory of revolution* Vol 2, New York 1978, p204.
30. *Ibid* p201. Marx’s most famous use of ‘permanent revolution’ can be found in his 1850 ‘Address of the Central Authority of the Communist League’, K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 10, New York 1978, pp277-87.
31. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 9, Moscow 1977, p237.
32. L Trotsky *The permanent revolution* New York 1978, pp33-34.
33. See ‘Kautsky, Lenin and the “April theses”’ *Weekly Worker* January 14 2010.
34. L Trotsky *The permanent revolution* New York 1978, p166.
35. *Ibid* p168.
36. *Ibid* p198.
37. L Trotsky *The challenge of the Left Opposition (1923-25)* New York 1980, p209.
38. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p38.
39. LT Lih, ‘Bolshevism was fully armed’ *Weekly Worker* February 26 2015.
40. Trotsky included the surviving minutes of the March conference in his *The Stalin school of falsification* London 1974, pp181-237. Provisional government thugs ransacked the Bolshevik HQ in July 1917. Though fragmentary, they make fascinating reading.
41. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p50.
42. *Ibid* p52.
43. *Ibid* p244-45.
44. *Ibid* p61.

**ANTI-ZIONISM****Defend Livingstone against**

The April 9 London Communist Forum featured two opening speakers. Each comrade took a particular angle on the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' lie

**Tony Greenstein: Nazi-Zionist collaboration is a historical fact**

I predicted about 18 months ago that Jeremy Corbyn would be departing from the scene quite shortly. I am still of that opinion and I think the events of the last week are part and parcel of that process. We have seen the abject capitulation of Corbyn. When Tom Watson and the Zionists argued expulsion was the only option to deal with Ken Livingstone, instead of standing up for Livingstone, Corbyn accepted that what Ken has said was 'offensive' and that he had showed no contrition.

If you surrender now, the chances that you will stand firm when you get into power are even less. We have seen in *Al Jazeera's* 'The lobby' that there is a concerted campaign by the Labour right, Labour Friends of Israel and the Israeli embassy to topple the left. And anti-Semitism is the ideal weapon for doing that - we are seeing the false anti-racism of the right. When British imperialism went into India, it did not do so to exploit, but to save the Indians from themselves - this has always been the message of imperialism, which was always a very benevolent operation in the eyes of the imperialists. Similarly today. When they defend the state of Israel, they do so on the grounds of anti-racism rather than racism.

What Corbyn should have done is say that, yes, he condemns anti-Semitism, but he also condemns the false use of accusations of anti-Semitism against people who are not anti-Semitic, but are simply supporting the Palestinians. If he had taken that principled stand then, he would not be facing the problems he is now. However much he gives, they will want more.

Ken Livingstone has actually been principled and we have no option but to defend him. We should defend him on the grounds that, if Livingstone goes, Corbyn will be next - there is no doubt about that. Livingstone is quite a juicy target, but the aim is to get rid of the whole Corbyn leadership. Throwing Livingstone overboard so that the good ship Labour will stay afloat as if he was just unnecessary ballast is neither just nor credible.

Last week a letter from the Jewish Labour Movement surfaced, with

over 1,300 signatories calling for Livingstone's expulsion from the Labour Party. *The Guardian* headlined the letter: "Jewish Labour calls..." As if the Jewish Labour Movement, which actually has a large number of non-Jewish Progress members, is the same as the Jewish Labour membership. *The Guardian* has been leading this campaign and had an abject editorial on April 7 on the Livingstone affair. It told us that it was only a matter of decorum - ie, politeness - which leads people on the left to talk about 'Zionists' as opposed to 'Jews'. You may have seen my letter to *The Guardian* the next day (April 10), in which I point out that it is only Zionists and anti-Semites who believe the two are synonymous.

There has been a whole slate of articles in *The Guardian* attacking Livingstone over this issue - just as there were attacking Corbyn a year ago over the question of anti-Semitism. We have seen Owen Jones jack-knife to the right - I predicted this two years ago at the height of Operation Protective Edge, when 2,200 Palestinians were killed (including around 500 children). Owen Jones's main concern then was about anti-Semitism in Britain. This showed a remarkably skewed sense of priorities, not least because there was no major problem with anti-Semitism in Britain. If there is such a problem you should go to the cause of it. If you say, as the Board of Deputies of British Jews does, that Jews are responsible for and support what Israel does, and that to criticise Israel is anti-Semitic, it is not surprising that some people will draw the wrong message from that and see Jews as their targets.

The letter I wrote to *The Guardian* has been circulating widely on the internet and I have no doubt at all that what is happening to Ken Livingstone is causing outrage among people in the rank and file of the Labour Party. One elderly couple wrote to me saying that they had been members for 60 years, but would resign over this issue. People realise what is at stake. I did an interview with BBC Radio London this morning and was asked about the 'offensiveness' to Jews of Livingstone's comments. I said quite

clearly that the essence of free speech is the right to give offence. When it comes to something like *Charlie Hebdo* and the cartoons of the prophet Muhammad, free speech rules, but when it comes to what the Zionists did with the Nazis through *Ha'avara*, the trade agreement between Nazi Germany and the Zionist movement, amongst other things, we are told that is too offensive, beyond the pale, you can't mention it. There is a good reason for that.

**Zionism**

What is Zionism? It is a settler-colonial project to establish a Jewish supremacist state in Palestine. Zionism arose as a specific movement amongst Jewish people.

The first Zionists were not Jewish: they were Christian evangelicals and imperialists. Lord Shaftesbury (1801-85) is a very interesting example. He was dead set against Jewish emancipation in Britain - he did not want Jews to have the vote - but he was in favour of them having a Jewish state in Palestine, because that would safeguard British imperial interests. There are a number of examples like him, including Lord Balfour himself. When he was prime minister in 1905, he was responsible for the introduction of the Aliens Act, the first piece of legislation directed against Jewish immigration. He did not want Jews who were escaping from the tsarist pogroms coming to Britain. This was also the view of other Conservative anti-Semites in the British Brothers League. Instead they wanted Jews to colonise an area of the world where British interest were primary. This has been the lesson of Zionism throughout history.

The best description I have is from one of Israel's foremost novelists, AB Yehoshua, in a speech he gave to the National Union of Jewish Students. Bear in mind that his talk was entitled "Zionism was right", so he is no anti-Zionist. He stated: "Anti-Zionism was not the product of non-Jews." Yehoshua is someone who tells the truth to young Zionists, who believe there are actually opposing anti-Semitism:

Anti-Zionism is not the product of the non-Jews. On the contrary, the Gentiles have always encouraged Zionism, hoping that it would help to rid them of the Jews in their midst. Even today, in a perverse way, a real anti-Semite must be a Zionist.

That is absolutely correct. If you are a dedicated anti-Semite you will also be a Zionist, and that was true in the Nazi era as well. Eichmann protested vehemently when the grave of Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, was desecrated in Vienna. Eichmann combined support for Zionism with organising the mechanics of the 'final solution'.

Reinhard Heydrich, who was described by Gerald Reitlinger as the engineer of the 'final solution' and who was Himmler's deputy, as well as being chief of the combined Nazi and state police, said on January 28 1935 in an order to the Gestapo:

The activity of the Zionist-oriented youth organisations ... prior to their emigration to Palestine lies in the interests of the National Socialist state's leadership. These organisations, therefore, are not to be treated with that strictness that it is necessary to apply to members of the so-called German-Jewish organisations (assimilationists).

In May 1935 *Schwarze Korps*, the paper of the SS, wrote in similar vein that

... the Zionists adhere to a strict racial position and by emigrating to Palestine they are helping to build their own Jewish state ... The assimilation-minded Jews deny their race and insist on their loyalty to Germany or claim to be Christian, because they have been baptised in order to subvert National Socialist principles.

That really knocks a lot of fallacies on their head. When Livingstone said that Hitler 'supported Zionism', technically that was not true, because Hitler never personally expressed such a view, but the Nazi state supported Zionism *vis-à-vis* the vast majority of Jews in Germany, who were not Zionists. In 1935 the only section of the Jewish community that welcomed the Nuremberg laws - the laws that stripped German Jews of their citizenship - was the Zionists.

**Ha'avara**

When people say that this material is offensive, OK - it may be offensive to Zionists to be reminded of what happened and what their movement did, but nonetheless it is true. The particular example which is given is *Ha'avara*, which was agreed in 1933. What it involved was the frozen marks of the German Jews, placed in a blocked bank account, being used to purchase German industrial goods, which were then exported to Palestine, sold there, and a fraction of the proceeds were given to the Jews who emigrated. In order to take advantage of this scheme you had to have the equivalent of £1,000 in order to gain entry to Palestine as capitalists. It therefore only applied to a minority and only 20,000 of the 50,000 German Jews who emigrated to Palestine did so via this scheme. These were the Jews who were most likely to have found a safe haven elsewhere. What the Zionists did was condemn their poorer Jewish brethren.

Why did the Nazis agree to it? Yes, it put German industry to work, but they did not get any hard currency from it. The reasoning is clear and there is no disputing this. Even in his letter to Ken Livingstone, Iain McNicol quotes Yehuda Bauer, one of the foremost Zionist historians of the holocaust, who was quite clear that Germany agreed to this because of the boycott movement at the time. Following the Nazis' assumption of power and the immediate attacks on Jews, international Jewish organisations, the labour movement and many others mounted a boycott of Nazi Germany, which immediately hit its exports. For instance, Britain almost overnight replaced Germany as the major exporter to Finland and Denmark.

On March 25 Göring called in the leadership of the German Jewish community to a meeting. He did not invite the Zionists, because they were so insignificant within the community at the time, but the Zionists nonetheless lobbied and obtained the right to attend the meeting. Göring said to the German Jewish leadership that they had to put pressure on international Jewish organisations to stop the boycott. The Jewish leaders responded by saying that they had no influence over those international organisations, but they did not support the boycott - which, of course, they had no choice but to say. However, the Zionists made it clear that they would enthusiastically fight the boycott, because they believed you could not defeat anti-Semitism: you could only use it. From that moment on, the relationship between the Nazi state

and the Zionists changed.

The Zionist idea goes back to Theodor Herzl, who wrote:

In Paris ... I achieved a freer attitude to anti-Semitism, which I now began to understand historically and to pardon. Above all, I recognise the emptiness and futility of trying to combat anti-Semitism.

He wrote in his founding pamphlet, *The Jewish state*: "I have already mentioned that honest anti-Semites, whilst preserving their independence, will combine with our officials in controlling the transfer of our state." Zionism always welcomed the support of anti-Semitism, because without anti-Semitism there is no pressure on Jewish people to emigrate. They saw in *Ha'avara* an opportunity. The German state was extremely weak at that time and there was talk of the military overthrowing Hitler. If you read Edwin Black's book, *The transfer agreement*, he raises the possibility that Hitler may well not have survived the winter of 1933.

What the Zionists did with *Ha'avara* was in essence to tie their fortunes to those of the Nazi state. As they saw it, the survival of the German economy was linked to the survival of the Zionist project. Between 1933 and 1939 *Ha'avara* accounted for 60% of total capital investment in Jewish Palestine. Whole industries were created as a result of the agreement between the Nazis and the Zionists. It was an extremely useful agreement to the Zionists and so they fought the boycott wherever they could.

For the Zionists the building of their state in Palestine was the priority. Shabtai Tevet, the official biographer of David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister and the chairman of the Jewish Agency, tells us that Ben-Gurion's "total dedication to historic interest" found extreme expression in December 1938 when he told Mapai's central committee:

If I knew that it would be possible to save all the children in Germany by bringing them over to England, and only half of them by transporting them to Eretz Yisrael, then I would opt for the second alternative. For we must weigh not only the life of these children, but also the history of the people of Israel.

That in essence was the Zionists' position. It opposed the rescue of Jewish people to destinations other than Palestine. They argued, quite understandably, that if you rescued refugees by taking them to places other than Palestine, what was the point of the Jewish state?

When Livingstone said that the Nazis supported Zionism, that was true. Of course, that does not mean that individual Zionists supported Nazism or, for that matter, that all Nazis supported Zionism. It is obviously also true that when Hitler exterminated Jews he did not differentiate between Zionists and non-Zionists - although the Zionist leaders of the Jewish councils and *Judenrate* had a better chance of survival. Any movement of collaboration - whether it is Quisling, Marshal Pétain or whoever - will always start from a position of an inequality of power. The people with whom the Zionists collaborated had the power and they had to accept the terms the Germans offered them.

But there is no doubt that the Zionist movement did collaborate, betraying the Jewish masses of Europe ●

# the witch-hunt

**Mike Macnair: there is a link between intersectionality and the false anti-Semitism campaign**



The headline of my article in last week's *Weekly Worker* - 'Compulsory lies' - seems to sum up the nature of the Labour Party's decision on the Ken Livingstone case. What Livingstone was charged with is violating rule 2.1.8, which begins: "No member of the party shall engage in conduct which in the opinion of the NEC is prejudicial, or in any act which in the opinion of the NEC is grossly detrimental to the party."

On the face of it, this rule just says that the national executive can throw anybody out for any reason - it is merely the "opinion of the NEC" which determines what is "prejudicial" or "detrimental". But in reality the rule is a little bit narrower. Firstly, whether you violated the rule is referred to the national constitutional committee, which is the body that has suspended Ken Livingstone. Secondly, there is a whole section which indicates that the rule is mainly supposed to be about membership of proscribed organisations like the Communist Party or Militant. Thirdly, there is this: "The national constitutional committee shall not have regard to the mere holding or expression of beliefs or opinions."

What is Livingstone charged with? How has he violated this section? First, he defended Naz Shah and downplayed the allegedly anti-Semitic character of her social media posts, which is "likely to prejudice the party by causing dismay among the Jewish community and indeed many supporters and members more generally". Second, he asserted in media interviews that Hitler at the outset of his regime supported Zionism, which means to say that the Nazi regime advocated the removal of German Jews to Palestine at that stage rather than extermination. Third, Livingstone has refused to apologise for saying this. This is "likely to deeply offend the Jewish community". General secretary Iain McNicol is perfectly explicit in his letter to Livingstone - referring in a footnote to a Zionist polemic about the relationship between Zionist organisations and the German state in the 1930s - that it makes no difference to the charges if every word that Ken Livingstone said was true. The letter argues that even so he would still have violated Labour Party rules.

What Livingstone said was not

precisely accurate. This is because we do not know what was in Hitler's head at that time and because some of the dates quoted are wrong. However, if this came before a court on a libel claim, the question of whether the statement was justified is decided not by whether it is *exactly* true, but whether it is *substantially* true - and there is no doubt that it is. But this is irrelevant, as McNicol says it does not matter if it is true. He claims that even if it is wholly true, Livingstone is obliged not to say things that are offensive to the 'Jewish community'.

I have a work colleague who is an active left Zionist, and he said to me: "You can't possibly defend Ken Livingstone. What would your attitude be to somebody who, in order to slander the Palestinian movement, drew attention to the relationship between the grand mufti in Jerusalem and the German state in the 1930 and 1940s?" This was presumably expected to be a difficult point for me to answer, but it was not at all. My answer was that I would unhesitatingly defend that person's right to speak and I would defend their right to be in the Labour Party.

The NCC came to the decision that Ken Livingstone, having violated this rule, must remain suspended. Immediately there was a wave of synthetic outrage demanding his expulsion. If he were to be expelled, he has said he would litigate. If they were to expel him on the grounds that he made statements (and *they say* it does not matter if these statements were wholly true or false) and for not apologising for these statements (which could be completely true, and when the rules say the NCC shall not have regard to the mere holding of beliefs or expressions), they would nevertheless *probably* win in court.

However, the basis on which they would win would be quite difficult: They would win because this witch-hunt is quite plainly a matter of the foreign policy of the present government - the judiciary *usually* finds a way of deciding cases involving foreign policy, which quite plainly ought to be decided the other way, so as to avoid embarrassing HM government. The court could, for example, find a way of avoiding such embarrassment by saying that it is up to the party to decide whether its rules have been broken; that the court will 'defer'

to the party disciplinary tribunal on that issue; and so on.

However, as soon as Livingstone's side is able to put forward its case in open court, it will become incredibly difficult for the wave of synthetic outrage to run on in the way it is now. So suspending Livingstone is the best bet from the point of view of the right wing - both because it avoids allowing for open contestation of the anti-democratic basis on which this decision has been taken; and because it allows the wave of outrage about not expelling Livingstone to continue.

The astonishing feature of this stuff is that the justification being offered by the right is essentially 'safe spaces' politics. As Tony Greenstein has said, it is essentially making anti-racism a means of defending US foreign policy in the Middle East. It is astonishing that this is being run in the mainstream media on such a scale, at the same time as a campaign is being conducted by this self-same media against 'political correctness' on university campuses and in favour of free speech. They want to no-platform Naz Shah and Ken Livingstone, whilst simultaneously campaigning against the no-platforming of rightwing speakers on campus. It becomes more or less completely transparent that the phrase 'freedom of speech' means 'freedom of speech for my proprietor and our political allies, but not for you lot who disagree with us'.

And this hypocrisy comes with the imposition of a positive duty to lie. This is what is being demanded of Livingstone: he must retract his broadly true statements. It is a positive duty to lie on the basis that not doing so is offensive to the self-appointed representatives of the Jewish community.

## Capitulation

At the same time amongst much of the left there has been an extraordinary capitulation to this. Firstly, the wave of indignation produced the result that by 2pm on the day the result came out Jeremy Corbyn was saying that, as Livingstone has still failed to back down, there were grounds for a new investigation. There were similar weasel words from Diane Abbott.

But that capitulation goes further to the left. *The Morning Star* published a leader saying that, while Livingstone should be defended, he had said some bad things. Before we can defend him we have to make concessions about the way he acted 'irresponsibly' in saying what he did. In *Socialist Worker* Charlie Kimber has made very similar statements. Of course, we have no reason not to expect such capitulation from the Alliance for Foreign Office Liberty (usually referred to as the Alliance for Workers' Liberty). It has not produced a new article because its paper, (*Western Solidarity*), did not come out this week. But its website leads with a Sean Matgamna article on Livingstone from May 2016, which alleges that Livingstone's "rewriting of history has had the effect of supporting - and encouraging - anti-Semitism". There is the same issue with Owen Jones.

This is going on because of a common misconception among the British Labour left and far left. That is the idea that you can dodge out from under the fact that the capitalist class controls the news agenda and sneak into power by persuading people that you do not have anything serious to say - conveying the impression that we don't really want to overthrow British imperialism, we don't really want to overthrow the monarchy, etc. The left wants to give the impression that really we just care about economic issues: we oppose austerity, we support a 'reasonable' Keynesian economic policy. What then happens is that the right and its corrupt media uses issues of imperialism, race, gender and internationalism against the left. The mainstream left imagines

that you can evade these attacks either by keeping quiet or by capitulating.

The Corbyn-McDonnell-Abbott leadership has opted for the latter and that is why Livingstone has been thrown to the wolves. Of course, it does not work - the wolves are not going to be fobbed off with skinny old Ken being thrown off the back of the troika: they can see there are fatter targets up ahead to be chased. Suppose there were a Labour government - there would be an offensive around migration in the media just for starters.

This affair is a particularly serious example of the failure to deal with the power of the media, but on one level it is actually normal practice on the left. It is true of the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party in England and Wales as well. But, rather than hiding their views to win an election (like the Labour left), these groups want to con people into organising a general strike that will in turn lead to creating soviets and launching a revolution, without ever confronting the question of the constitutional and international order of which the British state is part. According to this view people will become revolutionary in spite of themselves.

To leap for a moment to this year's centenary story. In February 1917 the revolution was started when women went on strike on International Women's Day - an initiative of the Second, Socialist International. International Women's Day has now become something that is part of the general discourse of non-denominational feminism, and of the great and the good. But in 1917 the Second International was widely regarded as an extremist, revolutionary group, and International Women's Day as an initiative of such a group. Hence, in February 1917 going on strike on International Women's Day with demands for peace reflected the high level of political consciousness existing *before* the revolution. This did not *arise out of* being on strike, or being conned into striking on economic issues and then becoming more radicalised.

Economism - this idea that we can dodge the more controversial aspects of politics and manipulate the capitalist media to build a mass movement or let us into power - has the consequence of capitulation when things get sharp. The AWL underwent this capitulation in the 1980s, when it reshaped the whole of its political conceptions so as to abandon opposition to the role of British imperialism. Similarly the left generally attempts to distance itself from Livingstone in order to appear to concede that there is something 'reasonable' in this witch-hunt campaign.

## Why now?

My next point is much more speculative. Why *this* witch-hunt around *this* issue now? The media have all sorts of possible political targets for such campaigns, but this is the one that has been selected to be repeated again and again. It is certainly true that there is plenty out there on the web which could be used against Corbyn in the way that this stuff has been used to attack Ken Livingstone. But they have not gone after Corbyn immediately for the same reason that they have suspended Livingstone rather than expelling him. This is an agenda that allows

them to keep the Labour leadership constantly on the defensive, without ever having to actually defend their factual claims.

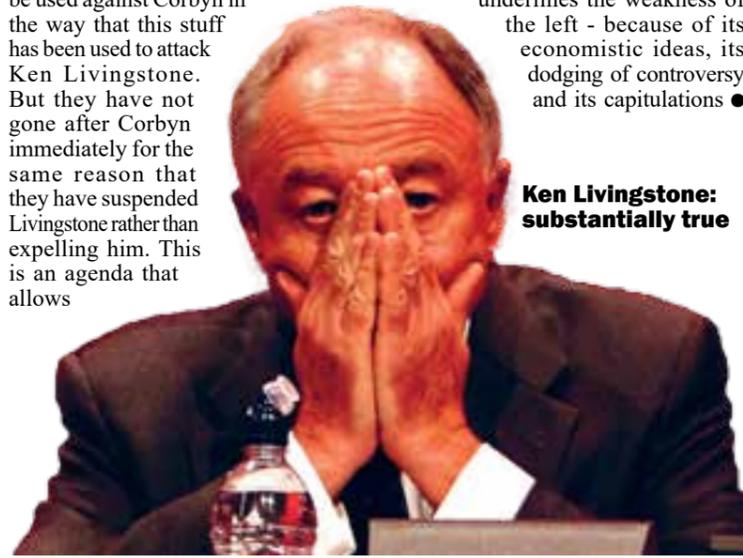
It may well be, as Moshé Machover has argued - and as was indicated at the start of the Trump administration (although he may now be pulling back on it) - that the US is going to authorise another substantial expansion of Israel. The annexation of the West Bank and Jerusalem looks like it is on the fairly immediate agenda. Certainly an attack on Iran by Israel, backed by the United States, or a direct attack on Iran by the United States is on the agenda. Further operations in Syria are also on the cards and those operations could perfectly well involve additional territory being taken in Syria and south Lebanon by Israel. That is the context in which making it illegitimate in Britain to defend criticisms of the Israeli state (which were in fact common ground across the main parties until the Blair administration) would be on the agenda. That is a serious concern.

In addition, those involved in the witch-hunt on the Labour right mostly voted for war in 2003. They are Blairites. Indeed the Trump administration, now Mike Flynn has been sacked and Steve Bannon has been sidelined, looks more like the administration of George W Bush. The imperialist bourgeoisie lost a lot of political ground in 2003-07. It suffered this particularly in Britain, because there was a mass movement around the Iraq war, and the war then created huge disorder in Iraq, saw massive numbers of dead and did not achieve any of its stated aims.

The 'anti-Semitism' witch-hunt is a means of seeking to recover that political ground for imperialist warmongering in the Middle East. The means used for this has been the promotion of 'safe spaces', identity politics and intersectionality in general. The idea that the oppressed have the right to define their own oppression - that what the oppressed *say* amounts to their oppression is the decisive question - was developed primarily in the context of debates around gender, sexuality and race. It provided the opportunity for intersectionalism to be used in defence of Zionism, by defining anti-Semitism as anti-Zionism, on the basis that Jews are an oppressed group and therefore should have the determinative voice in defining what counts as oppression. The idea that offensive speech and language constitutes oppression is part of what creates the context in which the left and the anti-war movement is disarmed. That disarmament is visible in precisely Iain McNicol's justification for disciplinary measures against Ken Livingstone.

The underlying agenda is about US foreign policy in the Middle East and about the place of Britain within that policy. It is about reversing the influence of the mass anti-war movement, whose ideas remained influential, although the active movement itself withered away, and were reflected in the fact that Corbyn won the leadership of the Labour Party.

The working-out of this agenda underlines the weakness of the left - because of its economic ideas, its dodging of controversy and its capitulations ●



**Ken Livingstone: substantially true**

## LIVINGSTONE

# Digging our own hole

The left itself must take some responsibility for the Ken Livingstone debacle, argues **Paul Demarty**



**Ben Chacko: Offensive? So what?**

One of the most distinctive aspects of the Ken Livingstone case is the leftwing response, and how cagey it has been.

Momentum - and its proprietor, Jon Lansman - has led the way in calling not for Livingstone's exoneration, but his head. For Lansman as an individual, this *may* be a hold-over from his long-standing left-Zionist history (many on the Labour left, in former times, were supporters of Israel, although most abandoned it after 1967 saw it turn decisively towards being a regional enforcer for American imperialism). It is nonetheless remarkable that he can carry so many along with him, as he *joins* a Blairite witch-hunt against the left.

Owen Jones, motoring through apostasies with the zeal of the convert, was an early participant in all this, and is still banging away at it. He told the *Jewish Chronicle* recently that there was a

collective failure, not just of the leadership, but all of us on the left, to deal with anti-Semitism ... The test for me is to ask, 'Do [Jews] feel the left it is a welcoming place for them?' And until the answer is yes, it is a failure.<sup>1</sup>

The *Morning Star*, in an editorial no doubt penned under the watchful eyes of the Communist Party of Britain's political leadership, condemns Livingstone's suspension, correctly noting that the purpose of the whole scandal is "to undermine solidarity with the Palestinian people ... [and] to discredit Corbyn". Yet the *Star* does not want to be too closely associated with Livingstone, whose

behaviour since the investigation began has not made things easier either for himself or for the Labour Party. His determination to prove he was merely stating historical fact ignores the real offence caused when the Nazis ... are compared to or associated with their victims. To acknowledge that there was a phase of Nazi policy which considered expelling Jewish people to Palestine is a very different thing from claiming that this amounted to 'supporting Zionism', a nationalist movement aimed at empowering rather

than deporting Jews. Livingstone should have acknowledged this and apologised.<sup>2</sup>

Even the Socialist Workers Party's national secretary, Charlie Kimber, insists on reminding readers of an older article on the subject by John Rose, who lamented last year that Livingstone had fallen into the "trap" of highlighting "Zionist collaboration with the Nazis" - an argument "rightly ignored by solidarity activists with Palestine."<sup>3</sup> All this effort in the interests of suppressing a straightforward historical fact - as if Zionist collaboration with the Hitler regime should embarrass not today's Zionists, but rather today's anti-Zionists. Why?

## Left anti-racism

To understand, we must go back half a century, to the growing-pains of the 'new left' (a period which, most fortuitously, coincides with the decisive shift in the history of Israel and the Palestine question that followed the six-day war and subsequent de facto annexations).

The cold war had a peculiar effect on society in post-war western Europe, and - more distantly - in the United States as well. 'Front line' states saw enormous aid from the USA to rebuild their economies after the destruction of the war, and even further afield vast concessions were yielded to the workers' movement in the form of social welfare programmes. The price of this was what would now be called 'social conservatism': the promotion of chauvinism - of both national and male varieties; and protection of the sectional rights of white people against the non-white migrants, who began to arrive from the current and former colonies.

The state regime in Britain in the 1950s and at least until the first Harold Wilson government was *explicitly racist*, at least so far as its restrictions on 'coloured immigration' went, and racist policing and popular attitudes went a lot further. In vast swathes of America, segregation and lynch mobs were the norm. In France, state-racist outrages were common, most notoriously the 1961 massacre of Algerian demonstrators in Paris. In all cases, this was a fragile consensus - the

victims certainly had little interest in being messed about so egregiously, and the white population was increasingly divided.

With the political tumult of 1968, then, the issue of racial discrimination presented itself as a matter of great moral urgency to the newly radicalised. More than that, however, it appeared as a great opportunity. For here was a significant fault line in the fragile political structure of post-war Keynesian capitalism. The very thing that had promised stability to such societies was now a source of upheaval. For the left, between the moral and the instrumental factors it was a no-brainer.

Trotskyist groups in Britain threw themselves into counter-mobilisations against fascist groups, backers of apartheid and Enoch Powell supporters. The Maoist-leaning organisations of the American New Communist Movement (NCM) threw themselves into the radical wing of the civil rights movement and its offshoots, rediscovering ideas such as the prevalent theory of 1930s communists that African Americans represented a distinct *nation* which should have self-determination in the 'black belt' states of the south. The gamble in both cases was that the race question was a particular form of appearance of the colonial question - the form in which it interposed in the metropolitan countries. It was potentially a revolutionary fault line in society.

How exactly to crack that fault line open was a matter, inevitably, of intense dispute. For the more traditionally minded comrades, there was the investment of great effort in overcoming formal and informal colour bars in the organisations of the workers' movement, undermining the sectional appeal of white working class racism. For parts of the NCM, the conclusion was rather that whites - even from relatively impoverished, working class backgrounds - gained real material privileges from their racial categorisation such that they formed a labour aristocracy, and thus could be expected to be counterrevolutionary until a vast movement of the super-exploited and oppressed could educate

them in the errors of their ways.<sup>4</sup>

## Establishment anti-racism

It was not only a matter of dispute for the left - the ruling class and political establishment themselves were acutely aware of the dangers of their situation. And what happened in the three decades starting in 1968 was a striking reversal, whereby the establishment purged itself of overt racism (and sexism, and latterly anti-gay discrimination). The process was long and fraught, and the agents of change were not necessarily those one expects. We meet, for example, a certain Ken Livingstone, in the 1980s, running the Greater London Council as a 'loony left' operation. The 'looniness' of the GLC, in the eyes of its frothing opponents, consisted almost entirely in its enforcement of 'political correctness', which is to say its sometimes inelegant, but consistent, pursuit of 'equalities' policies, so far as (most particularly) race and gender were concerned.

Margaret Thatcher shut the GLC down, and played to reactionary and bigoted opinion in the public gallery with legislation like the anti-gay section 28, but the overall picture of the years of her government is highly contradictory; for it was in this period above all others that state multiculturalism was *most aggressively expanded*, truly coming into existence in a form recognisable today, and also that equal opportunities policies were first adopted widely by employers.

The left, in this period, has undergone an experience analogous to the urban myth, whereby a frog can be placed into a pot of cold water and boiled without its even noticing by slowly raising the temperature. In the British context, a key moment was the Macpherson inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, which found that the Metropolitan police was "institutionally racist" - a charge which was at the very least recognisable to many lefts. It marked the beginning of the mop-up operation, whereby pockets of state racism still tolerated were finally purged. It also snuck in, through the back door, a semi-official definition of racism based on the perceived feeling of offence of the victim rather than any external, 'objective' definition.

The left did not demur from either

of these things - and how could it? We had been busily engaged in decrying the inherent racism of the state, and here was the state, more or less admitting it! Yet it is precisely the Macpherson mindset that makes the current mindset more dangerous. Let us revisit our friends, earlier cited: Owen Jones wonders whether Jews feel "welcome" in the left. Who can legislate as to that point, except for the same Jews? The same sort of thinking is exhibited everywhere else that Livingstone is not robustly defended for stating the plain truth - give or take trivial errors, which do not alter the substance of matters.

Jews, of course, are as violently divided on the justice of the Israeli state regime as everyone else. So which Jews get to count as the voice of 'the Jewish community'? A perceptive article in *Ha'aretz* by Jonathan Rosenhead notes that, despite the fact that opinion polling finds plenty of evidence of said violent divisions among British Jews, one could be forgiven for thinking that the "British Jewish population [is] all but united behind Israel and against Livingstone".

The Community Security Trust, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, and the Holocaust Education Trust ... have indeed been jumping up and down and making a lot of noise, in unison ... It is as if the Jewish organisations which take a sceptical or downright critical view of Israel - Jews for Justice for Palestinians, Free Speech on Israel, Independent Jewish Voices, Jewish Socialist Group and others - do not exist.<sup>5</sup>

What is the difference? Merely that the former set of organisations are effectively state-supported, and the others operating in opposition to the foreign office. Yet stating things so *requires* breaking with the standard anti-racist doxa of the far left, for it means asserting that the self-appointed representatives of a particular ethnic group *do not* have the unilateral right to define their own oppression, but rather that oppression is subject to external laws observable to all. But if this is conceded in the case of Jews on the matter of Zionism, then it must also be so in the case of Afro-Caribbeans, Asians, Pacific islanders and whoever else you like.

It is this pass that the left does not want to sell; this factor that leads even the SWP to deny the substantial truth of Livingstone's statements. Naive anti-racism is just too damn useful. It is the one part of the standard diet of left activity to enjoy state support, and thus the unanimous approbation of the right-thinking. Livingstone's fate, and the miserable contortions of his leftwing critics, ought to be a wake-up call: confusing second-order contradictions in society with the most fundamental ones leads to disorientation when the ruling class changes tack; and commitment to subjectivist theories of politics lays us open to the most crass manipulations ●

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## Notes

1. www.thejc.com/news/news-features/owen-jones-why-i-m-defending-jews-on-the-left-1.435444?highlight=owen-jones.
2. *Morning Star* April 6.
3. Kimber's article is in *Socialist Worker* April 11 2017; Rose's, *Socialist Worker* April 26 2016.
4. It should be stressed that this was not at all a unanimous position among the American Maoists: an article from the Revolutionary Union, the relatively sane predecessor to today's Revolutionary Communist Party cult, carries the self-explanatory headline, 'Carl Davidson: creature from the "White Skin Privilege" lagoon' (www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-3/creature.htm). Nonetheless, the white privilege idea is entirely a product of Maoism, which casts its current fashion among liberal yuppies - up to the queen-bee of them all herself, Hillary Clinton - in a peculiar light.
5. www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-1.782827.

# What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Jeremy Corbyn and Tom Watson: stop appeasing the right

# Stand up with us, Jeremy

This open letter to Jeremy Corbyn protesting against the bogus 'anti-Semitism' campaign was originally signed by 104 Labour Party members

We attach an open letter to you signed by 145 members of the Party, Jews and non-Jews, all socialists, who are alarmed by the treatment of leftwing supporters of Palestine facing victimisation within the party. We began collecting signatures before the national constitutional committee's decision to extend Ken Livingstone's suspension, the subse-

quent attacks on him and the party, and your failure to defend him. We are aware that other party members are also enduring disciplinary procedures which lack natural justice. The most high-profile of these is Jackie Walker and it is her case that the letter primarily addresses.

Those who have signed the letter are standing up and saying we do not

believe that the actions that Jackie has been accused of are, in any way, anti-Semitic. However, if the Labour Party is to employ an expansive definition of anti-Semitism that encompasses Jackie's actions, then all 145 of us too are guilty.

We would invite you to meet the organisers of this letter, most of whom you know well from pickets

and lobbies in defence of Palestinian rights, to discuss how to combine the party's historic and principled opposition to all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism, with a reinvigorated and public defence of Palestinian rights.

**Haim Bresheeth**  
**Mike Cushman**  
**Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi**

**W**e are writing to you as members of the Labour Party. We are a predominantly Jewish group and are writing to ask you to review your behaviour on the question of Israel/Palestine. We understand that amongst reasons given by the Labour Party for claiming that Jackie Walker, the ex-deputy chair of Momentum, is anti-Semitic, the following are included:

1. Regularly posting on Israel.
2. Describing Israel as a racist state.
3. A pattern of behaviour that causes offence to some members.
4. Claiming that there is an anti-Semitism witch-hunt.
5. Claiming that there is Israeli involvement in British politics.
6. Saying the right of the party is using this witch-hunt for political purposes.
7. Saying adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of anti-Semitism is an attempt to outlaw criticism of Israel and to silence pro-Palestinian voices.

We would therefore like to let you know that we are too are 'guilty' of such charges, not because we are anti-Semitic, but because we believe these to be reasonable statements, accurately describing Israel's policies and actions.

Examples of our activities include:

1. We have regularly posted on Israel and Palestine (and many other issues of political concern, including British and international politics) on various social media.

2. We have described Israel as a racist state (and indeed as an apartheid state) because it is one. Its legislation defines and differentiates between people on the basis of religion and/or ethnicity, including, as you must be aware: laws on ownership of land; who can become a citizen; and the outrageous category of 'present absentees', which make it impossible for Palestinians to return to their home, while enabling Israel to

confiscate it. Palestinian citizens of Israel are third-class citizens, tolerated at best, and the four million Palestinians under occupation enjoy no rights at all. Such views as ours are commonly held by those leading Israeli journalists and intellectuals intent on adhering to international law and the legal force of UN resolutions. Indeed, a small representative selection from recent articles (in the last month alone) in Israeli publications should be enough to demonstrate this point. It is clear that any such views would immediately lead to an inquiry by the UK Labour Party, were they voiced by one of its members.

'Supreme court rules against exposing Israel's role in Bosnian genocide': <https://972mag.com/israels-involvement-in-bosnian-genocide-to-remain-under-wraps/123503>.

'Israel's travel ban: how banning settlement boycotters is driving me into the arms of BDS': [www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-1.775717](http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-1.775717).

'Israel's ugly new travel ban tells the world: stay away if you don't agree with us': [www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-1.775749](http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-1.775749).

'Don't mess with our occupation': [www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/1.775051](http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/1.775051).

'In last monologue, Israeli comedy show host implores Israelis to wake up and smell the apartheid': [www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.774663](http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.774663).

'Israel loves wars': [www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-1.774709](http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-1.774709).

'Israel's Gaza war failure was first and foremost a diplomatic one': [www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-1.774507](http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-1.774507).

'Israel's organized hate crime against its Muslim minority': [www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-1.776355](http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-1.776355).

'Five ways Israel will make you hate Israel this week': [www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-1.775739](http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-1.775739).

'The Israeli lawmaker who embraces apartheid': [www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-1.775612](http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-1.775612).

3. We regret that some people may find our statements offensive, but one cannot engage in politics without being offended from time to time. We find many of the statements and actions of Israel and its supporters deeply offensive to us as Jewish, and other socialist, members of the party and human rights activists. Despite our unease, we do nothing to try and silence such views. We believe in free speech.

4. The reason we have claimed there is an 'anti-Semitism witch-hunt' in the Labour Party is that we do not know how else one could describe the singling out of Palestine rights' supporters and anti-Zionists in the Labour Party. We believe that the party has a far worse problem with Islamophobia and anti-black racism, but has shamefully not pursued such cases with any noticeable energy. We acknowledge there may be incidents of anti-Semitism in the party, as there are of all discriminatory behaviour, but they are infrequent and not systematic; and we have rarely, if ever, witnessed any. Any such incidents that are identified should result in appropriate, transparent and swift action. The cases of Walker, Greenstein, Livingstone and Wadsworth are clearly not amongst them.

5. We have claimed there is covert and overt Israeli involvement in British politics, as conclusively demonstrated in Al Jazeera's 'The lobby' series of programmes, and by numerous other media/social media reports. To claim otherwise is to ignore the evidence or to cave in to this very lobby.

6. We have claimed that opponents of the leader of the party have used the campaign of anti-Semitism allegations to destabilise the leadership and have greatly damaged the party as a consequence. They have done this with impunity. We believe this to be true and clearly demonstrated.

7. The letter from Jo Johnson to Universities UK using the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism is one of the examples of the

way this racist and demonising 'definition' of anti-Semitism is employed to censor necessary, and proper, political and moral debate. We have spoken to many students and staff who have felt intimidated, and prevented from expressing deeply held (and not in any way anti-Semitic) views on the brutal daily realities in Palestine/Israel.

These are members who are acting against Israel's illegal actions, moved by the need to achieve a just peace in the region. We believe that the IHRA definition is directed not at anti-Semitism - which is currently showing its ugly face in Europe and, in particular, in Trump's USA - but instead at the critics of Israeli crimes, many of them being socialist and Jewish members of the Labour Party.

For more details see the legal opinion of Hugh Tomlinson QC: <http://freespeechonisrael.org.uk/ihra-opinion>.

We have taken such positions because we are socialists and humanists. We believe in the rights of Palestinians to live free from the oppression, national and individual, that they currently experience. We also recollect similar sentiments expressed by yourself in the past.

We shall *not* give up on our right to free speech to criticise Israel or, for that matter, any other country which behaves illegally and immorally. We consider this to be our right and duty as progressive socialists. The current bogus 'anti-Semitism' attack by the Israel lobby is intended to deny us this right; will negate our human rights; and suppress free speech and free political debate.

If this stance is unacceptable to the current leadership of the Labour Party, we invite you to take action against us. If, as we believe, you share our views, please stand up with us and say so openly.

History will judge those who stifle debate and silence criticism ●

# weekly WORKER

**Alliances in Middle East shift and change continuously**

## Aiming to sideline 'reformists'

Tehran's conservative factions are trying every trick in the book to oust Hassan Rouhani. Yasmine Mather reports on the build-up to the May 19 presidential elections

Since the election of Donald Trump the government in the Islamic Republic of Iran has shown restraint in responding to the new administration's threats of more direct intervention and the imposition of new sanctions. Although the religious state's supreme leader does his best to convey confidence, claiming the regime is not worried by US threats, the very fact that he has not initiated any serious retaliations, including walking out of the nuclear deal with the 5+1 world powers, shows that even the more conservative factions of the Iranian regime are concerned and do not want to upset an unpredictable president in the White House.

That is why, until last week many Iranians had assumed that, despite failing to improve the economic and political situation in the country, in next month's presidential elections Hassan Rouhani, Iran's current president, will face such weak rivals that his re-election could be taken for granted. In an unprecedented move the supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, had publicly discouraged former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad from standing for what would have been his third period as Iran's president.

Whether it was coincidence or a response to the bombing of the Syrian air base, all this changed last week. On April 6, news came through that rightwing cleric Ebrahim Raisi had asked the supreme leader whether he would be forbidden from standing in the presidential elections, ayatollah Khamenei's response was negative. Soon afterwards, one of the main conservative religious coalition groups, the Popular Front of Revolutionary Forces, issued a statement naming Raisi as a contender, declaring: "The first step for change is to form a powerful and aware administration for serving people and fighting discrimination, poverty and corruption."

By April 9, Raisi had confirmed his candidacy and came out with clear criticisms of the current administration, including the policy of pursuing a deal with the 5+1. He said:

People are asking why despite all our resources and human talents ... our country is in this situation. The key solution to our problems is fundamental change in the executive management of the country by the will of the people, and the formation of a competent and knowledgeable government that works day and night to bring back the dignity of the people and fights poverty and corruption.

Raisi had been groomed to be a candidate for the position of supreme leader (there are persistent rumours that Khamenei is in poor health, so the issue of his succession is now very pertinent). So why the demotion and the declaration of his candidacy for a more junior position?

Iranians have been debating these questions over the last few days and, while some believe he was never going to be a serious contender for supreme leader, others say that becoming president will prepare him for the top job. There are also those who think that senior clerics want to assess his popularity, or lack of



Ebrahim Raisi: presidential hopeful

it, while some contend that he could only be a temporary supreme leader - after all, that position is surely reserved for Khamenei's son, the super-rich and super-corrupt Mojtaba Khamenei.

Whatever one thinks of Raisi's future, he already holds a very powerful position as the head of a multibillion-dollar religious foundation that manages donations to Iran's holiest Shi'ite shrine city of Mashhad. As a deluded cleric who constantly talks of moral purity (last year he was instrumental in banning a number of musical concerts in Mashhad), he certainly has some of the qualities needed to become president or indeed supreme leader - not least duplicity and pretence. Every year around 345,000 foreign tourists visit the city, and, according to Iran's statistical office, on average each pilgrim spends around \$1,500 - or \$517 million in total.

However, it is well known that Iraqi men who come to Mashhad are also customers of the city's sizeable population of sex workers. Officials turn a blind eye, as prostitution falls under the *sigheh* laws, which permit men to engage in 'temporary marriage' (sometimes lasting less than an hour). An AIDS charity worker told me recently that the number of drug addicts and AIDS sufferers is considerably higher in Mashhad than any other Iranian city. Yet, as I say, here the religious authorities ban concerts of classical Iranian music because, in the words of ayatollah Ahmad Alamolhoda, who leads Friday prayers in Mashhad, they "break the sanctity" of the holy city. Now Iranians can look forward to a Raisi presidency where, in true Shia tradition, the kind of duplicity with which he has ruled Khorassan province will be extended to the rest of the country. Ironically, when Raisi announced his

candidacy, he claimed that he would not use the considerable religious and financial advantages of his current position to boost his electoral chances - a claim few Iranians believe.

In fact, he is only one of five conservative candidates. The others include the mayor of Tehran, Mohammad Ghalibaf, who stands accused of some culpability for the big fire that destroyed a major building in central Tehran, costing the lives of 75 people, including 25 firefighters. There are also rumours that Ahmadinejad's controversial brother-in-law, Iranian supremacist Esfandiar Mashayei, will be standing, and, interestingly, in defiance of the supreme leader, Ahmadinejad himself submitted his own nomination papers on April 12.

After the deadline of April 15, the Council of Guardians will vet the list of candidates - only those it considers suitable are allowed to stand. The council, which is one of the Shia state's most influential organs, is currently dominated by conservatives.

In the last few months the 'reformist' factions of the Islamic regime have lost a number of senior allies, including in the Council of Guardians. Four years ago, when Rouhani was elected, he benefited from the support of a number of senior ayatollahs, three of whom are no longer alive. Given the rather vocal animosity between Khamenei and Rouhani over the last few months, there are those who believe the council might even consider disqualifying Rouhani from standing for a second term, leaving the space clear for one of the conservative candidates.

However, the supreme leader and his allies have learned from the demonstrations and protests that followed the presidential elections of 2009 and are

unlikely to tempt fate again by barring Rouhani. Instead they will rely on the fact that he has failed to deliver most of the electoral promises he made in 2013 - conservative politicians are making a lot of that in the current Twitter war with the 'reformist' camp. Added to that, there are those among the 'reformists' who blame Rouhani for failing to obtain the release of leaders such as Mir-Hossain Moussavi and Mehdi Karubi, and continuing the ban preventing former president Mohammad Khatami from making public appearances.

### Iraq and Syria

It is in this tumultuous political context that the US air raid in Syria, together with Iraq's distancing itself from Iran and attempted realignment with the US, has added to the conflict between factions of the Iranian regime. The arguments are no longer just about the nuclear deal - Iran's role in the region, its relationship with Syria's Bashar al-Assad and the Shia government in Iraq, not forgetting the alliance with Hezbollah, are all being debated.

During a recent visit to the United States of the Iraqi prime minister, Haider al-Abadi, Donald Trump used the occasion to air his well known opposition to the Iran nuclear deal and he made it very clear that continued support for Iraq in its attempts to "fight terrorism" depends on how far the Shia government distances itself from Iran. The Trump administration wants to bring Baghdad closer to Saudi Arabia as part of the plan to reduce Iran's influence in the region - last month it facilitated meetings between al-Abadi and Saudi ministers and royals, and deputy crown prince Mohammed bin Salman met the Iraqi premier in March.

However, the Iraqi government faces strong opposition in relation to these new policies: Sheikh Qais al-Khazali, head of the League of the Righteous, a faction within the Popular Mobilisation Units (PMUs), recently said:

The US aims to strengthen its influence in the areas west of Iraq and east of Syria and to start the partition project ... there is a dangerous conspiracy against the PMU, but we will not allow any attempt to dissolve or undermine our organisations.

Al-Abadi faces local elections this year and a general election next year and he is unlikely to emerge victorious without Iran's help. Furthermore his new-found allies in Washington will not improve his chances of re-election, at a time when his government is accused by all political groups - Shia, Sunni and secular - of corruption and incompetence.

In this context one can understand this week's statement by militia leader and cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, who became one of the first, but by no means the only, voice from within the Shia political and religious leadership in Iraq to call on Assad to quit. Al-Sadr would consider it "fair" for the president to resign, to "allow the dear people of Syria to avoid the scourge of war and terrorist oppression". He added that both Washington and Moscow "should stop intervening in the conflict".

This is significant because a number of Iraqi Shia militias - some of them directly supported by Iran - have fighters in Syria helping Assad's efforts to stay in power. Al-Sadr's statement was interpreted as a reflection of growing opinion among sections of the Shia clergy that it is time to stop defending Assad. Back in Tehran, on April 10 Rouhani condemned what he called "US aggression" in Syrian territory, but added: "We also believe that certain reforms are necessary to take place in Syria. We recommend elections, polls and democracy in Syria, as everywhere else in the world." A true champion of democracy!

Clearly in an election year, and given the threat of further sanctions and military strikes, Iran's Shia leaders are unlikely to go out of their way to save Assad, who is in any case too secular for their taste. The Syrian dictator's best hope is that the likes of Hezbollah in Lebanon can convince Tehran that Iran's regional strategic interests lie in supporting a unified Syrian state, be it under a different leader ●

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