

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



# weekly worker



**Emmanuel Macron has won himself a Bonapartist position of power in France**

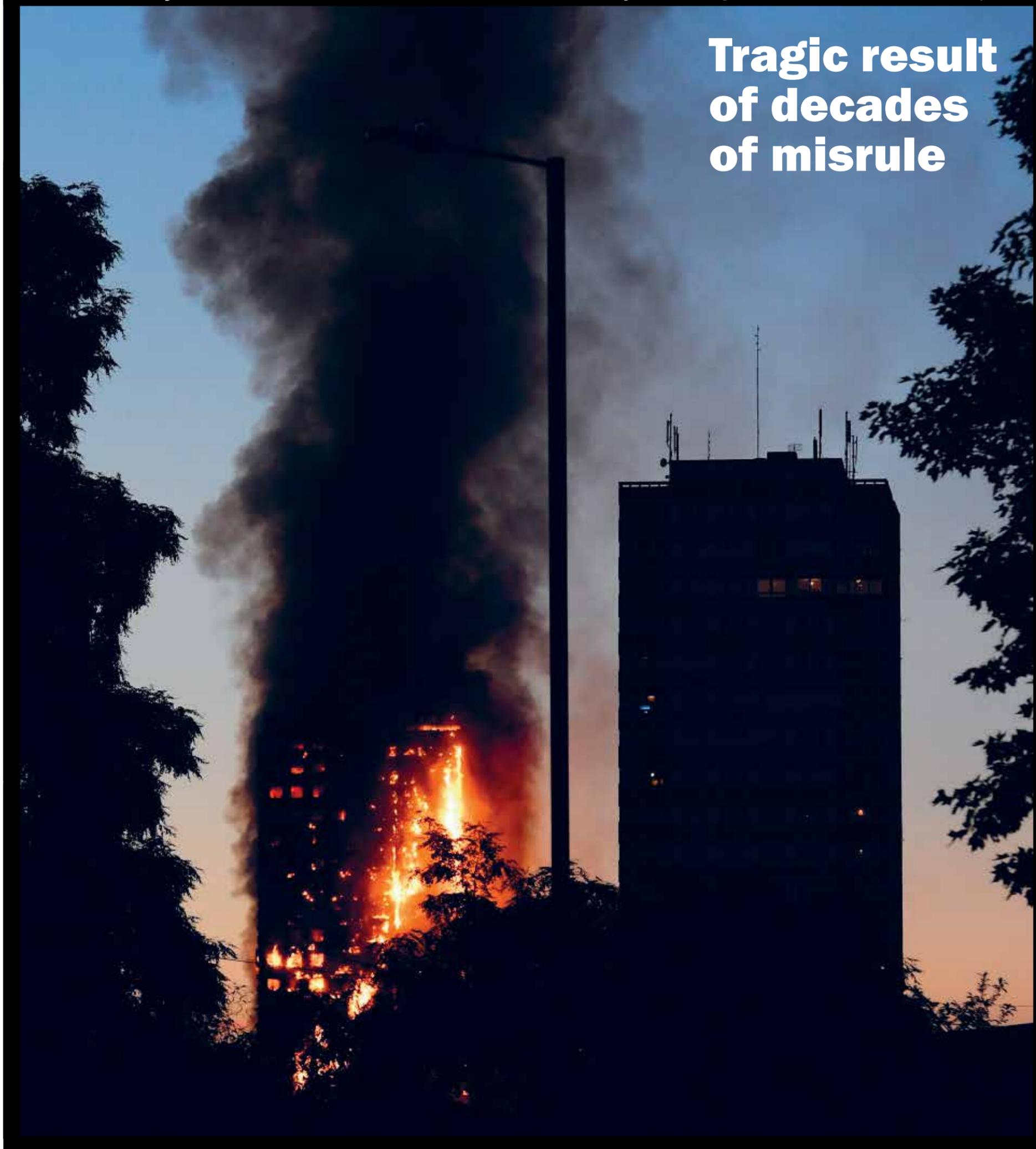
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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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**Tragic result  
of decades  
of misrule**



# LETTERS



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

## Splitter

Stan Keable is right to warn us that on achieving office a Corbyn-led Labour government would encounter extra-parliamentary subversion, including possible mutiny from sections of the military in alliance with the monarchy and deep state (Letters, June 15). For this reason, all of us in the Labour Party need to be aware of the dangers. We need to distinguish between office in parliament and real state power.

At the Labour Representation Committee's members meeting in London on June 10, Stan spelled out his own personal conclusion. Because Labour's current leftwing manifesto includes no pledge to abolish the monarchy and replace the standing army with a people's militia, we are clearly unprepared. Even should Labour win a majority of seats, according to Stan, we should therefore refuse to form a government, let other parties rule in our place and set about educating the working class.

In reply, Nick Rogers pointed out that this would amount to organising our own coup against ourselves. Graham Bash summed up Stan's message as 'Labour - don't take the power!' - which, of course, is the opposite of *Labour Briefing's* classic slogan. I regret to say that we were all splitting our sides laughing at this point.

I was later relieved to discover that Stan's bizarre position is not necessarily that of the *Weekly Worker*. But I am still worried. From what I have heard, the position of the CPGB is that our immediate aim should not be to force a general election, win a landslide majority, get rid of the Tories and put Jeremy into number 10. Instead, so I am told, the left's current order of priorities must be reversed. We must first educate Labour to adopt the CPGB's full programme and only then seek office in parliament.

This whole position is so flatly at variance with that of Lenin and Trotsky in 1917, so contrary to everything Marx taught and - in short - so utterly absurd, that I can only hope it is not meant seriously.

**Chris Knight** (personal capacity)  
*Labour Briefing* editorial board

## Morose

Clearly, Dave Vincent's expectation was that Labour would lose on June 8, and lose badly. No shame in that; many commentators concurred - including prominent writers on this paper. This false assumption presumably explains why he told us that "there is no point talking of [unions affiliating] until we see the state of the Labour Party after the general election" (Letters, June 1).

A rather docile attitude, but again not totally unreasonable. So, to give some context to our current discussion on union affiliation, shall we now have a little peek at that post-election "state" ...?

We find a mass membership - including a high percentage of young people amongst the intake - with left illusions in Corbyn and the Labour manifesto. We note that Corbyn is still clearly subject to pressures from the right (and still prone to buckling to them); but he is also more firmly ensconced in the Labour Party saddle than at any time since he won the leadership election in September 2015. The Labour Party's nature as a bourgeois workers' party is thus reaffirmed - and given dramatic expression in that ongoing struggle between its contending wings.

So what's Dave's problem? In truth, he agrees with us on the historical significance of Corbyn's victory: "if Labour loses on June 8 we would not get another leader like Jeremy for a generation, nor would we get a manifesto like the current one for a long time," he writes. What about Labour as that

awkward amalgam, a 'bourgeois workers' party'? Dave also ticks this box, when he castigates the Socialist Party for their "portrayal of Labour as a thoroughly bourgeois party" - it is clearly "wrong", he states.

So what exactly is his beef? It seems to come down to the idea that "If all the unions currently affiliated to the Labour Party haven't pulled it left, if the creation of the super-unions has not pulled it left, what are the chances that PCS, plus the RMT and NUT, can do so? What would actually happen is that PCS would be told to shut up, not to spoil Labour's election chances and, like all the rest, we would be expected to subordinate our members' interests to those of whatever is deemed electorally best for Labour."

This is very odd reasoning - made odder by the fact that the comrade feels it is useful to remind us of the treacherous record of attacks on civil servants by the last Labour government: "job cuts, pay restraint, regional pay in the ministry of justice, office closures, outsourcing..." He also speculates that Peter Manson - who challenged him to explain his stubborn opposition to PCS affiliation ("Left should not stand on sidelines", June 8) - "seems to have forgotten it wasn't the Labour left that powered Corbyn onto the ballot paper in the first Labour leadership contest", but the patronising largesse of Labour's rightwing "morons", and that "no-one, including Corbyn himself, expected him to win".

All the above is well known - but so what, for god's sake? We were delivered a leftwing leader of the Labour Party in the form of a political accident. However, it's here; our job now is to take advantage of this historic opening, while it exists. Already, it has unleashed the latent mass discontent against establishment politics, against the convergence of the main parties around a pro-capitalist consensus and - crucially - given it organisational form. Despite the left's organisational weakness and political confusion, we are now presented with what amounts to an historic opportunity to remake the Labour Party, to consolidate masses of working people into a left political organisation, to cleanse the culture of our movement top to bottom and make genuine socialism a 'common sense' political outlook for millions.

If anything, Dave seems a little peeved that this is happening at all. It presents an awkward challenge to a neat little template of political/union activism that has probably served him well since the days of Blair. This might account for his passive, deeply conservative outlook when he surveys the immediate prospects for Labour - he actually doesn't want things to change and actively campaigns for no-one to try!

Thus, Corbyn's electoral success will just mean that "after the ... humble pie eating by most of the backstabbers, Labour is now united behind their leader" (Letters, June 15). No more civil war in the party - you can have that on Dave's authority.

What of the hundreds of thousands who have been drawn into the ranks to support the leftwing leader? "If they do not attend constituency meetings (let alone have any understanding of the rules and constitution to try to effect change), how does the left influence them or the party?" Pointless trying to educate and activate them, then. Dave has decided for us. Given this "near total inactivity of the new younger members (in terms of their making any demands on the party)", Dave can already tell us the composition of September's Labour Party conference: "Starry-eyed youngsters, keen to become MPs, who do not make awkward demands on the party."

He asks if the existing Labour left has grown? He asks if the "Chartists' demand for MPs to be subject to instant recall and to be paid an ordinary worker's wage" has been implemented yet? And "what about the expulsions and membership bars during the coup? Has Jeremy demanded

these be overturned?" He wants answers on "allowing left organisations into the Labour Party". No-one has sent Dave an email bringing glad tidings that all these criteria have been met, so the Labour Party will have to totter along without him for the foreseeable future.

Missing from all of Dave's glum analysis is any dynamic of change, of the art of political opportunity and struggle. (This also accounts for his quite distasteful views on the alleged immutable nature of migrant workers' political outlook. I don't have space to go into detail on that, other than to observe that the sure-fire way to confirm the reactionary prejudices of these workers is to have the indigenous workers' movement adopt an attitude of institutionalised hostility to them.)

He thus finishes up with a thoroughly defeatist stance, a worship of the established facts of the movement the way it is, not the tangible potential for change that is so palpable in today's situation. All of which makes for pretty morose stuff. Dave makes Marvin the Paranoid Android look like a Butlin's redcoat.

**William Sarsfield**  
email

## Accomplice

Peter Manson ends his 'Left should not stand on sidelines' article (June 8) with the declaration: "The world belongs to all its peoples and our long-term aim as communists is to abolish all borders and achieve universal emancipation within a single global entity." I couldn't agree more. My only caveat would be that this is not a "long-term aim" but one of our immediate demands.

But what can be said about Dave Vincent's nationalist nonsense? According to him, it is not capitalism and its cut-throat competition of the labour market, nor its incapacity to adequately provide for the needs of people, which is at fault, but his fellow workers from abroad. All workers regardless of place of birth have but one enemy - the employing class - and Dave overlooks that fact to direct our frustrations and anger at newcomers.

Capitalism divides workers. Always has and always will. Only with socialism is there a lasting solution. The interests of the socialist movement and of the day-to-day struggle require that the workers of all nationalities be united. The struggle between native and foreign-born to sell themselves in the auction of the wage-slave market has engendered bitter xenophobic feelings and, so that they might bid more fiercely against one another, the masters fan this prejudice. Dave is proving to be an able accomplice.

Working people have only two choices: either let the bosses play us off against each other until we hit rock-bottom or unite and fight for decent wages and benefits for all. Nothing can be more dangerous for the ruling class than that indigenous and migrant workers should make common cause and, instead of fighting each other, join forces and fight the employers.

Dave simplistically blames the "Poles", even using the invective, "scabs", to describe them. He'd feel better if they all went back to Poland and, following his own logic, proceeded to kick out the million Ukrainian migrant workers there. And then Dave can be free to conduct a campaign to discourage the Scots and the Welsh from seeking work elsewhere, and later he can pick on those Geordies and Scousers who have the temerity to move home to better themselves. Damn, and what about those living on the wrong side of town stealing the jobs of "our community"?

**Alan Johnstone**  
SPGB

## Terrorist?

On July 10, Ben Stimson will go on trial in Manchester charged with two offences in violation of the British anti-terrorism legislation - for participation in the preparation of terrorist acts, and the promotion of a

third party in their commission.

The BBC interviewed him while he was with the Donbass militia in eastern Ukraine in October 2015, and filmed him saying he would be prepared to kill if his life was threatened, and he would see it as an act of war. Ben denied any involvement in military action, saying he had gone to the country to drive ambulances and at the time of the interview was trying to get away from the militia.

Ben is of Irish-Jewish parentage and was deeply affected by the explicitly fascist symbols flown by battalions like the Azov Brigade and the Right Sector. In the beginning the prison authorities confiscated the letters and the magazines I sent, because, they said, he is not allowed any political communications. The reason they gave was that the letter or publication could harm his rehabilitation. So they see it as a thought crime to oppose the work of the CIA abroad. The threat of legal action by the Revolutionary Communist Group resulted in the letters getting through.

Ben reports that he is subjected to vile anti-Semitic abuse. "Throw some Zyklon B in with him," said one guard and another boasted of being "in the fascist party". The prison authorities dismissed all his complaints about this, saying they were "offensive". He says he fears for his personal safety, as jihadists are allowed on the wing and they know he is Jewish.

The "legitimate government of Ukraine" was installed in a coup organised by the CIA. The coup was led by thugs who proudly display World War II fascist symbols. In fact, the "legitimate government of Ukraine" is the only government in the world to honour as a national hero a Nazi collaborator, Stepan Bandera, who slaughtered thousands of Jews.

Historian Karel Berkhoff, among others, has shown that Bandera, his deputies and the Nazis shared a key obsession: namely the notion that the Jews in Ukraine were behind communism and Stalinist imperialism, and must be destroyed. "The Jews of the Soviet Union," read a Banderist statement, "are the most loyal supporters of the Bolshevik regime and the vanguard of Muscovite imperialism in the Ukraine." When the Nazis invaded the USSR in June 1941, Bandera's lieutenants issued a declaration of independence in his name. They further promised to work closely with Hitler, then helped to launch a pogrom that killed four thousand Jews in a few days, using weapons ranging from guns to metal poles. "We will lay your heads at Hitler's feet," a Banderist pamphlet proclaimed to Ukrainian Jews.

Graham Philips, the independent journalist who reports extensively on the Ukraine, says in his blog: "However, in any case, Ben's situation has my full support. As a point of principle, I absolutely support a verdict of innocent for Ben. The UK justice system must be fair, and consistent. How can it be that a man who goes to fight for a neo-Nazi Ukrainian battalion is free to walk the streets of the UK absolutely untouched?"

The reference is to Chris Garrett, who had fought for Ukraine's neo-Nazi Azov battalion, who had Nazi flags and symbols everywhere, he tells us. He was not arrested when he returned to the UK, although he did admit to killing "a separatist" - as opposed to Ben, who said he would kill if he had to save his own life.

It is now more than three years after the Odessa massacre of May 2014. Ukrainian Maidan nationalists and Nazis were brought to the city by buses to stop the anti-government protests. They burnt alive 46 protestors in the Odessa trade union house, clubbed to death those who jumped from the windows to escape the fire, hanged a pregnant woman cleaner and the whole fascist mob cheered when her death screams ended and the murderer appeared at the window to celebrate. The Kiev government refused to investigate the case and concentrates on arresting and harassing the surviving protestors and their relatives. More than any other event,

this signalled to those in the Donbass that they had to defend themselves against these fascist thugs.

And that is why Ben Stimson went to the Donbass to fight. He is a heroic anti-fascist fighter and the left and every principled anti-fascist should attend his trial and support him in every way possible.

**Gerry Downing**  
Socialist Fight

## Rescind

I sent the letter below to my MP, Tulip Siddiq:

As your constituent, and member of the Queen's Park branch of the Labour Party, I wish to extend to you my heartfelt congratulations on your - and our - marvellous triumph in the June 8 general election. This triumph is a fitting tribute to the party, to its radical leadership and to you personally.

At the same time, I must express my disquiet, disappointment and dismay upon discovering that you have subscribed to a pledge supporting the racist settler state of Israel. This is especially hurtful to me, as an Israeli socialist, lifelong opponent of the Zionist project of colonisation. How could you bring yourself to pledge yourself "To celebrate the fact that Israel is a free society and parliamentary democracy that extends to all its citizens the right to practise their religion and have access to religious sites in Jerusalem"?

You must surely be aware of the fact that this democracy is similar in one major respect to Athenian democracy: it rules over a large population of disenfranchised persons, deprived of basic human rights. In the case of Athens it was women and slaves; in the case of Israel it is the millions of Palestinians in the West Bank and in the world's largest concentration camp, the besieged and starved Gaza Strip.

How could you pledge to support the sly "International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of anti-Semitism"? You must surely be aware of the considered, authoritative opinions of legal experts, such as Hugh Tomlinson QC and Sir Stephen Sedley (emeritus Appeal Court Judge, who happens to be of Jewish background). These opinions clearly imply that this so-called definition is highly suspect and is disingenuously designed to conflate anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism and to shield Israel and Zionism from legitimate criticism. As such, adherence to this "definition" may well lead to illegal suppression of freedom of speech.

I cannot believe that you have signed the pro-Israel pledge out of true conviction. I would very much like to believe that you signed it carelessly, without giving it much thought. If so, I urge you to reread the despicable pledge and to rescind your signature.

There is, however, another possibility, which I hope is not the case; namely, that you signed that pledge out of opportunistic motives, so as to curry favour with the pro-Zionist section of the local Jewish community and secure their support.

If this was your motive - which, I repeat, I hope is not the case - then your signature is not only immoral, but also short-sighted on pragmatic grounds. While the pro-Zionist section of the local Jewish community is well-organised and (apparently) well-funded, it by no means encompasses all Jews in this constituency, or in the local Labour Party. In fact, there are a very large number of people in this constituency, Jews and non-Jews alike, who are highly critical of the racist state of Israel, and who would find the pledge that you have signed objectionable. Surely you cannot wish to alienate this large, and growing, number of your constituents and would-be supporters?

I urge you to reconsider and rescind your signature of the pledge.

**Moshé Machover**  
email

# ECONOMY



Brussels: preparing for negotiations

## Capital in disarray

The UK economy is set to enter a period of recession, argues Michael Roberts

The fact that there is now a hung parliament puts the Brexit talks with the European Union in a mess, as there is no “strong and stable” government to negotiate with. But this is more than a disaster for May and the Conservatives: it is one for the British ruling class.

The negotiations over the terms of Brexit started on June 19 and the EU will face British negotiators who have lost their majority in parliament. The terms of any deal are going to be hard on the interests of British capital: on the terms of trade, employment mobility and on capital flows for the City of London.

At the same time, the UK economy is already struggling. In the first quarter of 2017, the UK’s real GDP grew more slowly than any other top (G7) economy. The British pound dropped sharply after the election result and it is likely to fall further, as foreign investors consider their options, given the uncertainty of what will happen with Brexit and the paralysed position of a minority Conservative government unable to carry out any economic policy measures.

Sterling has already fallen by over 15% since the Brexit referendum result last year. That has led to substantial rise in prices in the shops from higher import prices. Inflation is likely to rise further, driving down real incomes for the average British household. And that is after British households have suffered the longest stagnation in real incomes in the last 166 years!

The UK trade deficit with the rest of the world keeps widening, as British exporters fail to take advantage of a weaker pound and import prices rise. The reason that British capital is not gaining from the devaluation of the currency is that British manufacturing and services are still not competitive, because productivity growth is virtually zero.

It is nine years since the start of the global financial crash in 2008. Since then, real GDP per person in the major economies has risen on average at less than 1% a year - well below the trend average before the global crash. Germany has done best, with a cumulative rise of 8.7%, even better than the ‘lucky country’, Australia (6.8%). But the UK has managed just 2% over nine years!

The main reason is the sharp fallback in the growth of the productivity of labour. The UK economy has depended instead for its (limited) growth since the end of the great recession on a consumer boom and a big increase in immigration of young people from eastern Europe and the EU. According to the most recent Office for National Statistics figures, there has been no increase in the number of UK-born in employment over the last year. All the net increase in employment has been due to those born abroad. If the Brexit negotiations go according to May’s stated intentions and the free movement of labour is lost, British business is going to have to rely on domestic labour and skills. Employment growth will slow and national output will falter, unless productivity rises.

And the main reason why productivity will not rise is the failure of British businesses to invest in productive capital: ie, new machinery, plant and computer software. Business investment has hardly risen since the great recession, even as profitability recovered.

That is because profits were concentrated in the large companies, while the small and medium-sized companies made little and could not get credit.<sup>1</sup> The large companies (mainly tech and finance) returned their profits to shareholders in dividends and share buybacks or held cash abroad in tax havens, rather than

invest. And business profitability in the UK started to fall back even before the Brexit vote.

All this means that the UK economy is set to enter a period of stagnation at best. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’s economists are already forecasting that the UK economy will slow down to just 1% next year, as Brexit bites. And there is every likelihood of a new global recession in the next year or two.

After the 2015 election which the Conservatives won narrowly, I argued that the victory was a poisoned chalice and the Tories would not win the next election.<sup>2</sup> I said that because of the likely global recession before 2020. But Brexit cut across all that for a while. This result was partly a follow-up from Brexit, as the Conservatives did better in the areas that voted to leave the EU and Labour did better in those that voted to stay in. But now the election also brought back the issue of living standards of the many against the wealth of the few. That led to May’s failure.

This minority Conservative government is going to find it difficult to survive for long. There could well be a new general election before the year is out and that could well lead to a Labour government aiming to reverse the neoliberal policies of the last 30 years. But if the UK capitalist economy is in dire straits, a Labour government will face an immediate challenge to the implementation of its policies ●

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

### Notes

1. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2017/01/23/beware-the-zombies>.  
2. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2015/05/08/uk-election-a-poisoned-chalice>.

# ACTION

## London Communist Forum

Sunday June 25: No forum.

Sunday July 2, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Followed by open discussion and reading group: study of August Nimitz’s *Lenin’s electoral strategy from Marx and Engels through the revolution of 1905*. This meeting: chapter 1, ‘What Marx and Engels bequeathed’ (continued).

Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk); and Labour Party Marxists: [www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](http://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk).

## Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday June 27, 6.45pm: Series of talks on language, art, music and culture, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1. This meeting: ‘Jack and the beanstalk: its place in world mythology’. Speaker: Chris Knight.

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

## Red banner, green rosette

Thursday June 22, 7pm: Launch of David Douglass’s new book, Holly Hill social club, Benson Terrace, Felling NE10. Followed by concert - music from Ireland and the Tyneside coalfield, with the Geordie Shamrocks and Tony Corcoran Band. Entrance £3.

Organised by Follonsby (Wardley) Miners Lodge Association: <https://en-gb.facebook.com/follonsby>.

## Living on the edge

Monday June 26, 9am to 4.30pm: Conference, Congress House, London WC1. ‘The rise of job insecurity in Britain.’

Organised by TUC: [www.tuc.org.uk](http://www.tuc.org.uk).

## Social histories of the Russian Revolution

Thursday June 29, 6.30pm: Discussion meeting, Birkbeck, University of London, 26 Russell Square, London WC1. ‘The working class and the first five-year plan, 1928-32’. Speaker: Don Filtzer.

Organised by Social Histories of the Russian Revolution: <https://socialhistories1917.wordpress.com>.

## The revolution will be photocopied

Saturday July 1, 6pm to midnight: Art exhibition, Library, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. Bar available (last entry 11.30pm) Free admission.

Organised by Bishopsgate Institute: [www.bishopsgate.org.uk](http://www.bishopsgate.org.uk).

## Happy birthday, NHS

Saturday July 1 to Wednesday 5, all day: Street parties followed by national day of action in support of the NHS, nationwide. ‘No cuts, no closures, no privatisation’.

Organised by People’s Assembly: [www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk](http://www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk).

## National Shop Stewards Network

Saturday July 1: Annual conference cancelled.

## Not one more day

Saturday July 1, 12 noon: Protest against continued Tory government. Assemble BBC Broadcasting House, Portland Place, London W1, for march to parliament.

Organised by People’s Assembly: [www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk](http://www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk).

## The big meeting

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

Organised by Durham Miners Association: [www.durhamminers.org/gala](http://www.durhamminers.org/gala).

## 200 years of protest

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

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

## Tolpuddle 2017

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

Organised by Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival: [www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk](http://www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk).

## It starts here!

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

Organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade: [www.facebook.com/campaignagainstarmstrade](http://www.facebook.com/campaignagainstarmstrade).

## Das Kapital and Marx’s economics

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

Hosted by Marx Memorial Library: [www.marx-memorial-library.org](http://www.marx-memorial-library.org).

## No to the arms trade

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

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

## Book hunting?

Saturday September 9, 11am to 3pm: Book sale, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Quarterly book sale including socialist histories and Marxist classics.

Organised by Marx Memorial Library: [www.marx-memorial-library.org](http://www.marx-memorial-library.org).

## CPGB wills

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

**GRENFELL**

# Fire in Babylon

This is a disaster that results from decades of misrule, argues **Paul Demarty**

The death toll of the Grenfell Tower fire, as I write, has hit 79. For comparison's sake, that is pretty close to the total number of people who died in terrorist attacks on British soil since 9/11.

If anything, the public mood is more enraged. On some level, the average Briton understands the terrorist attacker, even if only so far as that he is the enemy, and enemies are wont to kill you. There is anger, and the desire for revenge, but ultimately not surprise. But this is the 21st century, it is Britain, and it is London - it is Kensington! Buildings do not burn down like this. No comparable fire has taken place for a century.

So surprise turns to anger. Who is to blame? The potential culprits line up for consideration: the shoddy lowest-bidder contractors who installed the exterior cladding leading so spectacularly to disaster are an easy scapegoat. The Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO), whose job it is to - among other things - make sure public housing in the borough is not committed to a fiery doom, has plainly failed, and has ignored concerns over fire safety for years. The buck stops locally with the council itself, which was an early and especially enthusiastic adopter of the sort of privatisation of housing management the KCTMO exemplifies (so-called arms-length management organisations), and is dominated by Tories who plainly consider their remaining council tenants a blight on an otherwise shapely neighbourhood. (Unlike in days of yore, when London County Council had the power to build houses, Sadiq Khan's mayoral office - and that of his predecessors - could not have done a whole lot.)

Yet even this, it turns out, is too small a canvas on which to paint the gutted husk of Grenfell Tower. Gavin Barwell (until recently housing minister - a high turnover job, in which nobody seems to achieve anything - but now Theresa May's chief advisor) ignored repeated warnings about the dangerous state of Britain's tower blocks. Eric Pickles, whose brief under David Cameron was sticking the knife into municipal government, was confronted with evidence of such failings, and merely passed the buck to councils, presumably knowing full well that the cuts he and his odious *confrères* had imposed meant that nothing would be done. A wholesome diet of porridge would do this corpulent ogre no end of good - if a cell can be found to fit him.

When a minister gets dragged in, however, so does the stubborn tradition of collective responsibility, and thus ultimately the prime minister. There is never a good time for a disaster of this type, but it could not have come at a worse moment for Theresa May, who has stumbled, bewildered, into the worst graces of the British media, having unforgivably failed to bury Jeremy Corbyn two weeks ago. Like Gordon Brown in 2010, she is unable to do anything right, and so it is unsurprising that initially she kept clear of displaced Grenfell residents, who could not be expected to greet her with any warmth. When that resulted in widespread condemnation of her cowardice, she submitted to a TV interview, which was found - after the fashion of many of her experiences in that capacity - to be wanting in terms of human warmth, and indeed the ability to say more than one thing during the course of a several-minute-long conversation. The mavens



**Justified anger has to be politically channelled**

of the bourgeois commentariat have commended Khan, by way of contrast, for taking the heckles on the chin.

## Anger

In the end, there is no shortage of blame to go around, and so it is being spread around quite liberally. In a typically ebullient think-piece for *Socialist Worker*, Charlie Kimber writes that the fire "sums up everything that is wrong in Britain" (as an aside: *everything*, comrade Kimber? There is an awful lot of Britain, and an awful lot wrong). "But it has become central and potentially transforming because people are fighting back. Instead of 'dignified' silence and acceptance, the residents and their supporters have chosen the dignity of struggle."<sup>1</sup>

This is to put too fine a point on it. The rage of those affected, and those who most readily identify with those affected, is genuine and entirely unsurprising. It is also directed, it seems, at almost anyone available with a petty fragment of authority to their name. It is certainly true that the socialist convictions we share with Charlie have much to say about the catalogue of crimes that led to the fire, but not at all obvious that the anger at the base amounts to "struggle" in the more elevated sense that he means it - a rung somewhere on the ladder up to revolutionary insurrection.

We are reminded, oddly, of a much less bloody episode - that of the MPs' expenses scandal of 2009, where more or less everyone in parliament was (*quelle surprise!*) found to be ripping off the taxpayer for personal advantage, in activities ranging from the petty (being too cheap to buy a Fruit Corner yoghurt) to the fatuously extravagant (mock-Tudor roof-beams and duck-houses for the country pile), to the patently exploitative (financial fiddles to extract rent and other forms of profit from taxpayer-funded residences). People were angry, oh yes, and one could hardly fault them, or indeed resist joining in - such was the morally contemptible graft on display. It is not at all clear that it helped the left. The most widespread 'radical' demand at the time was for the queen to dissolve parliament, and the immediate electoral consequence was the far-right breakthrough in the European parliament elections, with the post-fascist British National Party taking two seats and the UK Independence Party pipping Labour to second place.

Today, we are talking charred corpses rather than duck houses. But the spontaneous and righteous anger

is just as elemental and inelegantly directed. The establishment is plainly in damage-control mode, but is not doomed to failure in this endeavour. The queen was sent in. May, even, has managed to calm things down by meeting displaced residents at Downing Street, with a bishop sitting in mediation. The £5,500 bribe she has offered has not, truth be told, been met with the scorn it deserves,<sup>3</sup> seeing as people no doubt badly need the money. Naturally, we have an interminable public inquiry to look forward to, which will no doubt conclude, after squandering a great deal of treasure, that the building really ought not on the whole to have burnt down, but nobody is to blame for the unfortunate circumstance that it did.

Rather than merely cheerleading popular anger, we would be better served working out exactly how such a calamity came to be possible, and indeed to happen, and how we might contribute to avoiding such events in the future. There is nothing special about Grenfell Tower as a building (nor even, rather ominously, about its recently installed flammable cladding). There is nothing remarkable about its residents, bar their sudden plunge in average life expectancy. This is a mass death foretold - most notoriously by the residents themselves, who had been on at the council over fire safety for years with no luck, but also anyone who looks at the reality of housing in this country.

## Bad to worse

How did things get this bad? We must first of all point out that the prevailing direction, if not the explicit purpose, of housing policy in Britain since Margaret Thatcher's first government is to return things in substance to the *status quo ante* 1900. Owner-occupiers and landlords are to occupy a distinct stratum of society over and above the rest of us. The remainder of the middle class and the better-off among the workers will be permitted the privilege of paying exorbitant rents for adequate housing; everyone else, barring a tiny and arbitrarily selected coterie of the 'deserving poor', will be subjected to the capricious attention of slumlords, living in pestilential and unsafe conditions.

The corollary to this fact is that the three decades following the war, which saw huge expansion in public housing provision, are not the 'normal' reality of society, from which Thatcher deviated for reasons of ideological fervour (though fervid she and her colleagues certainly were). The reverse

is the case: *mass social housing is the aberration*, precarious and exploitative living arrangements the norm; British capitalist governments have been busily restoring the 'natural' order in the recent historical period.

The 'aberrant' period was not without its contradictions, of course, which were ably exploited by rightist demagogues of various types. The post-war housing boom was, in many cities, a matter of rebuilding an urban landscape devastated by aerial bombardment and otherwise pinched and left to rot by the privations of wartime. It was a vast project, and accumulated around it a kind of messianic *mien*, exemplified by the utopian designs of a generation of architects brought up on the ideals of path-breaking modernists like Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius of the Bauhaus school.

We are tempted, in the case of such people, to take the old idea that being determines consciousness unusually literally. Here were architects who seemed to believe that a vast set of social problems were amenable to solution by the proper design of the built environment. Many of them were radical in a more traditional sense - left social democratic or 'official communist' exiles from German or Austrian fascism. Their designs ran from compact houses to tower blocks, and even the layout of entire suburbs and city centres.

In the conservative imagination, it is the dictatorial conceit of the architects that is squarely to blame for the failure of post-war modernism, but that is hardly true. The law of unintended consequences, which certainly had its revenge on the ideologists of 'streets in the sky', need not lead to unpleasant consequences - merely unpredictable emergent behaviour. For the sink estates and crime and all the other blights of the council estate, the monolithic imagination of the architects had to merge with a mindset in municipal government focused primarily on numbers, packing people into flats like cans of dog food. Most such projects were not aesthetically ambitious or whatever, but merely took from the brutalists and so on licence to make unornamented buildings, designing them on the cheap, using low-quality materials, and tossing people in to rot.

A point of crisis came with the Ronan Point disaster, where a system-built tower block in east London partially collapsed after a gas explosion, killing four, in 1968. (Grenfell Tower just about post-dates the building

regulations brought in after Ronan Point; otherwise it might well have collapsed. It was certainly not among the more remarkable examples of its genre.) The crisis of the post-war settlement began to deprive the estates of the *ongoing* material support that any major housing site needs to thrive. Thatcher's war on municipal government and sell-off of the stock put the cherry on the cake.

## Political will

Today, the widespread hatred of post-war modernist housing is on the wane; in fact, the great exemplars of brutalism are now highly fashionable. Flats in Ernő Goldfinger's Trellick Tower, not too far away from the scene of the fire, are highly sought after by the London bourgeoisie; its older sister, Balfour Tower in Blackwall, was recently redeveloped to sell to much the same sort of people. The best examples of the style really are well designed, inside and out (contrary to stereotype, Goldfinger did actually spend time living in Balfour Tower), and have no intrinsic reason to fail - as is maddeningly obvious, now that they are sold on to the well-to-do. Whether a building or neighbourhood is tolerable or not is not in the end a matter of civil engineering - anything can be fixed, after all - but of social relations and political will.

To prevent such disasters in future, much needs to happen. Clearly, existing buildings need to be made safe; but they will only ever be *so* safe while housing conditions at large are so insecure. All parties promise to build more houses, and all fail, because in the end they rely on the big house-builders to do it, when it seems the latter are better off controlling supply and indulging in cynical land speculation. (Implicitly, by expecting nine-tenths of its promised million new homes to be private, Labour's recent manifesto is in hock to the same crooks.)

What is needed is a vast expansion in *public* homebuilding, and the reversal of decades of attacks on the autonomy and power of local government to make such things happen. Broad power to seize unused properties from absentee owners would also relieve matters, as would legal protection for those who decide to take occupancy into their own hands (the recent association of squatting with studenty anarchist types should not blind us to its utility as a *political tactic*). Public housing should be available to all who need it (that is, everyone); and those who use it should exercise meaningful democratic control over their living conditions.

The ultimate objective, of course, is to remove housing entirely from the purview of the market. Charlie Kimber overstates the case, but only slightly: to trust the fulfilment of the elementary human need for shelter to capitalism is madness. What better proof of that is there than Kensington and Chelsea, where mansions rot - sold and resold without ever being troubled by a tenant - and the poor are crammed resentfully into bedsits; where ex-prime ministers live comfortably a stone's throw from the blackened remains of Grenfell Tower? ●

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## Notes

1. <https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/44821/Grenfell+Tower+fire+shows+up+everything+wrong+with+our+system+its+time+to+end+it>.
2. I would just love to see this figure rigorously itemised. £268 for your worldly possessions, £800 to bury immolated relatives, £300 for treatment for post-traumatic stress ... Seriously: *five and a half grand?* What contempt.

GRASSROOTS

# Three-minute slots

David Shearer of Labour Party Marxists reports on a less than inspiring meeting

**A**round 120 comrades - including supporters of the Labour Representation Committee, Labour Party Marxists, Red Labour, Red Flag, *The Clarion* and Socialist Fight factions - attended the national meeting called by Grassroots Momentum on June 17. But what was its purpose? There were no motions or any kind of concrete proposals.

Towards the end of the meeting comrade Simon Hannah tried to explain this from the chair by stating that the event had originally been conceived as one where we could organise to defend the party leader following the expected heavy Labour defeat. But, of course, Labour had done far better than expected and for the moment the right is holding back on its anti-Corbyn offensive. So it seems the steering committee just could not think of a set of action proposals to put before us.

The reason for this partially lies in the origins of GR Momentum - comrades had been appalled by the refusal of Jon Lansman (following the orders of Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell no doubt) to contemplate any kind of membership democracy for Momentum, and this led to a rebellion by the majority of its steering committee and the formation of Grassroots Momentum. Everyone knew what they were against, but when it came to what they were for ...

True, the SC issued a kind of wish list for the June 17 meeting: "... we, grassroots members of the Labour Party, must take back control from the right that still dominates the Parliamentary Labour Party and many of the party structures". It reminded us that we are for the "abolition of the hated compliance unit" and that "Iain McNicol must be sacked"; we also want "a reversal of the expulsions and suspensions of all those who were penalised for their socialist beliefs". But the nearest it came to something more concrete was: "We also need meetings of leftwing party members at local, regional and national level in a fully democratic framework ... to coordinate the fight for a socialist Labour Party".

In fact the SC majority is demanding: "The Labour Party must go into emergency election mode", since another snap general election is more than possible and "Our aim is a leftwing Labour government". But that call stood in sharp contrast to the demand that "the NEC urgently organises open parliamentary selection conferences by all members ... rather than the imposition by the bureaucracy of mainly rightwing candidates". Surely a party in "emergency election mode" - especially one under the control of a rightwing bureaucracy - would be expected to bypass democratic procedures, citing the urgency of the situation.

The meeting was divided into two sessions, entitled: 'After May's humiliation, prospects for a socialist Labour government'; and 'Forward to a mass Labour left and a transformed party'. But after the opening speech from Matt Wrack, general secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, comrades were called randomly from the floor to offer their thoughts on whatever aspect they fancied in three-minute contributions.

While there were some useful exchanges, mostly it felt like a waste of time, since the format ensured that no decisions could be taken on anything. Obviously, motions should have been invited in advance, but, more than that, there should have been a process



Good enough for little children, but ...

in place allowing each of the factions to move their own proposals, so that individual GR Momentum supporters might be able to judge the various options on offer.

## 'Radical'

Understandably comrade Wrack devoted a small section of his speech to the Grenfell Tower tragedy, pointing out that fire safety inspectors had been reduced by two-thirds and the "red tape" that might hold back profits had been ditched.

Turning to the general election, he claimed that sections of the Labour right had gone into it "with the aim of losing". They were ready immediately to call on Corbyn to resign following a bad result, but in the event Corbyn's position was "pretty safe for the time being". He stated that we now need a drive for democratisation and the selection of "working class, socialist candidates".

He warned against those who think that under Corbyn "everything will be hunky-dory". In fact Corbyn has been compromising with the right and, to prevent that, we need to "build a politically informed mass movement and Labour Party".

Following this, the three-minute contributions began with the LRC's Jackie Walker. The comrade said that at last, during the election campaign, class had "come back onto the agenda" - the prime example being "For the many, not the few" - the title of "the most radical manifesto I can remember". She too wanted Labour to be put on "an election footing", but without the "imposition of candidates", who must be nominated by "open selection".

I suppose, if the existing manifesto is so "radical", in that case we can elect a "socialist Labour government" within a few months without first having to defeat the anti-Corbyn right. In reality, as *The Clarion's* Rosie Woods stated, *For the many, not the few* was "very timid". Marginally to the left of what was on offer under Ed Miliband in 2015, it can only be described as "radical" compared to what was proposed by Tony Blair.

wrestling" - the way he described the internal battle within the Labour Party. Defeating the Labour right was "not the most important" - rather we should follow John McDonnell's advice and aim for "one million on the streets" for the July 1 demonstration, which should be linked to trade union struggles and the anti-cuts movement. As it was, the steering committee's statement prepared for the meeting was "one-sided", because it "concentrated only on the internal struggle".

Nick Wrack, who reminded us he was one of those "still excluded" by the witch-hunt, responded that, while it was correct to want to "turn Labour outwards", we must "not lose sight of the fact that we have to transform it from top to bottom". If people were "engaged on the streets, not in Labour, the right will be happy". He correctly pointed out, however, that what was "sorely lacking" was "a strategy" for such a transformation. He proposed later on that the steering committee should campaign for an "organisation for socialism in the Labour Party". We "can't simply talk about it and do nothing".

But Dewi John was another who disparaged Labour Party work: "Where are the young activists here today?" he asked. "How can we mobilise them for deathly dull Labour meetings?" Another comrade thought that, while getting young people to join Labour might be "the worst thing we could do", we do have to replace the right, which means that "mud wrestling is essential". In the words of a disabled comrade: "Mud is there; the enemy is there. If you don't wrestle them, they'll drown you in it!"

Steve Forrest stated that we need to "educate young people in the ideas of socialism". The idea must be to "turn them into Labour to fight against the machine" - how about re-establishing Labour Party Young Socialists? He stressed the need to stand by those unjustly suspended or expelled - although he remarked pertinently: "I haven't heard much from Jeremy Corbyn against the witch-hunt".

Sandy McBurney, of Glasgow Momentum, while agreeing that official Labour meetings are dull - often "intentionally", he thought - insisted that we need to steer activists linked to Grassroots Momentum into the party. Aim to "build the mass movement and bring them in to defeat the right".

The contribution of Terry Conway from Socialist Resistance was just about the worst of the lot. Instead of telling us all about her organisation's support for a Labour-Green-Women's Party-Health Action Party-Scottish National Party popular front, she stuck to what she knows best: complaining about the "awful" age, gender and race "imbalance" in the room. Her totally apolitical conclusion was that we are "not sharing best practice enough". She later added that we "weren't ambitious enough about this meeting" - we should have "marketed" it to people inspired by Corbyn. In other words, we should go for a rally and cut out the political debate.

## Serious alternative

However, Jack Conrad of LPM thought we should "take this meeting more seriously". The key question is not age, ethnicity or gender, but *politics*. We need to treat ourselves with "more self-respect". On Labour's programme, he said that it was "quite possible" that

capital would not accept it, but we need to "look at the manifesto seriously": it was a call to *run capitalism* in favour of "the many, not the few". That "cannot be done". Yes, we must defend Corbyn against the right, but we must not lose sight of the overriding interest of the working class - the winning of socialism. And that is what we need to organise around.

Graham Bash of the LRC also called on comrades not to "denigrate this meeting" - we "need to have this discussion". However, he took a rather more positive attitude to the Labour manifesto than some others: "if implemented it would put Labour in conflict with the bourgeoisie", which meant we now have the "prospect of a Labour government prepared to confront capital". What is more, "the leadership doesn't fear the movement: it wants it".

Richard Gerard of Red Flag asked us to think about *how* we could replace the right and with what policies. He reminded us about the lack of democracy in official Momentum, which is "run by Jon Lansman and two other people". The task was to organise the left in a democratic manner, ensuring full discussion.

Another victim of the witch-hunt, Gerry Downing of Socialist Fight, pointed out that if there was another general election we would still be "going into battle with an army led by those opposed to Corbyn" - we had to "get rid of the hostile bureaucracy", he said. While he agreed that under Corbyn we had seen the "first breach of the neoliberal agenda", he compared this to the reforms of the 1945 Labour government, which nevertheless "defended British imperialism".

For his part, Mark Wadsworth from Grassroots Black Momentum identified himself as one of those falsely accused of anti-Semitism. He could not understand why Corbyn was "bending over backwards to bring back the right wing into the shadow cabinet".

Mark Lewis of LPM said that there was a mood of conciliation amongst many Corbyn supporters. They seemed to agree with Tony Blair's dictum that politics was "not about principle" - it was about "the best people". He also reminded us of the words of another Tony - Tony Benn - who had remarked that the Labour Party "needs two wings to fly". That was nonsense - we do *not* need the right.

In introducing the second session from the chair, comrade Hannah had urged us to "focus on the particular things we can do together" (he mentioned demonstrations, for example!). In response a comrade from Manchester called for the SC to set up a means of communication - on WhatsApp, for instance - where we could "prioritise ideas".

Reacting to criticism about the general directionlessness of the meeting, comrade Hannah desperately tried to bring together some of the proposals raised from the floor into a makeshift motion (like supporting the July 1 demonstration!), but, when people objected to the idea of a catch-all motion suddenly being foisted upon us, he dropped the idea.

So we went away having to content ourselves with our three-minute contributions. While these did reveal some basic differences, it has to be said that the meeting took us nowhere. What is the role of Grassroots Momentum? Hopefully this pointless meeting will provoke some serious thought ●

## 'On the streets'

Stuart King, of Left Unity, was the first speaker to use the term "mud

## ITALY

# Grillo and M5S humiliated

Toby Abse examines the first round of the local elections and the return to the main parties



**Beppe Grillo: top-down**

The most notable feature of the June 11 first round of the local elections was the most comprehensive electoral defeat that Beppe Grillo's Movimento Cinque Stelle (Five Star Movement - M5S) had suffered since its parliamentary breakthrough in February 2013.

Even allowing for the fact that M5S has never performed as well in municipal elections as in national, regional or European polls,<sup>1</sup> it was a disaster for the Grillini. According to the political scientists of the Istituto Cattaneo, the percentage obtained by M5S in this year's local elections was 10.4% - a massive drop from the 18.1% it scored in the local elections of 2016. In only one out of the 25 provincial capitals did M5S make it into the second, run-off, ballot to be held on June 25. Whilst in three others (Palermo, Cuneo and Frosinone) an outright winner emerged in the first round,<sup>2</sup> elsewhere the second round will be contested by the centre-left and centre-right (or in a few cases between one of the main traditional blocs and a local civic list). M5S has only got into the run-off in nine of the 142

municipalities with more than 15,000 inhabitants.

M5S's performance in Grillo's home city of Genoa was particularly humiliating in the light of its internationally renowned triumphs in local elections last year in Rome and Turin - cities in which it had much shallower roots. M5S's 18.4% in Genoa was hardly a huge improvement on the 14.1% gained in the same city in 2012, before its breakthrough into national prominence. Moreover, it was substantially below its Genovese scores in the general election of 2013 (32.2%), the European election of 2014 (28.1%), and the 2015 regional election (27.6%).

It is at least arguable that this fiasco was largely a product of the utterly undemocratic, top-down imposition of an M5S mayoral candidate - the operatic tenor, Luca Pironcini - who had lost the local M5S mayoral primary to the more committed local activist, Marika Cassimatis. Cassimatis was hated by Grillo's notoriously authoritarian Ligurian lieutenant, Alice Salvatore, who regarded her as both too independent and too leftwing. Grillo, always suspicious of any independent

thought within the increasingly cultist M5S, willingly followed Salvatore's poor advice and staged a national online plebiscite of M5S members to obtain official endorsement for Pironcini - a completely absurd procedure for a local candidate's election, given the total unfamiliarity with both candidates to the overwhelming majority of non-Genovese M5S members, and one totally at odds with M5S's own traditional localism.

Whilst Cassimatis herself only obtained 1% of the vote when, after vain efforts to overturn the stitch-up, including recourse to the courts and to Grillo's *bête noire*, the mainstream press, she left M5S and stood against Pironcini in the first round of the Genovese mayoral election, the negative publicity surrounding the episode had doubtless damaged the M5S brand in the eyes of the local electorate. As a result, floating voters were pushed back towards the two mainstream candidates.

Insult was added to injury for Grillo and the M5S leadership by the first-round result in Parma, the scene of M5S's first municipal triumph five years earlier. The official M5S candidate scored a pathetic 3.5%, whilst Federico Pizzarotti, who had been elected M5S mayor in 2012, obtained an impressive 34.7% as a 'civic' candidate in opposition to his old party, as well as to the mainstream candidates. There is every likelihood that Pizzarotti will win the run-off against the centre-left candidate, Paolo Scarpa, since the supporters of the third-placed centre-right candidate, Laura Cavandoli (19.2%), are most probably going to cast their votes for an independent rather than a leftwinger - if they bother to participate in the second round at all.

Whilst Pizzarotti eventually broke with Grillo of his own accord after a prolonged suspension from M5S, officially motivated by a criminal investigation into his alleged 'abuse of office', 'Captain Pizza', as Grillo sarcastically renamed him, was in reality driven out of M5S for displaying too much independence.<sup>3</sup> This typical short-sighted authoritarianism on Grillo's part meant that M5S has lost somebody whom it could in other circumstances have presented as its longest-serving, most competent and most popular mayor. In the event,

the bulk of Parma's M5S voters, like most of its city councillors elected in 2012, sided with the local dissident, not Grillo's uninspiring lackey, whose electoral campaign had little point other than a vain attempt to deprive Pizzarotti of the votes needed to enter the run-off.

## Race card

Whilst local factors clearly played a role in M5S's setbacks in both Genoa and Parma, its national stance during the last few weeks of the local election campaign probably had some negative effect too. The abortive attempt at a consensual electoral reform law, involving a temporary alliance between Matteo Renzi's Partito Democratico (PD), Matteo Salvini's Lega Nord, Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia and M5S itself, may well have undermined the 'anti-system' credentials of M5S. The impression given to the general public that the four biggest parties in parliament had united in an unprincipled lash-up to devise an electoral law in their own interests, and to deliberately exclude all smaller groups (whether centrist, neo-fascist or radical left) via a 5% minimum threshold was hardly edifying.

Given the massive publicity about the electoral law during the municipal election campaign, it is probably no coincidence that the turnout was only 60.1%, compared with 66.8% in the same localities back in 2012. Whilst this sordid episode has revived Berlusconi's political fortunes - a matter to which I will return later in this article - it may well have weakened Grillo's hand, both in relation to voters looking for a vehicle to express their discontent, and in relation to the 'orthodox' wing of M5S represented by Roberta Lombardi and Paola Taverna. The 'orthodox' have added the abortive electoral reform to their list of grievances against the 'pragmatist' wing, officially led by M5S's current candidate premier, Luigi Di Maio, but in practice sponsored by Davide Casaleggio and Grillo himself. It ought to be stressed that the 'orthodox', unlike the now departed erstwhile M5S dissidents mentioned above - Cassimatis, Pucci, Pizzarotti - cannot be seen as left critics of Grillo.

Predictably, Grillo has sought to quell internal dissent and revive M5S's electoral fortunes by yet again playing the race card against both migrants and gypsies. This has not been confined to Grillo's habitual racist rants on the sacred blog - "those who declare they have no income and go around in luxury cars should be kicked out", as should "those who beg on the Metro accompanied by children", apart from the inevitable demand for the closure of the "Rom camps".<sup>4</sup> Virginia Raggi, the M5S mayor of Rome - whose links with the corrupt entourage of the former neo-fascist mayor, Gianni Alemanno, have become so obvious over the last year - has written an official letter to the prefect of Rome, demanding that no more refugees be sent to the capital. Luigi Di Maio has said:

I fully endorse Raggi's letter. Our country is a pressure cooker. We cannot think of dealing with this phenomenon within our borders. Either Europe will wake up and start to redistribute all these people through quotas for other countries, or the lid will come off here.

## Back into the game

If M5S is the clear loser in the first round of these local elections, Renzi's PD seems likely to lose out in many

important run-off ballots to the centre-right alliance of Berlusconi's Forza Italia and Salvini's Lega Nord. Whilst it remains uncertain, to say the very least, as to whether Berlusconi and Salvini will present a united front at the general election due early next year,<sup>5</sup> Forza Italia and the Lega have been able to unite around agreed mayoral candidates in almost every municipality for the current local elections - elections in which divisive issues like their respective stances on the European Union or their preferred candidate for premier are of no great concern.

Berlusconi's negotiations with Renzi over the abortive Electoral Reform Law brought the 80-year-old tycoon back into the political game from which he seemed to have been sidelined after the election of Sergio Mattarella to the presidency. The widely believed and probably accurate rumours that the PD will form a Grand Coalition with Forza Italia in the event of an inconclusive general election have assisted Berlusconi's *de facto* political rehabilitation, whilst further eroding Renzi's reputation.

In the run-off ballots the Forza Italia-Lega front is favourite to win in 13 out of the 22 provincial capitals. The centre-left is only ahead in six, whilst in the other three civic lists are in the lead. Senator Federico Fornaro of the social democratic Movimento Democratico e Progressisti (MDP) has pointed out the extent to which the PD support has waned under Renzi's neoliberal stewardship. Compared with 2012, "the balance of forces has been reversed". On the previous occasion, the centre-left took Pistoia and La Spezia in the first round, and was ahead in 13 major cities in the run-up to the second round. The MDP parliamentary emphasised the downward shift in four major cities in particular:

In 2012, we were close to 50% in Taranto, and today we register 17.9%; in La Spezia, we are down from 52.5% to 25.1%; in Lucca, the contraction is from 46.8% to 37%, with a centre-right grown to 35%; in Pistoia, a fall from 59% to 37%.<sup>6</sup>

The Istituto Cattaneo has emphasised that the centre-left has lost votes to abstentions in a variety of cities, whilst the centre-right has kept its ranks serried to a much greater extent. The odds are now against the centre-left in both of the main industrial (or former industrial), largely working class port cities of Liguria - Genoa and La Spezia. However much Renzi may now rejoice in Grillo's disastrous showing, the PD seems very likely to lose in some of the left's old strongholds later in the month ●

## Notes

1. M5S's excessive reliance on the internet means it lacked solid roots in many communities. Its local 'meet-ups' were a poor substitute for proper party branches.
2. On the Italian mainland, a mayoral candidate needs to get over 50% to win in the first round. However, Sicily has a 40% threshold, so Leoluca Orlando was re-elected mayor of Palermo with a plurality of 46.2%.
3. It ought to be noted that the much more loyalist mayor of Livorno, Felipo Nogarin, was never suspended from M5S membership when placed under investigation on very similar grounds.
4. Grillo's use of the politically correct 'Rom', rather than the traditional 'zingari' for 'gypsy' illustrates how irrelevant fashionable linguistic obsessions are to practical anti-racist solidarity, even if it may assist *New Left Review* editors in their obstinate denial of M5S's now clearly institutional racism - a denial repeated in an otherwise useful and interesting *NLR* article on the December 4 referendum.
5. The four-party plan for an early general election in September or October seems to have collapsed along with the Electoral Reform Law.
6. *Corriere della Sera* June 13.

## Fighting fund

### Confident

As I predicted, the extremely low amount that came in to our fighting fund last week has been compensated for this time around - no less than £780 was received in standing orders alone over the last seven days. Amongst them were generous regular donations from comrades TR, KB, MM, TB, PM and SK, which accounted for the bulk of that amount.

And then, unusually, there was more than £100 in the shape of PayPal donations - thanks to HJ (£50), JP (£30), VD (£20) and MP (£5) - but nothing at all through the post (cheque-writing is well past its heyday!). Never mind - as VD writes, referring to his PayPal gift, "The first thing I do on a Friday morning is log on to the *Weekly Worker* site" - and sometimes he clicks on that

PayPal button obviously.

VD was one of exactly 3,500 online readers last week, but the majority of them are maybe not quite so appreciative. Or, if they are, they don't translate that into cash for our fighting fund.

Anyway, the extra £885 that came in this week not only stands in sharp contrast to last week's £102, but takes our running total up to £1,479. Which means we have just over a week to raise the extra £271 we need to match June's £1,750 target. In contrast to last week, I'm now more than confident we can do it. ●

**Robbie Rix**

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

FRANCE



Emmanuel Macron: unprecedented power

# Macron's crushing majority

Despite the poor performance of the left René Gimpel expects militant action

And so it came to pass - the prodigal obtained his majority. Emmanuel Macron, youngest French president and elected to public office for the first time, last year conjured up *ex nihilo* a political party, La République en Marche (LRM) and has seen it obtain a solid majority in the general election. Half his new national assembly members had never been in politics before, half are women, all owe their appointment to Macron personally and all have signed a pledge to carry out the president's programme, which Macron claims is synonymous with a 'programme for France'. In the 17th century, the absolutist king, Louis XIV, proclaimed: "The state is myself" - something of this claim adheres to Emmanuel Macron.

LRM has 308 of the 577 seats and its close ally, Mouvement Démocrate, a further 42. The two parties are in lockstep. Meanwhile, the conservatives, Les Républicains, drop from 199 seats to 113 - they may split into pro- and anti-Macron factions, as the president tries to woo more to come into his big tent. Most dramatic of all, the Socialists, who held 284 seats, are reduced to a rump of 32. This rump does not even include Benoît Hamon, the Parti Socialiste's failed candidate for the presidency, who not only sank from view then, but in addition failed to make it to the second round of the national assembly elections. Virtually all the party bigwigs have disappeared and the remainder probably owe their re-election to LRM not fielding a candidate against them, as Macron estimates he can gain their support for his programme. This could entail a further splintering of the PS.

Here in the UK, which is the Third District (Northern Europe) for ex-pats, the PS's long-serving Axelle Lemaire succumbed to Alexandre Holroyd of the LRM, who more than doubled the vote previously obtained by Lemaire. Holroyd is Anglo-French, was educated at the French Lycée in London and claims to have a good understanding of business in both countries. In an interview in the daily *Le Monde*, long-standing PS member Kader Arif says of Lemaire's loss:

My generation has known losses, but when we were beaten it was usually by adversaries who understood

politics and had local legitimacy, having served on councils or in other capacities. Now we are replaced by people who were parachuted in a few weeks before the first round, without experience, ideas or programme other than a photo of Emmanuel Macron on their desk.<sup>1</sup>

Jean-Luc Mélenchon's radical group, La France Insoumise (FI), notched up 17 seats, from a second-round contest in 77 constituencies. Given the extraordinary abstention rate in the first round of voting - over 50% for the first time in French electoral history - Mélenchon went on air to urge his followers: "Damn it, get out of the house and vote" (elections in France take place on a Sunday and Mélenchon needed every young vote he could get). He himself secured Marseille, displacing a popular PS member - and succeeding in the south of France, where the Front National (FN) is strong. The importance of that figure of 17 seats is that FI, the "humanist, social justice and ecology" party, has passed the magic cap of 15 seats, which allows it to form a recognised grouping in the assembly. This brings privileges such as the right to propose motions and to sit on permanent commissions.

The French Communist Party (PCF) obtained 10 seats and both this party and the FI might have done better had they not contested seats in each other's constituencies, weakening the far left. Not so lucky were the FN, which saw its number of seats increase from two to eight, but this was far short of expectations. Contesting election after election, Marine le Pen finally obtained a seat in Nord-Pas de Calais - perhaps not surprising in a depressed area, which has been beset by conflicts with refugees seeking access to the UK. Le Pen, or "Blue Marine", as she likes to style herself (the blue in the French flag as opposed to the red), has been crowing about her victory and warning Macron that he does not have a mandate to govern France as he wishes. So delusional as usual about the FN's real strength. Nevertheless, in one respect le Pen is right. If the first round of voting revealed a high abstention rate, the second round went further, with 57% of the electorate abstaining. And of those who did vote, a startling 25%

cast blank ballots.

## Divide and rule

Macron's programme is considered 'radical' in the same way that Tony Blair's was considered 'modernising'. That is to say it aims to crush the working class, curb the unions, drastically cut public-sector employment and slash benefits. The flagship element is the dismantling of France's progressive (by European standards) employment law, with its 35-hour week, security of employment and generous retirement benefits. Macron has said he will move directly to abrogate the law.

While the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), had been the largest and most militant trade union for decades, recently it lost its number one position to the Confédération Française Démocratique de Travail (CFDT), which arose out of social and Christian democratic traditions, rather than the communist traditions of the CGT - militants like to call it a bosses' union because of its willingness to do 'sensible' deals where the CGT will not. Macron is preparing a divide-and-rule strategy in this sphere, as in all the others. The minister for the economy, Bruno Le Maire, is preparing a reduction in unemployment benefit and the introduction of an hourly rate of €5 for certain workers at the bottom end of the pay scale. Le Maire will be buttressed by Gérard Darmanin, minister for public accounts, who served under president Sarkozy.

According to the French version of US business magazine *Forbes*, the president says that France is being "asphyxiated by the weight of administrative and union regulations, tax harassment and strictures".<sup>2</sup> Macron's slogan, "Liberalise France and protect the French", aims to appeal to right and left, though, as the *Forbes* article concludes, Macron draws more from Fillon's Les Républicains than from Hollande's socialists. Macron's appeal to the centre rests in part on his passionate belief in the European Union, an institution in which he intends to place France alongside Germany as the behemoths setting the pace for the other 25 countries. On Brexit, Macron matches David Davis's hard line; he considers Britain's

decision to leave "a crime" and intends to make the UK pay dearly for this.

The left in the assembly, however broadly described, has been greatly reduced. Adding together socialists, FI, the PCF and some independent lefts and greens, there are barely 80 members. It is possible that these will move closer to the CGT and take extra-parliamentary action, though in what form remains to be seen. However, there is a different scenario. For all the pledges that Macron has secured from his cohorts to toe his line and not act against his interests, their signed promises have no legal standing under the French constitution. An assembly member should owe no loyalty to self, to party, or even to the electorate that voted the member through. The loyalty is supposed to be to the interests of France, as a nation and state.

Yes, the president is attempting to

identify that interest as identical to his own, but what will happen when contentious matters come to be debated? A conservative weekly, *Valeurs*, used as its cover a famous painting of Napoleon on his rearing white horse, but changed the face to Macron's and entitled the article: "Macron I: the dangers of all-encompassing power".<sup>3</sup>

There is another French expression which relates to the Napoleonic period. Many who lost their seats in this election are said to have suffered their 'Berezina' - a reference to an incident in the catastrophic retreat from Russia in 1812. When will Macron's Berezina appear over the horizon?

## Notes

1. *Le Monde* June 18-19.
2. [www.forbes.fr/politique/emmanuel-macron-concocte-son-mix-fillon-soft-et-hollande-plus](http://www.forbes.fr/politique/emmanuel-macron-concocte-son-mix-fillon-soft-et-hollande-plus).
3. <http://abo.valeursactuelles.com/abonnements.html>.

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**1917**

# Bolsheviks take to the streets

Nos 12-13, '1917: the view from the streets' - leaflets of the Russian Revolution

One hundred years ago today, on June 22 (9) 1917, the Bolshevik Party circulated among Petrograd workers the first proclamation below (drafted by Joseph Stalin). Nine days later, the Bolsheviks' slogans won mass support at a giant, soviet-called demonstration.

In mid-May, the Bolshevik Military [soldiers] Organisation (BMO) proposed to the Bolshevik Party central committee a demonstration opposing the Provisional Government's planned military

offensive. Fearing that such an action was premature, the CC was not receptive. BMO organisers became more insistent over coming weeks, as soldiers worried about attempts to restore military discipline and feared transfer to the front.

BMO leaders hoped to time a demonstration to coincide with the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which met in Petrograd June 16-July 7 (June 3-24). The CC remained undecided - Lenin supported a demonstration, as did

most Petersburg [Petrograd] committee members, while Kamenev was against.

Worker unrest over the Provisional Government's attempt to expel anarchist-communists from their headquarters created more friction. An expanded meeting of Bolshevik Party organisations on June 21 (8) revealed majority support for a demonstration by workers and soldiers on June 23 (10). The Bolshevik leaflet, translated below, helped prepare for the demonstration.

The second document we

reproduce is the response by the All-Russian Congress of Soviets to the Bolsheviks' appeal.

The proposed demonstration encountered opposition in the Congress, which appealed to military units and factory workers not to march. In the early morning hours of June 23 (10), a small meeting of Bolshevik CC members called off the demonstration.

In an attempt to bolster support for its policies, the Soviet arranged a demonstration on July 1 (June 18), which attracted almost 500,000

participants. Due to the efforts of Bolsheviks, Left Socialist Revolutionaries and anarchists, however, the demonstration was dominated by radical slogans (ending the war, opposing the coalition government and its military offensive, and transferring all power to the soviets).

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

**First published at: <http://Johnriddell.wordpress.com>.**

## Proclamation of RSDLP(B) posted in Petrograd districts



**Worker-soldier demonstration**

To all labourers, workers and soldiers of Piter [Petrograd]

Comrades!

Russia is experiencing difficult trials. The war, which has carried off millions of victims, continues. Millionaire bankers are intentionally prolonging it, because they're making a fortune out of the war.

The war has devastated industry, leading to factory stoppages and unemployment. The greedy capitalists, who lock out workers, while making fantastic profits, exacerbate this trend.

Shortages of bread and other food supplies are becoming more acute. The increase in the cost of living is throttling the population. Prices keep increasing, as per the whims of robber-speculators.

The sinister spectre of hunger and ruin looms over us. At the same time, the black clouds of counterrevolution are approaching.

Imposed by the tsar to strangle the people, the [illegitimate] June 3 duma<sup>1</sup> now demands an immediate offensive at the front. But for what purpose? To drown in blood the freedom that we have obtained.

The state council, which supplied the tsar with hangmen ministers, is quietly braiding a traitor's noose, while shielding itself behind the law. What is this for? It is so that at a convenient time they may come out into the

open and hang the noose around the neck of the people.

The Provisional Government - positioned between the tsarist duma and the soviet, and containing 10 bourgeois members - obviously has fallen under the influence of gentry landowners and capitalists. Instead of securing soldiers' rights, Kerensky's 'declaration' violates their rights in several very important points.

- Instead of securing the liberties that soldiers gained during the revolution, new 'commands' threaten them with penal servitude.

- Instead of securing the freedom, which Russia's citizens achieved, there are arrests without trial or investigation, and new suggestions about article 129, which make threats about penal servitude.

- Instead of struggling against counterrevolution, they put up with the debauchery and bacchanalia of counterrevolutionaries.

- Meanwhile, economic devastation keeps getting worse and no measures are taken against it.

- The war keeps going on and no actual measures are taken to end it.

- Famine is still imminent and no actual measures are taken to prevent it.

Is it really any surprise that counterrevolutionaries are becoming more insolent and inciting the government to repress soldiers, sailors, workers and peasants?

Comrades! It's impossible to

endure such things in silence any more. It is a crime to keep silent after all this! Protest is already beginning in the depths of the working class. We are

free citizens. We have the right to protest and we should avail ourselves of this right before it is too late.

We still have the right to demonstrate peacefully. We will go to a peaceful demonstration and will make our needs and wishes known!

Raise the flags of victory today to make the enemies of freedom and socialism afraid!

Let our call, the cry of the sons of the revolution, fly round all Russia today to the joy of all those who are oppressed and enslaved!

Workers! Join together with soldiers and support their just demands. Indeed, don't you remember how they supported you during the revolution? Everyone onto the streets, comrades!

Soldiers! Hold out your hands to workers and support their just demands. The strength of the revolution is in the union of soldiers and workers. Not one regiment or company should sit in the barracks today!

Everyone into the streets, comrades! March on the streets of the capital in orderly ranks.

State your wishes calmly and confidently, as befits the strong:

- Down with the tsarist duma!
- Down with the state council!
- Down with the 10 capitalist ministers!
- All power to the All-Russian Soviet of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants' Deputies!
- Revise the 'declaration of the rights of soldiers'!
- Repeal the 'commands' against soldiers and sailors!
- Down with anarchy in industry! Down with capitalists who engage in lockouts!
- Long live workers' supervision and organisation of industry!
- It's time to end the war! Let the Soviet of Deputies announce just conditions of peace!
- Neither a separate peace with Wilhelm, nor secret treaties with French and English capitalists!
- Bread! Peace! Freedom!

## Notes

1. Socialists regarded the state duma as illegitimate, because it was elected under undemocratic voting rules enacted in 1907 that gave landowners and capitalists a predominant voice. The tsarist regime enacted these rules after having arbitrarily dissolved the previous duma on June 3 that year.

## Proclamation of All-Russian Congress of Soviets

Soldier and worker comrades!

The Bolshevik Party is calling you out onto the street.

Their appeal was prepared without the knowledge of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, the All-Russian Congress, the Soviet of Peasants' Deputies, or any other socialist parties. It rang out right at the critical moment, when the All-Russian Congress called upon worker comrades of Vyborg District to remember that any demonstrations during these days can harm the cause of the revolution. Comrades, on behalf of millions of workers, peasants and soldiers in the rear and at the front, we say to you, don't do what they are calling upon you to do.

At this critical moment, they are calling upon you to go onto the street to demand the overthrow of the Provisional Government, which the All-Russian [Soviet] Congress only just recognised as necessary to support.

Those who call you out cannot help but know that bloody riots may arise from your peaceful demonstration. Knowing your dedication to the revolutionary cause,

we say to you, they are calling upon you to demonstrate in favour of the revolution, but we know that hidden counterrevolutionaries want to make use of your demonstration.

We know that counterrevolutionaries eagerly await the moment when internecine war in the ranks of revolutionary democratic forces will make it possible for them to crush the revolution.

Comrades!

In the name of all Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, the Soviet of Peasants' Deputies, armies in action and socialist parties, we say to you:

- Not one company, regiment or group of workers should be on the street.
  - There should not be even one demonstration today.
  - A great struggle still confronts us.
  - When counterrevolutionary danger actually threatens Russian freedom, we will call upon you.
  - Disorderly demonstrations are the downfall of the revolution.
  - Conserve your forces.
  - Act in concert with all revolutionary Russia.
- Signed by:  
All-Russian Congress of Soviets of

Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies Executive Committee of the All-Russian Soviet of Peasant Deputies Organisational Committee of the RSDRP [Menshevik] Central Committee of the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries Central Committee of the Bund Central Committee of the Labourite Group [Trudoviks] Ukrainian fraction of the All-Russian Congress Fraction of United Internationalists of SD Bolsheviks and Mensheviks of the All-Russian Congress Military Section under the Organisational Committee and Committee of the Petrograd Organisation of the RSDRP. Both documents are translated from AG Shlyapnikov *Semnadsatyi god* Vol 4, 1931, pp404-06.

Other sources:  
A Rabinowitch *Prelude to revolution: the Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 uprising* Bloomington 1991, pp54-79.  
RA Wade *The Russian Revolution 1917* Cambridge 2000, pp179-80.

REVIEW

# How about thinking like a Marxist?

Kate Raworth *Doughnut economics: seven ways to think like a 21st century economist* Random House Business Books, 2017, pp384, £20

For some time now people have been writing books critical of mainstream economics. This volume is one of them and has a lot going for it.

The basic metaphor is very simple. Think of two concentric circles, one inside the other: beyond the outer-circle boundary we have critical planetary degradation; within the inner circle we have critical human deprivation. The objective is to set humanity in position between the two circle boundaries - this area is the "doughnut", as illustrated on page 11 of the book. It is a powerful image, and it has the virtue of establishing the ecological problem facing humanity fairly and squarely in the centre of political economy - where it should have been since at least the 1970s.

Kate Raworth is adamant that we should stop fetishising growth of GDP, and focus on the doughnut. This involves being aware of "human needs", "human nature", "systems", "distribution by design" and "regeneration by design" (her chapter headings).

Particularly useful is the way she brings basic needs centre-stage. In her view, there are 12 of these:

sufficient foods; clean water and decent sanitation; access to energy and clean cooking facilities; access to education and healthcare; decent housing; a minimum income and decent work; and access to networks of information and to networks of social support. Furthermore, ... achieving these with gender equality, social equality, political voice, and peace and justice (p45).

To sum up, "every human being must have the capabilities to lead a life of dignity, opportunity and community" (p164).

## Human nature

This demand is linked to a view of human nature nicely at variance with the traditional figure of *homo economicus*, the 'rational' calculator of orthodox political economy. Raworth recognises the importance of this, quoting a certain Robert Frank, to the effect that "our beliefs about human nature help shape human nature itself" (p100) - which is true, of course. In place of the standard model, her view of humanity shows up the following features:

First, rather than narrowly self-interested, we are social and reciprocating. Second, in place of fixed preferences, we have fluid values. Third, instead of isolated, we are interdependent. Fourth, rather than calculate, we usually approximate. And fifth, far from having dominion over nature, we are deeply embedded in the web of life (p102).

Another concept in need of reshaping is equilibrium. In the old political economy, "each market had to have one single, stable point of equilibrium, just as a pendulum has only one point of rest" (p132).

Hence, according to Kate Raworth, the widespread failure to forecast the crash of 2008 - economists were assuming equilibrium and ignoring the dislocation caused by the financial sector (p134). Operations in this sector have been well analysed by Hyman Minsky, who

realised - counterintuitive though it sounds - when it comes to finance, stability breeds instability. Why? Because of reinforcing loops, of course. During good economic times, banks, firms and borrowers all gain



Kate Raworth: good intentions

in confidence and start to take greater risks, which pushes up the price of housing and other assets. This asset price rise, in turn, reinforces borrowers' and lenders' confidence, along with their expectations that asset values will keep on rising (p146).

Raworth quotes Minsky as saying: "The tendency to transform doing well into a speculative investment boom is the basic instability in a capitalist economy."

The reference to "reinforcing feedback loops" indicates that the author of *Doughnut economics* has been influenced by systems theory. This is all to the good (see Donella Meadows' writings). Another plus is the fact that Kate Raworth endorses the desirability of everyone having a "basic income": "It is simply no longer feasible to expect GDP growth to keep pace with the anticipated scale of lay-offs due to automation, which only reinforces the case for introducing a basic income for all" (p278).

Not surprisingly, she is also in favour of what has become known as 'people's QE' - ie, debt relief for households (see p184). As for taxation, Raworth wants international action on tax havens, and taxation of accumulated wealth rather than income (see pp276-77). Furthermore, companies should not be penalised for employing many workers, but should be discouraged from appropriating an overabundance of resources (p278). Likewise, tiered water pricing should be promoted - a basic charge for essential amounts, but more to be paid on top of that if additional quantities are required (pp213-14).

Overall, the ecological awareness shown is refreshing. For example, Raworth praises what she calls "the circular economy":

instead of heading for landfill, the leftovers from one production process - be they food scraps or scrap metal - become the source materials for the next. The key to making this work is to think of all materials as belonging to one of two nutrient cycles: *biological* nutrients such as soil, plants and animals, and *technical* nutrients such as plastics, synthetics and metals (p221).

## In thrall

So much for the good ideas. Where Kate Raworth is disappointing, however, is on the vexed question of markets. In her estimation there are four "realms of provisioning": ie, households, markets, the commons and the state, which ideally ought to work together (p78). However, she does admit that

a growing range of products and services can be produced abundantly, nearly for free, unleashing potential such as open-source design, free online education and distributed manufacturing. In some key sectors *the 21st century collaborative commons* has started to complement, compete with and even displace the market (my emphasis, p84).

Here Raworth shows that she is still in thrall to the capitalist mode of production, in spite of the fact that she must surely recognise that it is capitalism which is driving the resource depletion we are currently experiencing. As Marxists, we would like to reach a condition where both the market and the state can be dispensed with.

This reluctance to think outside the bourgeois box is a pity, because Kate Raworth is obviously close to a Marxist position in some ways. This can be seen from her stress on needs, but she will not take the next logical step and consider the possibility of replacing (capitalist) production for profit with production for need.

This failure to engage with Marxist political economy is what detracts from the value of the book. There is no discussion of the overall rate of profit, nor review of the literature on markets - such as David McNally's *Against the market*, and the writings of Hillel Ticktin and Bertell Ollman on 'market socialism' - not even any discussion of the pro-market position put forward by Von Mises and Von Hayek.

It would have been useful if Kate Raworth had managed to grasp the importance of the alienation of the worker under capitalism. This is not just a question of working class psychology, it has economic effects, a negative contribution to productivity being one of them. (This was also the case in the Soviet Union, as witness the workers' joke: "We pretend to work, and they pretend to pay us"). The reasons for her attitude are probably the usual ones - revulsion against Stalinism, combined with the view that, as far as Marxism is concerned, the Stalin version is authentic and good coin, in which case why bother with Marx's voluminous writings on political economy, where some of the views advanced may well turn out to be utopian? This is definitely a pity, because it cuts Raworth off from a whole series of insights.

Take, for example, the remarks on alienation contained in the *Economic and philosophical manuscripts of 1844*:

What, then, constitutes the alienation of labour?

First, the fact that labour is external to the worker: ie, it does not belong to his intrinsic nature; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself, but denies himself, does not feel content, but is unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy, but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He feels at home when he is not working, and when he is working he does not feel at home.

His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced* labour. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need: it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that, as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labour is shunned like the plague. External labour, labour in which man alienates himself, is a labour of self-sacrifice, of mortification.

Lastly, the external character of labour for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, but to another. Just as in religion the spontaneous activity of the human imagination, of the human brain and the human heart, operates on the individual independently of him - that is, operates as an alien, divine or diabolical activity - so is the worker's activity not his spontaneous activity. It belongs to another; it is the loss of his self.<sup>1</sup>

## Production for need

What is the remedy for this state of affairs? In theory, the answer is very simple: it involves the "associated producers" taking production into their own hands and devising a plan which will satisfy the outstanding needs of the population (over time). Will this work? We already have evidence of its potential in the form of the Lucas Corporate Plan, as reported by Mike Cooley:

We then did what we should have done in the first place. We asked our own members [at Lucas] what they thought they should be making.<sup>2</sup>

The members responded with suggestions for a medical life-support system, energy-saving products, a range of wind generators, a road-cum-rail vehicle, kidney machines and telechiric devices - to mention only the most salient examples (out of 150 or so products). They also laid down certain criteria for "socially useful

production" (ie "production for need").<sup>3</sup>

Marx actually outlined his vision of socialism in the 'Marginal notes to the programme of the German Workers' Party' (1875), better known as the *Critique of the Gotha programme*. It is not explicitly stated, but this work surely presupposes political power held by the working class in a number of countries, together with command over a sufficiency of material products. The "proceeds of labour" can then be divided along the lines that Marx lays down, including cover for replacement of means of production, funds for expansion, reserve or accident funds, costs of administration, social wage, disability benefit and so forth.<sup>4</sup>

Crucially,

Within the cooperative society based on common ownership of the means of production, the producers do not exchange their products; just as little does the labour employed on the products appear here as *the value* of these products, as a material quality possessed by them, since now, in contrast to capitalist society, individual labour no longer exists in an indirect fashion, but directly as a component part of the total labour.<sup>5</sup>

In this set-up the worker receives a time-rate:

the social working day consists of the sum of the individual hours of work; the individual labour time of the individual producer is the part of the social working day contributed by him, his share in it. He receives a certificate from society that he has furnished such and such an amount of labour (after deducting his labour for the common funds), and with this certificate he draws from the social stock of means of consumption as much as costs the same amount of labour. The same amount of labour which he has given to society in one form he receives back in another.<sup>6</sup>

The task, then, is to develop the collaborative commons: a transition from production for profit to production for need will ensure that humans arrive at the 'goldilocks' conditions represented by the doughnut (or bagel, or whatever). Later,

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life, but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly - only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: 'From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs!'<sup>7</sup>

There is one error in the text of *Doughnut economics*, which needs pinpointing: the reference should be to the economist, Silvio Gesell, *not* "Gessel".

Chris Gray

## Notes

1. K Marx *CW* Vol 3, New York 1976, p274.
2. M Cooley *Architect or bee? The human price of technology* Nottingham 2016, p118.
3. *Ibid* pp154-55.
4. See K Marx and F Engels *Selected works* Vol 2, Moscow 1958, p22.
5. K Marx *Critique of the Gotha programme*: www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm.
6. *Ibid*.
7. *Ibid*.

## REVIEW

# Witnesses of the revolution

David E Lowes (editor) **Bessie Beatty on revolutionary Russia** Red Revenant, 2017, £6.99, pp256

David E Lowes (editor) **Arthur Ransome Three accounts of Revolutionary Russia** Red Revenant, 2017, £6.90, pp212

Full marks to comrade David Lowes, who has personally collated these long forgotten accounts into two attractive books. David is an active member of the North West England Socialist Theory Study Group, which dedicates itself to Marxist education in an age when Marxism is rejected (even by the tens of thousands of 'Corbynistas'!). This is, in part, a consequence of Stalinism's poisonous legacy.

So these books serve two very useful purposes: firstly, they are a fitting way to commemorate the centenary of the revolution. To this end (thanks also to the *Weekly Worker*), they will help spread the truth about the world's first successful proletarian revolution to an even wider readership. Secondly, by so doing, they can be used to encourage more people to study Marxism itself.

October 1917 epitomised the epoch of wars and revolutions. Both writers provide an immediate and detailed account of the revolution as it unfolded. Ransome, in particular, also highlights the enormous contradictions and ensuing problems that confronted the beleaguered regime: the imminence of a counterrevolution from without, which opened the door to the counterrevolution from within. At the same time, they express their hope that the masses could eventually free themselves from the chains of existing society. They also lay to rest many of the lies spread about the Bolsheviks ever since. Yet, in the heat of the moment, they are compelled to examine the question of what democracy really means; at the same time they have to consider the vexed subject of how to deal with counterrevolutionaries and corruption.

Today the odds for the revival of the social revolution have become more difficult. Not only are we living in the epoch of capitalist decay, but the deepening crisis of a moribund system continues to envelop humanity in a thick fog. Thus what David Lowes has done is most welcome. Bessie Beatty's account, in particular, comes across like a breath of fresh air.

I shall start by examining Beatty's *The red heart of Russia*, which covers the period, June 1917 to March 1918. This will be followed in the second part of this review by Ransome's *The crisis in Russia* (1920-21). For me, both writers share a single theme: the idea of *the dream versus reality* - that eternal question of what is and what ought to be, at both the objective and subjective level.

## Bessie

Bessie Beatty was the daughter of Irish immigrants, who grew up in Los Angeles, where she started her career in journalism. In 1917, along with Louise Bryant and John Reed, Beatty went to Russia to cover the unfolding revolution. She later wrote: "I had been alive at a great moment, and knew it was great."<sup>1</sup>

Whilst there, in line with her feminist politics, she revealed her fascination with the role of the women and their 'death battalions', who showed great bravery at the front, and later made a last-ditch stand in defence of the Provisional Government (but at the same time, she downplays their reactionary role). She was also fascinated by Trotsky and her famous introduction to the revolutionary leader on the night of the Bolshevik's seizure of power is included here. In this regard, Bessie reveals another admirable strength: her determination

to tell the truth in the face of the lies of the bourgeois media (which today is as strong as ever). To this end she published an interview with Trotsky, entitled 'They lie about me in America'.

Bessie is not a Marxist, but she is so honest and objective about the drama which is unfolding that she usually comes to the right conclusion! Her determination to tell the truth about the Russian Revolution as she understood it meant that she had to be courageous as well. In 1919 she was ordered to give testimony to a committee of the United States senate. When asked to describe the Bolshevik "reign of terror", she replied, "No, the reign of terror did not begin until the revolution was nearly a year old. The reign of terror did not really begin until after allied intervention" (p212).

Bessie is on her first visit to Russia. It is June 1917, the time of white nights in Petrograd. She finds a room in the Select hotel:

At six o'clock [am] the wild pigeons ... sang me to sleep. I awoke with a start six hours later. "Where am I," I asked. "In Petrograd," I answered myself - "in Petrograd, in the heart of the revolution" ... Eyes and ears drinking in strange sounds, and thoughts darting back and forth from the land of Tolstoy, Turgenieff and Dostoevsky ... Ivan was tired of war - tired to death ... War and revolution are incompatible bedfellows! (pp5, 7, 17, 19).

Here is how she describes the night of October 25 and the following days. The uprising has started. Kerensky has been bringing troops from the front to defend the government, including

an endless procession of Cossacks [break them and the revolution has a chance]. Thursday morning the Bolsheviks were still in control of the Fortress of Peter and Paul, and were directing their operations from the palace of the famous ballet-dancer who had been a favourite of the tsar ... At 12 that night I was lying in bed reading, when suddenly again came the unmistakable sputtering of the machine guns and the crack of rifles ...

I leaned out the window ... and looked at the square. Nothing was visible in the strange great light of that darkest hour of the white night. There were no shouts, no cries, no single sound but the rattle of the machine guns and the bark of the rifles ...

The women stood about in frightened groups, talking in hushed tones. "It's civil war," somebody said. "The streets will run with blood before this thing's over." ... By Sunday fear had lifted from the heavy heart of Petrograd. Her people were being happy while they could. St Isaac's Square was flooded with sunshine ... There were no rivers of blood; the gutters did not run red. There was only a handful of victims where we had feared there might be hundreds. The Bolsheviks proclaimed the uprising a success ...

The riots were significant chiefly because they introduced the Bolsheviks to a world that was soon to know much more of them ... The Cossacks were hailed as deliverers. The conservative and reactionary papers wrote paens of praise for them ... Though they had been in favour of the suppression of the Bolshevik uprising ... Some of the Cossacks refused to accept the role of hero, and passed a resolution



October, as imagined by Sergei Eisenstein

declaring that they did not wish to be praised by the bourgeoisie ...

Late one afternoon the soldiers carried their dead in silver coffins into the great cool recesses of St Isaac's Cathedral ... The next morning the soldiers gathered in the square, black mourning flags fluttering from the tops of their lances. There were thousands and thousands of them ... The cavalry lined up on both sides of the square, their horses standing to perfect attention. The infantry stacked their rifles around and squatted on the cobble stones during the mass. The priests, in black mourning robes of black and silver, carried ecclesiastical banners; and the caskets were borne on ornate, canopied hearses, drawn by black horses ...

As I stood watching the funeral procession file past, an acquaintance, opposed to the new Russian order, joined me for a minute. "This is the end of socialism," he said triumphantly. On the contrary, it was only the beginning of the class struggle in the revolution (pp53-55).

## Congress

Bessie now gives us a first-hand account of the assumption of power by the Bolsheviks:

It was nearly five when we reached the entrance of the Smolny. The great building until a few months before a private seminary where the feminine flower of the Russian aristocracy was cultivated in seclusion, had suddenly become an arsenal, bristling with guns and swarming with armed men.

Upstairs the Workmen's and Soldiers' Deputies were gathering for the Congress of Soviets. They were coming together to decide whether the Bolshevik demand of 'All power to the soviets' should be granted. It was a question already being answered by the voice of the guns ...

"Here's Trotsky!" whispered the man beside me. "Come, I want you to meet him." Before I had time to acquiesce or protest, I found a lean hand grasping mine in a strong, characteristic handshake. We stood there for a few moments, talking of inconsequential things, but all of us were charged with the intensity of the hour. There was keen intelligence here, nerve, a certain uncompromising streak of iron, a sense of power; yet I little suspected I was talking to a

man whose name within a few brief weeks would become a familiar word on every tongue - the most talked of human being in an age of spectacular figures ...

The Bolsheviks, with Nikolai Lenin and Zinoviev at their head, climbed to the platform. A cheer went up from the Bolshevik supporters. Lenin and Zinoviev, who had been in hiding since the July riots, had come out of their holes to take a historic part in this new revolution.

When the ovation died down, Dan briefly stated the object of the meeting before relinquishing his place to Trotsky. "The business of this convention," said he, "divides itself into three heads: a governmental crisis, the question of war and peace, and the Constituent Assembly" ...

Martov, the ablest of the Menshevik internationalists, took the platform and in a voice ringing with indignation demanded immediate settlement of the governmental crisis: "If this convention wants to be the voice of revolutionary democracy, it must not sit idly by before a rapidly developing civil war that may result in a disastrous explosion of the counterrevolution," he said. "When the question of organisation of the government is being settled by one of the revolutionary parties, we are challenged by only one problem; the immediate warding off of impending civil war."

He proposed the appointment of a committee with other socialist parties and organisations to stop the rapidly developing clash. The resolution was passed. [But Trotsky, because of other pressing reasons, delayed the implementation of the resolution, and] thereby toss[ed] away his opportunity for compromise.

Meanwhile the guns [from the Aurora] on the Neva continued their eloquent boom! boom! boom!

Kharash, a [Menshevik] delegate from the Twelfth Army, got to the floor: "While a proposition for a peaceful settlement is being introduced here, a battle goes on in the streets of Petrograd," he said. "The Winter Palace is being shelled. The spectre of civil war is rising. The Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries repudiate all that is going on here, and stubbornly resist attempts to seize the government."

"He does not represent the Twelfth Army!" cried a soldier from the ranks. "The army demands all power to the soviets."

Twenty others were on their feet

in an instant. "Staff! Staff! he comes from the Staff! he's not a soldier!" they shouted angrily, shaking their fists at the delegate from the Twelfth. Pandemonium broke loose ...

"We are leaving the convention," a [Menshevik] said. "We can't stand here no more! We are going unarmed to die with our comrades in the Winter Palace."

A hush fell over the crowd. It was broken only by the sound of shuffling feet, as the speaker led the way to the door, followed by a hundred or more of the conservative revolutionaries, who filed quietly out [into 'the dustbin of history'].

At midnight, with three fellow correspondents, I left the atmosphere of that memorable meeting, great with smoke and charged with battle, and went in search of passes that would permit me to go to the Winter Palace (pp82-85).

## Telegraph

Bessie now describes an unheralded display of opposing values, which she herself witnessed. (It also reminds me of a classic Hollywood western!) On the one hand, it reveals the moral bankruptcy of the old regime; on the other, the moral integrity of the Bolsheviks - a luxury which they could still afford in these early, heady days of revolution: ie, before the counterrevolution had really got underway. The telegraph exchange had been recaptured by military school cadets (or boy soldiers): "The boys started blithely forth, convinced that they were preparing the way for the restoration of the Provisional Government and it was merely a matter time before the victorious troops of Kerensky would come and relieve them."

But a counter-attack by the Red Guards and sailors was imminent. However, they had Antonoff, head of the Red Guard and a member of the Bolshevik War Commissary, prisoner in a nearby room.

In the middle of the afternoon the terrified cadets suggested a peace parley, offering to surrender Antonoff if they were allowed to go free. But the Red Guards began to close in.

Men and girls fled to the back of the building. In a pantry I found a boy officer with a huge breadknife, trying to cut the buttons from his coat with hands that trembled so they made a long job of it ... another was tearing frantically at his epaulets.

One of the cadets grabbed the coat lapels of Mr Williams, Bessie's companion and fellow journalist, demanding that he give it up, so that he might escape incognito. But Williams, who was well known, refused on the grounds that his coat would be recognised by one of the Red Guards; he was afraid that they would then shoot him for being a traitor. He came up with another idea:

"Perhaps I can do something with Antonoff" ... he offered to go to the imprisoned minister of war and try to make terms of surrender that would guarantee their safety.

"Tavarisch Antonoff, save our lives!" cried the cadets in unison. On the word of a good revolutionist that we know you are, save our lives!"

"Where are the officers?" Antonoff asked.

"They have all left us," they answered.

# What we fight for

The terms of surrender were quickly made, and Antonoff and Williams started downstairs to face the crowd. The men of the Red Guard recognised their leader. [But they were frustrated because the Junker officers had fled; so they wanted to execute the cadets on the spot. Antonoff responded, saying:]

"I have given my word of honour as a revolutionist that these men shall not be killed, and as revolutionists you must keep your word ...

"I will myself shoot the first man who harms one of the [cadets]" ...

"Shoot us?" they cried incredulously.

"Yes!" he answered. "I would rather die than that this American should say that revolutionists of Russia were base and revengeful" (pp98-102).

## 'Mother Moscow'

Bessie quickly moved on to Moscow. Here things could not have been more different:

That cry, already so familiar in Petrograd, 'All power to the soviet!', grew louder and louder with each passing day, and I heard hectic speeches punctuated with the same "Bourgeoisie!" and "Counterrevolution!", "Capitalists!" ...

'On the sides of palaces of stone and stucco, huge posters announced the opening of the opera season of 1917 and 1918 under the direction of the Workmen's and Soldiers' Committee. This is the famous Bolshoi Theatre, where imperial eyes had viewed the triumphs of the great singers of all Europe ... Strikes in Moscow grew more and more frequent ... it was not until four days after the Bolshevik rising in Petrograd that Mother Moscow suddenly became aware that she was to be the battleground of a class conflict quite as determined and far more bitter than any that had torn the scorned city of Peter. It began Friday night, October 29 ... For seven days the firing continued almost ceaselessly ... on Tuesday heavy artillery sent the guests of the Metropole and National hotels to the cellars for safety ...

The military cadets, reinforced by some of the older officers, were entrenched in the city duma, the Riding Academy and the Kremlin. The Bolsheviks conducted their operations from the governor-general's palace ...

The Bolshevik army was made up largely of factory workers. The Moscow garrison, as a whole, had agreed to remain neutral; but 20,000 soldiers offered to fight with the Bolsheviks, and it was estimated that about 5,000 took part. The critical moment came with the arrival of a company of sailors and Red Guards, sent from Petrograd to reinforce the Soviet ...

When the surrender finally came, the cadets had been driven into a corner of the Kremlin ... Here, as in Petrograd, the defence of the Provisional Government centred around the duma, and both bodies were dissolved by the Bolsheviks ...

With only a handful of people killed in Petrograd, Moscow's death toll is estimated at from 750 persons to twice that number ...

Close beside the Kremlin wall, in the holiest of holy places, the workmen and soldiers of Moscow dug the great trench that was to receive the bodies of their fallen comrades. All day they dug and when night came they continued their work by the light of torches ... By daybreak they had finished.

It was the day of the proletariat ... At 8 o'clock in the morning the procession started, and all day long the people filed past - a vast, endless throng of them, men, women, and little children. There were no priests, no prayers. Strong young soldiers in mud-coloured coats carried the red

coffins on their shoulders, and above the heads of the crowd the crimson banners flowed like a river of blood (pp112-15).

## Guillotine'

In the days before the attempt on Lenin's life by a Social Revolutionary, there was a vigorous debate about whether the revolution should abolish the death penalty. One afternoon Bessie decided to drop into the office of Jacob Peters, who was then deputy chairman of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combatting Counterrevolution and Sabotage (Cheka). He was in the office of the Anti-Counterrevolutionary Committee, successor to the Military Revolutionary Committee:

As I passed through the outer office, I noticed a woman sitting there. Her plain face was pale, and an occasional tear trickled from her frightened eyes. Peters sighed when I asked about her.

"She's the secretary of the Cadet party," he said. "I have to question her because she knows about counterrevolutionary plots, and I hate to do it. I wasn't made for this work: I detest jails, so that I can't bear to put anyone into them."

"What about the guillotine?" I asked. "Surely the Russian Revolution will never resort to that. It's been a hundred years since the French Revolution, and I would like to think the world had moved a little since then" ...

"No," he said. "We will never restore the death sentence in Russia - not unless" - and he hesitated for a moment - "not unless we have to use it for men who are traitors in our own ranks" ...

[The problem was] "It's physically impossible ... to read thoroughly every paper that I am asked to sign during the day. I have to trust others" ...

When the Military Revolutionary Tribunal began its sittings, more than 100 speculators were awaiting trial. Peters told me that one day he was riding on a street car, when the man sitting next to him ... offered to sell him 1,200 bags of flour at 250 roubles each, 6,000 pounds of sugar, and some butter. Peters got him to write down his name and address, and within an hour he had been arrested and his supplies seized.

Meanwhile the people were crying out, "Bread, bread, give us bread!" in a desperate effort to keep the old 'grey wolf', hunger, at bay.

Wherever the death penalty was inflicted, it was done by mobs having no official sanction - mobs aroused to an uncontrollable fury, and momentarily conscious of no other passion than that of reprisal. Considering the unsettled condition of the government, such instances of violence were not frequent as to change the character of the revolution into that of a reign of terror (pp131-33).

Unfortunately, Bessie spoke too soon. The tragedy for the people of Russia, and history herself, is that she was unable to foresee the dreadful effects of imperialist intervention, the desperate struggle to save the revolution, wherein the white terror had to be countered by the red terror; otherwise Russia would have slumped into even worse forms of exploitation and suffering than that which prevailed during the days of the tsar. But there were warning signs. Bessie also reports that "the Czecho-Slavs will go on fighting" until they win back "their country".

## Fate

Here Bessie reveals a somewhat formalist method. On the other hand, she also acknowledges that the stages of the revolution are moving very quickly. In the end, it might simply be a matter of semantics. Through all this emerges a dialectical understanding of the revolutionary process. She arrives at the correct position (more or less) in

the end. By so doing she echoes Lenin (as we shall see):

The revolution that overthrew tsarism was basically a political revolution. That which established the dictatorship of the proletariat was fundamentally economic. Between the political and economic revolutions, the demands of the masses had undergone a sweeping change. The Constituent Assembly, in spite of its socialistic membership, and its claim of being the only elective group in Russia, was a bequest of the political revolution (p174).

Bessie points out that there were violent protests before the assembly was due to open. They were led by members of the petty bourgeoisie, who carried banners proclaiming, "All power to the Constituent Assembly!" and "Long live the boss of Russian land!" (pp176-77). But, when they appealed to the people and the soldiers, they were quickly put down by the Red Guards.

The assembly finally opened on the afternoon of January 16 1918. The auditorium of the Tauride Palace was lined with "red-leathered couches [which] marked the places where the many mighty men of Russia's past had sat. Here, in due time, came the People's Commissaries. Trotsky was away at Brest-Litovsk. Kollontai, commissary of public welfare, was the first to take her place", followed by Krylenko, commander-in-chief of the army. "Lunacharsky, the commissar of education, came next":

The Cadets had stayed away, but the right wing of the Social Revolutionaries were already waiting there, along with their leader, Chernoff. Sverdloff, chairman of the executive committee of the All-Russian Soviet, opened the proceedings ... he began by solemnly stating that "the French bourgeois revolutionists [had] made a declaration of the rights of man, so [now] the socialist members of this new time must make their own declaration, fitting the hour of the new demand." [But it too was based on class contradictions - not bourgeoisie and artisans, but workers and peasants!]

He followed with a statement of the Bolshevik programme of land to the peasants, control of industry to the workers, government by the soviets, recognition of the people's commissaries by the Constituent Assembly, and immediate general democratic peace.

When it came to the vote, Chernoff had more votes in his pocket than the Left Social Revolutionary, Marie Spiridonova (who was a tiny woman). Living democracy sprang into action. There were cries of "Deloy! Deloy!" (Down! Down!) ... Poised on the railing was a Bolshevik sailor, who interrupted frequently with shouts of "Korniloff! [leader of the failed army coup against Kerensky's government] 'Kaledin! Kerensky! Counterrevolutionist!' ... Lenin alone sat unperturbed. He stretched himself out on one of the red-carpeted steps ... and, hidden from the eyes of the crowd, went calmly to sleep ...

A Bolshevik member read a statement declaring that the majority of the Constituent Assembly had refused to accept the demands of the people's commissaries, which were the demands of the toiling masses and the economic revolution, and in so doing had become a counterrevolutionary body.

Comrade Spiridonova insisted that the assembly accepted the resolution of the people's commissaries. The rightwing delegates refused: "A sudden commotion arose. Two men were on their feet ... One drew a revolver. [He was wrestled to his seat.] The Left SRs got up quietly from their seats, and departed from the convention as the Bolsheviks had done" (p177-79).

Obviously Lenin was well awake by now! The commissary of the palace

informed the meeting that it had now become a caucus for the Right SRs and therefore ordered them to retire to their own headquarters, because he wished to close the building. Bessie concludes:

For the people's commissaries to have permitted themselves to be rejected would have been to acknowledge themselves as a body of adventurers, and all their decrees mere scraps of worthless paper ... The Constituent Assembly contained the seeds of a great government experiment [sic], but were scattered upon the rocks of great uncompromise, and there could be no harvest [sic].

For once, she appears to misunderstand the developing revolution, to which she is undoubtedly committed.

"At midnight Albert Williams [a colleague] was talking to Madame Kollontai. 'How long do you think the assembly will last?' he asked. 'Comrade, don't you think it has lasted too long already?' she answered" (p182).

Bessie now turns to the Smolny, where the members of the central executive committee of the All-Russian soviet were meeting. It is worthwhile pointing out here that, at this stage, the soviet still included opposition parties. Therefore the latter were free to launch personal attacks on the Bolsheviks. Following the dissolution of the assembly, one delegate shouted at Lenin: "Long live the dictator!" Whence an angry mob sprang to their feet and demanded, "Put him out! Put him out!"

Lenin took his place. He stood quietly for a moment, surveying the audience, with his hands in his pockets and an appraising expression in his brown eyes. He knew [that] he must win over wavering members of his own flock [not for the first time!]. He began by quietly tracing the historical developments of the soviet as an institution ...

"In Russia," he said, "the workers have developed organisations, which give them power to execute aspirations ... We did not organise the soviets. They were organised in 1917; they were created in the revolution of 1905. The people organised the soviets. When I tell you that the government of the soviets is superior to the Constituent Assembly, that it is more fundamentally representative of the will of the masses, I do not tell you anything new. As long ago as April 4, I told you that the soviets were more representative of the people than this Constituent Assembly, which you want to organise.

"The February Revolution was a political bourgeois revolution overthrowing tsarism. In November a social revolution occurred, and the working masses became the sovereign authority. The Workmen's and Soldiers' delegates are not bound by any rules or traditions to the old bourgeois society. Their government has taken all the power and the rights into its own hands. The Constituent Assembly is the highest expression of the political ideals of bourgeois society, which are no longer necessary in a socialist state. The Constituent Assembly will be dissolved. If the Constituent Assembly represented the will of the people, we would shout, 'Long live the Constituent Assembly!' Instead we shout: 'Down with the Constituent Assembly!'" he finished (pp183-84).

And there we must leave Bessie Beatty's vivid, often thrilling account of the Russian Revolution. In part 2, I shall be looking at Arthur Ransome's account of the deepening crisis which faced the Bolshevik regime in the period 1920-21.

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## Notes

1. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bessie\\_Beatty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bessie_Beatty).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# weekly WORKER

## Disestablish the Church of England

# Bigotry parading with a halo

Tim Farron claims it is 'impossible' to be both a Christian and the leader of a modern political party. But, says **Eddie Ford**, he is a fake martyr

Last week Tim Farron announced his intention to resign as leader of the Liberal Democrats, though he will remain in post until a successor is elected in the summer recess. At the moment Vince Cable, now that he is back in parliament as the MP for Twickenham once again, is the hot favourite to replace him - though Ed Davey, who served with Cable in the last coalition government, is also considered a strong contender.

According to Farron, who is on the evangelical wing of the Church of England, he cannot be both a Christian and the leader of a modern political party: "From the very first day of my leadership I have faced questions about my Christian faith," he said. The "consequences" of this unwanted "focus" was that Farron found himself "torn between living as a faithful Christian and serving as a political leader", concluding that "to be a political leader - especially of a progressive, liberal party in 2017 - and to live as a committed Christian, to hold faithfully to *The bible's* teaching, has felt impossible for me". With an air of martyrdom, Farron said he felt that he had become "the subject of suspicion because of what I believe and who my faith is in" - meaning that "we are kidding ourselves if we think we yet live in a tolerant, liberal society".

Frankly, this is total humbug. Not for nothing did Jennie Rigg, acting chair of LGBT+ Lib Dems, describe Farron's speech as "awful", "pious", "self-pitying" and "upsetting to all three of the overlapping circles in the Venn diagram of liberals, Christians, and LGBT+ people - and semantically dubious to boot".<sup>1</sup> Funnily enough, Theresa May, who just so happens to be prime minister - though watch this space - seems to have no problems reconciling her faith with her political position. The daughter of a Church of England vicar from the Anglo-Catholic tradition, she regularly attends services on Sundays (which is one definition of "committed") saying that her Christian faith is "part of who I am and therefore how I approach things".<sup>2</sup>

Gordon Brown too made no secret about the strong influence exerted upon him by his father, a Church of Scotland minister, and let us not forget the saintly Tony Blair. According to Alastair Campbell's diary, Blair often read *The bible* before taking any important decisions - and after leaving office he quickly converted from Anglicanism to Catholicism.<sup>3</sup> There is no particular reason to doubt the sincerity of such beliefs. Indeed, it is also worth noting that if Ed Miliband had succeeded in his bid to become prime minister - go on, just imagine it - then he would have been the first *self-declared* atheist ever to have done so.

Of course, by pretending to be suffering persecution at the hands of intolerant atheists, Farron has attracted supporters - fellow victims of the supposedly unstoppable forces of secularism. "His tormentors should be ashamed of themselves," declared John Sentamu, archbishop of York - whilst the archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby,



Tim Farron: sticking with god

tweeted: "If he can't be in politics, media and politicians have questions." Expressing similar concerns, Theos - the think-tank supported by church leaders - regarded Farron's resignation as "highlighting what a growing number of people in Britain now recognise": that it is "becoming increasingly difficult for Christians to hold public office".<sup>4</sup>

Also not wanting to miss out on the secular-bashing was Christian Concern, which runs the Christian Legal Centre - responsible for a succession of court cases defending nurses wearing crucifixes, anti-gay cake-bakers, B&B owners, etc. Needless to say, they see Christians being thrown to the lions everywhere - all victims of an increasingly rampant "Christianophobia".<sup>5</sup> Tim Farron's forced resignation, we read, shows the "totalitolerance" of the "illiberal elite" - now "we have seen at first hand the pressure Christians have been under to conform to the new morality of sexual liberation and radical secularism". A grim vision. Poor Farron "had to choose whether to surrender his conscience and forfeit his soul to the intolerant, marauding elite" - but opted for the righteous path in the end. Farron's departure, alongside the "vilification" of the Democratic Unionist Party, demonstrates that "Christians are simply not tolerated by the illiberal elite in positions of influence". Indeed, if this "crusade" continues, "we will enter a harsh and conformist world where Christianity will be 'no platformed' and eventually squeezed out of every sphere of public life" - pariahs in their own land.

On the other hand, Christian Concern has absolutely no problems with Islamophobia - which seems to be a

bit of a speciality. Turning to an article almost at random, it seems that "we are at war with an evil ideology" - ie, Islamism, and that "jihad has continued by Muslims for the last 1,400 years".<sup>6</sup> Unlike Christianity, presumably, "Islam has expanded violently throughout its history" - Muhammad being a "warrior who fought in many battles and personally ordered or supported the killing of multiple people". Ibn Ishaq's biography is cited, where it is claimed Muhammad dug a trench and beheaded over 600 men from the Jewish Banu Qurayza tribe. Therefore "those who commit violence in the name of Islam can legitimately claim that they are following the example and teaching of Muhammad". But "by contrast", Jesus "never killed anyone" - in fact, "he did the opposite, by healing and raising people to life". Confronted by such an enemy, CC argues that "we need bold and courageous Christians who are unashamed and unafraid to confront Islam".

Among Christian circles and rightwing newspapers, it has become an article of faith - or common sense - that Christianity is being marginalised, whether in official politics, the BBC or the courts. But this nonsense flies in the face of reality. Parliament itself has a *disproportionate* number of committed or militant Christians compared to society as a whole, and the House of Lords is a part-theocracy - after all 26 seats are reserved for Anglican bishops as law-makers. Besides them there are other faith leaders, who consistently take a reactionary stance on gay rights, abortion, right-to-die issues and so on. According to the constitution, the Church of England is the *established* church (state religion) and the monarch

is the "defender of the faith" - ie, the Anglican faith. So much for the goddess atheism engulfing the nation.

### Squirmed

What Tim Farron fails to understand is that it is perfectly possible to be a Christian and a politician, but what is problematic is being a *bigot* - whether against gays or women. He clearly felt extremely uncomfortable when asked repeated questions about gay sex, first replying evasively that "we're all sinners" and then later saying that he did not believe it was a sin. Well, not *much* of a sin - as what he was apparently saying now was in conflict with past statements on the issue. After all, in 2007 he voted against the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations Bill, which outlawed discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in the provision of goods and services - six years later Farron abstained from the third and final reading of the Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Bill, despite having voted for same-sex marriage earlier that year. Similarly, he voted in favour of a 2006 bill which would have brought the abortion limit down to 21 weeks and would have introduced compulsory counselling and a "cooling off" period before the procedure took place. The following year he told the Salvation Army's *War Cry* magazine that "abortion is wrong" and that "society has to climb down from the position that says there is nothing objectionable about abortion before a certain time" - the "reality is that abortion is too widely available" and "there needs to be tighter restrictions". The "challenge" for Christians was to "come up with realistic alternative strategies".<sup>7</sup>

The fact that the Lib Dem leader squirmed so much about gay sex was *good* - at least as far as communists are concerned. It is healthy and progressive that bigoted views are vigorously challenged. We would say the same about a political leader influenced by Islam who started to look awkward or shifty when trying to answer direct questions about that section of the *Koran* which states that the evidence of a woman counts less than that of a man - you should feel embarrassed by such stuff. And if you do not like being asked about it - then don't stand for public office.

In the case of Tim Farron, he thoroughly deserved the trouble he found himself in. He may be a "committed" and "faithful" Christian, but it all depends on what sort of Christian values you

have. If you go to *The bible*, especially the Old Testament, you immediately come across all manner of absurd and ridiculous stipulations, whether about not coveting your neighbour's ass or how if you go to war with the Canaanites or Philistines you have to smite them all down - and not leave one donkey alive. The straightforward truth is that Farron, to one degree or another, is prejudiced against gay people - if he wants to call that Christianity, that is up to him. But other people will have different and contending interpretations of that religion.

It had been widely reported that several senior figures in the party had visited Farron in recent days and weeks to persuade him to step down. They had become exasperated by his reactionary social attitudes and also the Lib Dems' mediocre election performance - even though they picked up an extra four seats, their share of the popular vote actually fell by 0.5%.

The 'coup' began, if we are to believe sources within the party, with the resignation on June 14 of the home affairs spokesman, Lord Brian Paddick, formerly one of the country's most *open* senior gay policemen. Paddick, made a life peer in September 2013, said he felt unable to continue in his role because of Farron's views on "various issues" - no prizes for guessing what they were. In the same vein, David Laws, who served as education minister in the coalition government, told the *i* newspaper online that "you cannot be a leader of a liberal party while holding fundamentally illiberal and prejudiced views which fail to respect our party's great traditions of promoting equality for all our citizens".<sup>8</sup>

Given Tim Farron's prejudiced and unprincipled views, communists say good riddance to a fake martyr ●

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### Notes

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