

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly
worker



Silvio Berlusconi and the Mafia's role in the Sicilian elections

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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NEW ALLIANCE AGAINST IRAN



LETTERS



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

Trotsky wood

How did Leon Trotsky characterise the Russian Revolution? Was it bourgeois democratic, socialist, both or neither? Lars T Lih argues that Trotsky was inconsistent and incoherent ('Trotsky 1917 vs Trotsky 1924', November 2). In 1924 he stated the revolution was socialist. In 1917 he thought it was bourgeois democratic.

Lih alleges that "the most cogent refutation" of Trotsky's understanding of the revolution as socialist can be found in an article Trotsky wrote in 1917 titled 'The character of the Russian Revolution'. The *Weekly Worker* kindly reprinted the article, so that readers can examine whether Lih's allegations are true or false. Amongst other things, Lih states about the article that Trotsky "derided the whole issue of the character of the revolution as an academic, 'sociological' one with no political importance". Moreover, Lih also writes that Trotsky labelled the events of 1917 a "bourgeois-democratic revolution".

I was therefore surprised when I could not find evidence in the article to support Lih's statements. On the contrary, I found information pointing in the opposite direction. I discovered that Trotsky not only denied the revolution was bourgeois, but also took the issue of the characterisation of the revolution most seriously. The character of the revolution was of immediate political importance. The article seemed to affirm the positions Lih attributed to Trotsky in 1924. If so, Trotsky was completely consistent and coherent.

Trotsky was clear that the character of the revolution was proletarian and described the proletariat as socialist. He stated that the revolution "is not a 'national', not a bourgeois, revolution". To characterise the revolution as bourgeois was "empty" and those who did so were "dwelling in the realm of the hallucinations of the 18th and 19th centuries". Trotsky quoted Engels on revolution to prove his point. Engels stated that revolutions go far beyond their original aims. This demonstrated that a proletarian revolution in the 20th century can not only liberate "the oppressed peasant and urban masses" from "serf-like relations" (including the "caste-based rapacity" of the church) - but also end capitalism and wage-slavery throughout Europe. Trotsky argued that a 20th century proletarian revolution is necessarily transitional to socialism. It not only resolved the problems of failed bourgeois revolutions, such as the continued existence of serfdom, but also those of a decaying capitalism based on "private ownership of the means of production".

Trotsky's citation of Engels demonstrated both an awareness of the contradictory nature of transitional forms and the political importance of a correct characterisation of the Russian Revolution. Engels stated that the fact revolutions go far beyond their original aims "is one of the laws of the evolution of bourgeois society". Trotsky used Engels' law to prove that what Plekhanov and the Mensheviks "give out as Marxism" was a sterile sociological position. He opposed "real theory" - concerned with the evolution of categories and their instantiation in understanding changing social relations - to Plekhanov's sociology. The latter characterised the revolution as bourgeois in order to "preserve the privileges of the bourgeoisie". The Mensheviks used a pseudo-Marxist sociology in order to uphold the "axiom" that it is impossible to have a bourgeois revolution without the bourgeoisie.

Trotsky's argument against this axiom was far from academic. It was highly theoretical and deeply concerned with his characterisation of the revolution as proletarian and socialist. Trotsky discussed the period of Jacobin rule during the

French revolution to illustrate how it is possible to have a bourgeois revolution without the bourgeoisie. The Jacobins, like the Mensheviks and SRs, were petty bourgeois in outlook and composition, but relied on the "urban artisan-proletarian lower classes" for support. Trotsky quoted Marx to show that the effect of the terror was to "dispose of the enemies of the bourgeoisie". In the temporary absence of bourgeois rule, it was an alliance of the proletariat with the petty bourgeoisie. This advanced the interests of the economically dominant capitalist class.

Trotsky then discussed the difference between the Jacobins and the petty bourgeois parties in the Russian Revolution - the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries. These parties "fell into a slavish dependence on the groups representing counterrevolutionary capital". Trotsky explained this as the result of the "higher level to which capitalism had evolved in Russia" in 1917, compared to France in 1789 and 1848. In particular he mentioned the proletariat's "revolutionary role" - based not on its numerical strength, but on its "crucial productive role".

Trotsky's account was therefore a skilled application of Marx's theory of history to contemporary events. This not only gave explanations of the different positions of the political groups according to the classes they represented, but also paid attention to changing economic relations within an evolving capitalism. He showed an awareness of both the political economy of capitalism and the emergence of contradictory social formations, which were neither bourgeois nor proletarian. This resulted in a dynamic account of contemporary historical events that - contra Lih - took the question of the correct characterisation of the revolution seriously and explained the political implications of differing theoretical approaches to this question.

If I am correct, then why is Lih's reading of Trotsky's article so mistaken? Is it because he has been influenced by rightwing historians who want to prove that Trotsky was as guilty of the falsification of history as Stalin? Does he believe that no credence should be given to sources written in hindsight, such as memoirs and subsequent political polemic? I don't know. However, I wonder what his opinions are on theoretical history in general and Marxist theories in particular. Does he adhere to a theory? If so, what is it?

Compared to Trotsky, Lih's historiography - impressively dependent on detailed examinations of textual evidence - does not seem to place ideas and events within the context of an evolving social whole. This could lead to a subjective and limited approach to the material he studies. Put differently, he cannot see the wood for the trees.

Paul B Smith
Ormskirk

Lars and Jack

It is very frustrating to try to make sense of Lars T Lih and Jack Conrad ('Putting the record straight', November 9) on the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry'. Back in 1877, Fredrick Engels described the thought process that produces the lines of argument put forward by Lars and Jack:

"To the metaphysician, things and their mental images - ideas - are isolated, to be considered one after the other and apart from each other: fixed, rigid objects of investigation, given once for all. He thinks in absolutely unmediated antitheses. His communication is 'yea, yea; nay, nay'; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. For him a thing either exists or does not exist; a thing cannot at the same time be itself and something else. Positive and negative absolutely exclude one another; cause and effect stand in a rigid antithesis one to the other."

A 'stage' in the development of the consciousness of the masses is not to be confused with a programmatic separation

of the bourgeois and socialist revolutions. We must see the Russian Revolution as one revolution, which proceeded in stages from February to October - not two distinct revolutions separated by a whole historic era to allow the productive forces and the mass of the proletariat to develop until they were able to make a socialist revolution. The African National Congress and South African Communist Party provide the modern example of Stalinist stagism.

Unlike Lars, we must see the internationalism of Lenin's April theses or of Trotsky's *Permanent revolution* as unlike like that of Stalinism, Sinn Féin or even Nazism - 'people like us in other countries who might help us or we might help'. The global working class is one class with different national sections, which can only achieve socialism, and then the communist future, via world revolution, as proposed by Lenin in April 1917, and as rejected by every Stalinist current that has falsely claimed the heritage of the revolution since.

The original Bolshevik formulation represented a bourgeois revolution, albeit led by the Bolsheviks at the head of the working class. Lenin rejected that in April 1917 in his famous April theses in favour of the dictatorship of the proletariat. That is not a piece of lying Trotskyist propaganda launched in his *Lessons of October* in 1924. Jack asserts his point thus: "Indeed, Trotsky even claims that Lenin 'came out furiously against the old Bolshevik slogan of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry'. Instead of a 'bourgeois republic', Lenin held out the prospect of a 'full socialist state'. Though he never admitted it in any publication, speech, letter or telegram, Lenin had stolen, adopted - or maybe through his own gallant efforts independently arrived at - the theory of permanent revolution, as put forward by Trotsky in his *Results and prospects* (1906)."

Unfortunately, Lenin himself came out even more vigorously against the old formulation in his 'Letter on tactics', written between April 8 and 13 (Julian) 1917 and published as a pamphlet the same month. He openly attacked Kamenev, the leading opponent of the April theses, in a manner that really cannot be described as a "difference of emphasis, even temperament, but not of substance"; thus: "Now let us see how comrade Y Kamenev, in *Pravda* No27, formulates his 'disagreements' with my theses and with the views expressed above. This will help us to grasp them more clearly: 'As for comrade Lenin's general scheme,' writes comrade Kamenev, 'it appears to us unacceptable, inasmuch as it proceeds from the assumption that the bourgeois-democratic revolution is completed, and builds on the immediate transformation of this revolution into a socialist revolution.' There are two big mistakes here [note "big mistakes, not "difference of emphasis" - GD].

"First. The question of 'completion' of the bourgeois-democratic revolution is stated wrongly. The question is put in an abstract, simple, so to speak one-colour, way, which does not correspond to the objective reality. To put the question this way, to ask now 'whether the bourgeois-democratic revolution is completed' and say no more, is to prevent oneself from seeing the exceedingly complex reality, which is at least two-coloured. This is in theory. In practice, it means surrendering helplessly to petty-bourgeois revolutionism.

"Indeed, reality shows us both the passing of power into the hands of the bourgeoisie (a 'completed' bourgeois-democratic revolution of the usual type) and, side by side with the real government, the existence of a parallel government which represents the 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry'. This 'second government' has itself ceded the power to the bourgeoisie, has chained itself to the bourgeois government.

"Is this reality covered by comrade Kamenev's old-Bolshevik formula,

which says that 'the bourgeois-democratic revolution is not completed'? It is not. The formula is obsolete. It is no good at all. It is dead. And it is no use trying to revive it."

Oh dear, comrade Jack, not a bit of the "difference of emphasis" here either.

And, from the same work, Lenin making that explicit 'Trotskyist' 1924 formulation of the issue: "Comrade Kamenev concludes his article with the remark that 'in a broad discussion he hopes to carry his point of view, which is the only possible one for revolutionary social democracy if it wishes to and should remain to the very end the party of the revolutionary masses of the proletariat and not turn into a group of communist propagandists'. It seems to me that these words betray a completely erroneous estimate of the situation [again, not a "difference of emphasis" - GD]. Comrade Kamenev contraposes to a 'party of the masses' a 'group of propagandists'. But the 'masses' have now succumbed to the craze of 'revolutionary' defencism. Is it not more becoming for internationalists at this moment to show that they can resist 'mass' intoxication rather than to 'wish to remain' with the masses - ie, to succumb to the general epidemic?"

Lenin condemned Kamenev and two other Bolshevik deputies who repudiated his theses that the party should work for a national defeat in war when arrested in October 1914. Kamenev and Stalin held that same national chauvinist line, but those with more of the "politically limited abilities of Alexander Shliapnikov and Vyacheslav Molotov", as Jack dubbed them, maintained the Leninist line, and were ousted from the editorship of *Pravda* to impose the rightist line. However, despite his opposition to defencism, Shliapnikov, like all Bolsheviks in Russia, did not pursue Lenin's 'Down with the provisional government' line. Trotsky, in his famous *History* notes that Sukhanov says Stalin was "a grey spot which would sometimes give out a dim and inconsequential light". And then there was the scabbing of Kamenev and Zinoviev on the October revolution - "treason", as Lenin put it.

Scarcely merely a "difference of emphasis".

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

Sorry end

To add to Danny Daly's lament (Letters, November 16), the annual Anarchist Bookfair in London was for 34 years the highlight of the anarchist and radical Marxist calendar. It brought together the most splendid, vivid fascinating and eccentric, profound and trivial, exciting and profane, hilarious and spiritual assortments of people.

They came in thousands. They bathed in the rainbow variety of factions, tendencies, visions and issues. Workshops, presentations, entertainment and discussion filled the entire day, as the crowds crammed past stalls laden with literature and art, T-shirts and stickers, posters and badges, cards and calendars. A myriad of interesting and unique stuff you would never find anywhere else under one roof. The vegan food commune outside the venues hawked the most interesting of pastries and butties, tatties and cakes - rich, wonderful chocolate cakes and angel cakes, which tested the willpower of the most dedicated of health freaks.

In my own judgement, the Anarchist Bookfair vied with the Durham Miners Gala (almost) in terms of 'not to be missed' events. Ancient anarchists rubbed shoulders with the Mohican punks of yesteryear, born-again hippies, young activists and what a Glasgow paper, talking of the anti-Polaris demonstrators of the 60s, called "beardies, weirdies and lang-lagged beasts".

Sadly, the great spirit of comradeship diversity, the 'let a million flowers blossom, let ten thousand schools of thought reign', which Mao had once said and may actually have once believed, had started to change and smoulder into authoritarian intolerance. In a gradual change of attitude, which I

think has spread from the ultra-PC 'no platforming', 'shut them up', 'safe space' evangelists of the US campuses, only very particular schools of thought would be allowed to be heard.

Invited to speak one year, I suggested I bring the famous 'red' miners' banner of the Follonsby Lodge. The banner, originally designed in 1928, famously sets forth the options and variety of radical working class ideologies and 'roads', depicting social democracy, Bolshevism and anarcho-syndicalism, the ballot box and the gun, in the form of Kier Hardie, James Connolly, VI Lenin, AJ Cook and George Harvey. The banner encapsulates the trajectory of ideological struggle and events which led through the birth of the International Workers of the World, the Independent Labour Party, the development of the soviets, the General Strike, the Irish Easter Rising and the Russian Revolution. In this trajectory, the debate around the nature of the state and working class democracy, ideas of the anarchists and syndicalists, the industrial unionists, how society could function once capitalism was defeated, were all reflected in the birth of this banner.

I had concluded that the Anarchist Bookfair was an ideal platform to retell this story and the way in which working class history had developed. "Nope", I was told, the bookfair couldn't guarantee the banner's safety. One look at the central portrait of Lenin flanked by the hammer and sickle would be enough to stifle any debate and could lead to the destruction of the priceless banner. It was an early demonstration of the chain of thought which would seek to rewrite history by tearing down all statues and memorials and references to un-PC historic figures. It would be the fingers in the ears, while shouting 'la la la', to stop the sound of words too wounding to be heard. It is the recreation of history to be more like what we wished it had been.

Then, four or five years ago, we had a gang attack on comrade Brian Bamford of the Northern Anarchist Network (NAN). Brian has a knack of rubbing folk up the wrong way, it must be said. He had been irreverent to an old stalwart of traditional anarchism, who had passed away. Brian's obituary was thought to be insensitive, which it undoubtedly was. But it led to his stall being turned over, his books trashed and him beaten up and sprayed with ketchup. This was in the middle of an event put on by anarchists, who are supposed to believe we can govern ourselves without enforcement and laws imposed upon us. It got worse, as first Brian, then members of his group, were banned from regional anarchist bookfairs - not simply from having a stall, but attending - on pain of violence. Book and newspaper shops which stocked the NAN magazine were visited and warned not to stock the journal; the printers likewise were given the gypsy's warning. He hasn't mounted a bookstall since.

Last year, a section of the anarchist wing, fighting alongside the PKK against IS, were invited to speak at a workshop. The hall was invaded by students from the Gulf states, who, although purporting to be progressives, were basically supporters of the jihadists and theocrats. They stamped and chanted and no-platformed the speakers. Bending over backward to preserve our traditions of free speech, they were invited to present an alternative view before the anarchists spoke, which they did, and then broke up the meeting and stopped them being heard.

This year was the final straw. As outlined in Danny's letter, one of the anarcho-feminists had been circulating a leaflet questioning why they didn't allow trans men to attend women-only sessions and workshops, when she was surrounded and shouted down and threatened by a gang of 'trans men', who not only stopped those sessions, but put a whole list of demands to the bookfair. This was as to content of stalls, workshops, items displayed and on sale. The organisers, under a constant barrage, have just said, 'Bollocks. You organise your own - we're done.'

I cannot in conscience blame them. The

only way to stop this march of intolerance would have been to not tolerate it and to physically impose free thought and free speech on people who plainly don't believe in it - which would be a contradiction too hard for many anarchists to cope with. It's a sad reflection on where mostly middle class 'safe space' victim-mongering, no-platforming, witch-hunting tyranny has taken us. It is a very sad day, in my view. We have to ensure that this intolerance and denial of free speech and basic liberty is not fed into working class organisations and events. I'm afraid we already see this happening at the merest challenge to agreed wisdom on climate change or - Lord, have mercy on me - working class socialists who voted for Brexit.

Tyneside anarchists, in conjunction with the Follonsby Wardley Miners Lodge Association, will be hosting a Guy Fawkes Workers' Bookfair on Tyneside next year, on November 3. This will be an opportunity to present books on working class political ideology and history and progressive thought that one would not get the chance to see in conventional book venues. It will very much be in the tradition of the once-famous bookfair, although we don't expect the same numbers. We are hoping to present a display of the Tyneside 'Red Miners' banners, some of which carry portraits of people who were heroes at the time, though fallen from grace in their latter years. Smelling salts will be at hand to revive those prone to swoon at upsetting scenes. At this bookfair the principle of free speech and political liberty will be guaranteed, and anyone who doesn't accept the principle, 'left' or right, will be not invited and, if necessary, excluded.

David Douglass
South Shields

Full house

In the July 1 issue of the *Labour Party Marxists* publication, the following was said about Corbyn's housing policy: "... sadly, it is worth noting that *For the many* internalises many aspects of Thatcherism. Take the programme for building a million homes. Nine tenths of them are projected to be private. Only a tenth council and housing association" ("You voted Labour, now transform Labour").

This is deeply misleading. Prior to the unveiling of Labour's manifesto in this year's general election, Corbyn made a promise of a million houses within five years, in the event of a Labour government being elected. Not long after, *For the many* revealed their plans for housing: plans that contradict what is said in the *LPM* article. The manifesto does not promise that 100,000 council and housing association houses will be built as a total within the million. It promises 100,000 *per year* as part of the plans to build a million houses within five years. This means that, of the million, 500,000 will be council and housing association. Not one tenth: one in two.

It could be said to this that the message of the *LPM* article still stands even in spite of this correction. But to say that would be incorrect. It is true that, regardless of whether or not 10% or 50% of Labour's proposed houses are set to be council or housing association, *For the many* still accepts the significant interference of landlords and private ownership within the realm of housing. But it being 50% does make a huge difference.

The fact that it stands at 50% means that it'd be inaccurate to say that Labour's housing plans contains any element of Thatcherism at all. For it to contain an element of Thatcherism, it would have to accept the creed of gradually intensifying privatisation of housing in accordance with the dictates of neoliberal capitalism. It quite clearly isn't proposing that. Rather, what the manifesto pledges is a return to a distinctly 'old Labour' form of social democracy within the housing sector, firmly in line with the Keynesianism of the manifesto as a whole.

That is not to say that we should herald the housing pledges in the manifesto as sufficient for the creation of a socialist society. Any Marxist that would think this should not be considered a Marxist at all. Keynesianism is objectively hostile to socialism by its very fabric and foundation.

But the most essential criterion that we ought to judge this according to is what general direction Labour's manifesto is travelling in - and that includes within housing.

The most important thing is that Labour's manifesto represents a clear and decisive break from Thatcherism, regardless of whether it is towards a form of Keynesianism or not. In the current climate facing us in terms of class-consciousness, even a call for a return to social democratic Keynesianism is inherently progressive. Not because Keynesianism is progressive in and of itself, but because it represents a clear advance in terms of the capacity for people to question the legitimacy of austerity and neoliberalism.

This all links to the development of class though - it is a gradual process that is built up in accordance with a combination of factors: a changing objective situation and a revolutionary party to 'push' the process. A significant part of that entails us responding to the pledges found in *For the many* in relation to the general state of poor class-consciousness in society at this stage.

As Rosa Luxemburg points out, Marxists will inevitably be faced with "fresh disappointments and disenchantments" that present significant obstacles for revolutionaries of all stripes. Nevertheless, a determined revolutionary force can overcome these obstacles through tenacious struggle.

If we are to assume that the disappointments and disenchantments of the past are the betrayals of past Labour governments and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 90s, we will find that we can only see Corbyn's reformist programme as a positive step that ought to not be denounced, but built upon.

By misrepresenting Corbyn's pledges in this way to draw the false conclusion that they have internalised "Thatcherite elements", I fail to see how *LPM* are aiding in this process. Presumably, because it constitutes "economism". But, hey - same old, same old.

Ralph Kirkham
Bristol

Statement

Labour Against the Witchhunt (LAW) is a Labour Party campaign. We urge all those who oppose Labour's witch-hunt against Corbyn supporters and critics of Israel/Zionism to stay in the party and fight.

Labour Against the Witchhunt welcomes the participation of all people who support its three key aims:

1. An end to automatic suspensions and expulsions;
2. Rejection of the IHRA definition of

anti-Semitism, which conflates anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism and support for the rights of the Palestinian people;

3. Abolition of Labour's 'compliance unit'. Those, like the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, who promote the false anti-Semitism smear, who conflate anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism and who promote the myth of left anti-Semitism, are not welcome in LAW.

Those, like Socialist Fight, who promote the 'socialism of fools' - the view that imperialism's support for Zionism and Israel is because of the influence of Jews - are also not welcome in LAW.

Tony Greenstein, Stan Keable, Jackie Walker
LAW steering committee

Racist

I have just a few words for James Harvey's article about the Football Lads Alliance ('Rising to the challenge', November 16). It is racist against any form of protests by the white, indigenous people of our country and it should stop now.

We are not 'far right'. We are in the middle, and just sick to the back teeth at what is happening in our country. And the 'racist' label is wearing thin - very thin.

Julie Stanley
email

Back 'em up

Myself and my missus were on the march in London on October 7. Yes, we are both white, but are you calling us racists? I've just read what you say about the FLA, so now let's see if you back up your words. I await your answer saying, as far as you're concerned, myself and my missus and *everyone* else on that march were racists.

Shane O'Neill
email

Something real

Having viewed your piece on the rise of the FLA, I take your views as those of a hard, leftwing fool with no idea of anything which is going on in the UK today.

You seem to doubt the commitment of a normal working class man to defend the rights of white working class family values. I have no political alliance with the national government. In fact, a lot of my views are classed as very leftwing, but I am not, like you and your kind, blinkered and worthless.

Have you *ever* sat with anyone from the FLA and asked about their aims? Should you wish to discuss the issue at length, maybe you could learn something real about the working class people of the UK - the group you claim to be part of.

Michael Daley
email

Fighting fund

Records falling

Brilliant news! Over the last seven days we have raised what I believe is a record sum for our fighting fund in a single week. Readers and supporters have donated no less than £1,202!

Pride of place amongst them goes to comrade RG, who sent us a cheque for a hugely impressive, but strangely unusual, amount of £392 without a covering note (as is his wont, as one of the regular contributors to this fund). When editor Peter Manson emailed him to enquire what such a precise amount was for, he pointed out that it exactly matches the fighting fund deficit we have built up so far in 2017!

Well, thanks to that, plus an unusually large number of hefty standing orders, the total for November now stands at £2,128 - exactly £378 more than our £1,750 monthly target with over a week still to go. In other words, we've not only smashed right through that barrier, but are only £14 short of

eliminating the deficit too!

And there's more good news - this time in the shape of our online readership. Over the last seven days we had 4,029 readers - the first time we've exceeded 4,000 in well over a year. Amongst them were PayPal donors DC (£10) and LN (£5) - thanks to both. As for those standing order donors, there are too many to list, but a special mention is due to comrades KB, SK, PM, MM, TB and TR for their ultra-generous contributions.

Now let's see what the last week of November will bring. A word of warning here: because of the Christmas break we frequently lose out when it comes to cheques in particular. So let's make sure that we go into the final month of the year with a large surplus. ●

Robbie Rix

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

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday November 26, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group: study of August Nimtz's *Lenin's electoral strategy from Marx and Engels through the revolution of 1905*. This meeting: chapter 3, 'The "dress rehearsal" and the first drama'. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk; and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday November 28, 6.45pm: Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1. This meeting: 'From music to language: a Bayaka perspective'. Speaker: Jerome Lewis. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: <http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

We are many

Friday November 24, 7.30pm: Film screening, Oasis Community Centre, Princess Elizabeth Way, Cheltenham. Organised by Gloucestershire Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/Gloucestershire-Stop-the-War-Coalition-379355595736213.

Taxi co-ops versus Uber?

Friday, November 24, 10am-1pm: Discussion of cooperative economic practice, 1 Drummond Gate, Pimlico, London, SW1. Organised by Cooperatives UK: www.uk.coop/taxicoops.

Craft and peace

Saturday November 25, 11am to 6pm: 7th annual fair, Birch Community Centre, Brighton Grove, Manchester M14. Organised by Greater Manchester CND: www.facebook.com/greatermanchester.cnd.

Palestine solidarity

Sunday November 26, 2pm to 6pm: Festival, community centre, 150 Ossulston Street, London NW1. Music, readings, speeches, Palestinian goods. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org/events/festival-for-palestine.

Remember John Maclean

Sunday November 26, 1pm: Graveside commemoration, Eastwood Cemetery, Thornliebank Road, Glasgow G4 (near Thornliebank station). Followed by social, St Mary's church hall, 150 Shawhill Road, Glasgow G43. Organised by Scottish Republican Socialist Movement: <http://scottishrepublicans.myfreeforum.org>.

Labour's support for Zionism

Tuesday November 28, 7pm: Meeting, 1st floor, The Wellington, 37 Bennetts Hill, Birmingham B2. Speaker: Paul Kelemen. Organised by Birmingham Socialist Discussion Group: 07771 567496.

Monopoly power against democratic rights

Tuesday November 28, 7pm: Political economy talk with Simon Renton, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London, EC1. The final in a series of four classes on 'Capitalism, crisis and imperialism'. Hosted by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.

The coming war on China

Tuesday November 28, 6.30pm: Fundraiser screening of John Pilger's documentary, followed by Q&A with the filmmaker. Rio Cinema, 107 Kingsland High Street, London E8. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Recalling the Spanish Civil War

Thursday November 30, 8pm: Photoart book launch, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. *A gentle visual fire* by artist Amy Feneck features the photographic collections on Spain in the archives of the Marx Memorial Library. Hosted by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk.

Labour Against the Witchhunt

Saturday December 2, 12 noon to 3pm: Organising meeting, Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Organised by Labour Against the Witchhunt: info@LabourAgainstTheWitchhunt.org.

Adelante!

Saturday December 2, 10am to 5pm: Political conference focusing on Latin America, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. Hosted by Latin America Conference: www.facebook.com/LatinAmericaConference.

Stop the war on Yemen

Saturday December 2, 1pm: Protest against Saudi/UAE aggression in Yemen, embassy of United Arab Emirates, 30 Princes Gate, London SW7. Organised by Arab Organisation for Human Rights: <http://aohr.org.uk/index.php/en>.

Repression beyond exploitation

Wednesday December 6, 7pm: Book launch, Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester M2. Shir Hever introduces his *The privatisation of Israeli security*. Organised by Manchester Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.facebook.com/groups/PSCMAN.

Britain and the Russian Revolution

Thursday December 7, 7pm: Discussion, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Speaker: Mary Davis. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: 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.

MIDDLE EAST

New alliance against Iran

In response to Trump's ever more bellicose anti-Iran campaign, Putin has strengthened Russia's links with the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis of resistance. The world is getting ever more dangerous, warns **Yassamine Mather**

Last year, when Donald Trump was elected US president, old-order defenders of imperialism were telling the citizens of poor third-world countries run by dictators that the 'checks and balances' in the wonderful democracy that is the US will stop Trump's mad policies from becoming reality.

Unfortunately, although the claim could well have some truth in relation to internal policies, when it comes to international politics and the Middle East in particular, many of his most irrational election statements are becoming a reality. Amongst them the pro-Israeli, pro-Saudi policy goes well beyond traditional US neoconservative positions. Here Trump's unelected son-in-law, Jared Kushner, is playing a crucial role advising simultaneously both Saudi Arabia and Israel.

This week we had confirmation from the Israeli army's chief-of-staff, Gadi Eizenkot, of the scale of Saudi-Israeli cooperation. In his first ever interview with a Saudi newspaper, *Alaf*, Eizenkot told the world that Israel is ready to share intelligence with Saudi Arabia on Iran. Also for the first time, Israel co-sponsored with Saudi Arabia a resolution against Syria in the UN Human Rights Council. Furthermore, Israeli communications minister Ayoub Kara extended a warm invitation to Saudi Arabia's grand mufti, Abdulaziz al-Sheikh, for what he said were his friendly comments about the country. All this follows a period during which Saudi crown prince Mohammed Bin Salman has undertaken a number of unprecedented steps, which include the arrest of scores of princes and ministers, and direct intervention in Lebanese and Palestinian affairs.

To 'legitimise' steps taken to normalise relations with Israel, Saudi Arabia summoned Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas to Riyadh last week, to convince him to accept a peace plan put forward by Kushner. Of course, Saudi-Israeli collaboration is an important part of that plan. According to the *New York Times*, the proposal could include, among other normalisation measures, "overflights by Israeli passenger planes, visas for business people and telecommunication links" with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates.¹

In Yemen civil war continues and the Saudis have the support and cooperation of the US as well as the UK. In the words of Ron Paul writing in the *New American*:

And why is there a cholera epidemic? Because the Saudi government - with US support - has blocked every port of entry to prevent critical medicine from reaching suffering Yemenis. This is not a war. It is cruel murder.

The United States is backing Saudi aggression against Yemen by cooperating in every way with the Saudi military. Targeting, intelligence, weapons sales, and more. The US is a partner in Saudi Arabia's Yemen crimes.²

Then we have the public revelations of Israeli-Saudi cooperation. Of course, no-one had any doubt that it had entered a new phase since Trump's election. However, the open admission of such relations implies a new era in the politics of the Middle East. On November 20, Yuval Steinitz, Israel's energy minister, confirmed there had been contact between Israel and Saudi Arabia, but said that Riyadh was eager to keep the cooperation a secret: "We have ties that are indeed partly covert with many Muslim and Arab countries, and usually



Touching the orb: Egypt's president Sisi, Saudi king Salman and Donald Trump

[we are] the party that is not ashamed."

This claim is in direct contradiction to the official Saudi statement - foreign minister Adel al-Jubeir has said several times in the last two years that Saudi Arabia has "no relationship" with Israel and there have been no secret back channels. Yet last year, after his visit to Riyadh, Mr Trump told the world that he found king Salman and the Saudi leadership to be "very positive" towards Israel.

So less than a year since Trump took office we are seeing new alliances in the Middle East. There is no longer a major war against Islamic State and no-one wants to mention al Qaeda or its offshoot, Al Nusra. The 'enemy' is Iran - uniting Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel and the majority of the Persian Gulf states.

What we are witnessing is the formation of a new imperialist-led alliance against Iran's Islamic Republic. Under such circumstances it is bizarre that we keep hearing about a Sunni-Shia conflict. Typical of such ignorant articles is one by Paddy Ashdown in *The Independent*:

The greatest threat to world peace coming out of the Middle East now is not terrorism, but the danger of a wider Sunni-Shia religious conflict, into which the great powers are dragged.³

The great powers aren't dragged into this war: they are behind it. To think that Liberal Democrats were once speakers on Stop the War Coalition platforms.

Macron

A firm supporter of the new alliance is Trump's best friend in Europe, Emanuel Macron. Alain Badiou calls Macron a "neoliberal phantom" and a "leader of a democratic coup d'état", who is losing

support fast amongst those who voted him president in preference to the much hated Marine Le Pen.

To divert attention from his failures at home Macron has become super-active on the international scene - after all, France is the 'legitimate' foreign power which has 'Lebanon's interests at heart'. That is why he invited Saad Hariri to Paris and appeared on the steps of the Elysée Palace with the 'former' premier of Lebanon - a man who only days earlier had resigned from his post while in another country, Saudi Arabia, on a TV channel owned by Saudis, by all accounts reading a text written for him by his hosts, in which he complained about Iran's influence in his country!

You might have thought that this was a scene from some comedy, but unfortunately it was all too true - and all too dangerous: the lead players in the drama, Trump and Macron, are so ignorant of regional sensitivities and historical facts that we could be entering a truly catastrophic period for the Middle East. In the last few days Macron has had talks on Lebanon with president Abdel el-Sisi of Egypt, prince Salman al Saud of Saudi Arabia and Donald Trump himself.

All this because Iran has what they regard as 'undue influence' over Hezbollah. Yet despite concerted Saudi/US/French efforts, there is no sign of civil war in Lebanon. The Christian president, Michel Aoun, remains critical of Hariri's resignation and in fact as soon as the 'former' premier landed on Lebanese territory, he decided to 'temporarily suspend' that resignation:

Today I presented my resignation to his excellency the president, and he asked me to temporarily suspend submitting it and to put it on hold ahead of further consultations on the reasons

for it ... I expressed my agreement to this request, in the hope that it will form a serious basis for a responsible dialogue.⁴

So on what basis did France believe it had the right to intervene in Lebanon's affairs? Macron - who, by the way, likes to hold cabinet meetings in Versailles - acts as if France is still the colonial protector of Lebanon and Syria. No wonder France is a recruiting ground for IS and other jihadi terrorist groups.

However, many Sunnis in Lebanon believe the Saudi 'plot' has already failed. Reports from Beirut talk of the anti-Saudi sentiment expressed by the Lebanese Sunni community. According to Joe Macaron, who is a policy analyst at the Arab Center in Washington, "Riyadh's risky gambit had no realistic endgame or allies to execute it. It has failed miserably, no matter the outcome."⁵

According to Sunniva Rose, *Al-Monitor's* reporter who visited the mainly Sunni city of Tripoli,

The escalating regional tensions and Saudi Arabia's increasingly aggressive rhetoric have direct and dangerous implications for Lebanon. Mustafa Alloush, a former member of parliament from Tripoli and a member of the political bureau of Hariri's party, the Future Movement, is pessimistic. "The only way to get out of the situation is through a major clash. If there is enough money funnelled into Lebanon from abroad, a civil war can happen again" ...

But in the streets of Tripoli no-one wants to hear this ... In the main square, dozens of taxis stand in line waiting for customers. "I never vote," taxi driver Mohammad Badra told *Al-Monitor* ... "I would only vote for a politician who offers new job opportunities, and

no-one has done that recently."

For jeweller Omar Namel, the political scene in Lebanon is an "embarrassment" ... Lebanon "deserves better than politicians like Saad Hariri, or anyone else", he told *Al-Monitor*.⁶

In the meantime another world power, Russia, is building its own alliance. Within one week the Black Sea resort of Sochi has been host to a summit between Bashar al-Assad of Syria and president Vladimir Putin, and a conference where Hassan Rouhani of Iran and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey joined Putin and Assad to discuss the future of Syria and presumably Lebanon.

Every one is fighting over influence and control post-IS, but the reality is that, contrary to claims by general Qasem Soleimani of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, IS remains a danger not just for the countries of the region, but also for the rest of the world. The new instability fuelled by Trump, Macron and all the rest is precisely what IS needs at a time when it has lost 95 % of the territory it once controlled in Iraq and Syria ●

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Notes

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ITALY

Mafia politics sway vote

Toby Abse analyses the significance of the Sicilian election results earlier this month

The November 5 Sicilian regional election was the last major electoral contest before the Italian general election - currently expected to take place in March 2018. As a consequence, it was widely regarded as the best indication of the outcome of the national contest. And the victory of the so-called 'centre-right' - the coalition led by the 62-year-old neo-fascist veteran, Nello Musumeci, who has now become president of the Sicilian region - is an indication that the national coalition of Forza Italia-Lega-Fratelli d'Italia, led by Silvio Berlusconi, is likely to be the strongest grouping in the next Italian parliament.¹

The Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S - Five Star Movement) had hoped that Sicily would be the launching pad for a nationwide triumph next March, just as M5S's unexpectedly high score in Sicily five years earlier (14.9%) had been a foretaste of its sudden breakthrough into national parliamentary politics in February 2013. Although its list for the Sicilian regional assembly gained 26.7%, placing M5S clearly ahead of any other single party (and nearly doubling its vote in the previous regional election), and its presidential candidate, Giancarlo Cancelleri, got a very impressive 34.6%, the result suggests that its hopes of forming the next national government are fading.

However, if the result was a cruel disappointment for M5S, it was an absolute disaster for Matteo Renzi's Partito Democratico (PD). The PD itself got 13.2% and the candidate it supported as regional president, Fabrizio Nicari, the rector of Palermo University, with no previous public political allegiance, got 18.5% of the vote - considerably below the combined 25.4% of the four lists making up his coalition.² Whilst the election was not a disaster for the left, the 6.2% of Claudio Fava, its presidential candidate, and the 5.3% of its list (Cento Passi per la Sicilia - a united front of the Movimento Democratico e Progressista [MDP], Sinistra Italiana [SI], Partito della Rifondazione Comunista [PRC], Possibile and the Greens) were below its own expectations and below some of its earlier opinion poll scores; it obtained a single seat in the regional assembly.

In some ways, the most notable and most depressing feature of the election was not the score of any of the contending parties, but the very low turnout - slightly under 47%. There was clearly a widespread sense of hopelessness amongst a large section of the Sicilian electorate - a belief that nothing could ever change, that the island's politics would always be mired in corruption and linked to organised crime. This despair has been reinforced by the disastrous record of the outgoing centre-left administration, led by Rosario Crocetta, who had only managed to beat Musumeci on the previous occasion because of a split on the right.

Whilst the Sicilian centre-left took much pride in the election of Sicily's first openly gay president, his flamboyant and quarrelsome character did a lot of damage to his administration, provoking many resignations by *assessori* (regional cabinet members), and it was hardly surprising that the PD showed no inclination to indulge his longing to stand for a second term, even if its subsequent choice of the rather grey and bureaucratic Nicari did not improve its chances.

It is worth noting that, although the hard-right Musumeci was the figurehead of the centre-right coalition this year, the two nationally organised



Silvio Berlusconi: Mafia links alleged

hard-right parties supporting him - Giorgia Meloni's neo-fascist Fratelli d'Italia and Matteo Salvini's Lega³ - only picked up 5.5% of the vote for their joint list, gaining a mere two seats in the regional assembly. One assumes that Musumeci had some real input into candidate selection for the Lista Musumeci, which gained another 6.1%, but the remaining lists of the centre-right had a rather different character. They were all much closer to Silvio Berlusconi than to Musumeci, who had been imposed on a very reluctant Berlusconi by Salvini and Meloni at the national level as a price for their continuing loyalty to the coalition.

Forza Italia itself obtained 16.4%, whilst the two essentially Christian Democrat lists - Saverio Romano's Popolari e Autonomisti and Lorenzo Cesa's Unione di Centro (UdC) - won 7.2% and 7.1% respectively.

Criminal vote

It would be extremely naive to interpret this difference in electoral outcomes in conventional terms - to make the assumption that electors much preferred 'moderates' who were only slightly to the right of centre to 'extremists' on the hard right.

At best, the kind of Sicilian politics associated with such lists could be seen as opportunist and clientelist - the UdC had spent the previous five years supporting Crocetta's centre-left administration before switching sides to back the centre-right in this year's election. Some Forza Italia candidates had previously stood for the PD, and a grand total of 14 of the regional deputies who had supported the Crocetta administration shifted from supporting the 'ex-communist' (Crocetta) to the 'ex-fascist' (Musumeci) this year.

At worst, these lists had a more sinister character, representing the kind of Sicilian Christian Democracy that had served as the link between Giulio Andreotti and the Mafia in

the cold war years. Of course, it is indisputable that the Sicilian Mafia has used its electoral influence to favour Berlusconi and Forza Italia from 1994 onwards. Moreover, on three separate occasions investigating magistrates have opened enquiries into possible links between both Berlusconi and his long-standing henchman, Marcello Dell'Utri - currently serving time for Mafia links - and the Mafia bombings in Sicily and the mainland during 1992-93. The first two investigations were abandoned, but the third and current one is ongoing, even if past experience suggests it is unlikely to get to the bottom of this murky affair.

It was no accident that Totò Cuffaro, a disgraced former president of the Sicilian region, who had spent some years in jail, and consequently had been deprived of the right to vote, made it clear in press interviews that all his relatives would be voting for the centre-right. Raffaele Lombardo, another former president of the Sicilian region (whose six years and eight months sentence for Mafia links had been overturned on appeal, even if he may still serve two years for buying votes), was a candidate in the Popolari e Autonomi list this year.

Perhaps the most notorious case amongst this year's successful candidates was that of Luigi Genovese, a 21-year-old, who gained nearly 20,000 preference votes in the Messina constituency. This young law student is the son of Francantonio Genovese, who has been sentenced to 11 years for crimes ranging from fraud to money-laundering of EU funds intended for youth training. The younger Genovese boasted of making "a decisive contribution" to Musumeci's victory, and said:

I am very happy with the result. We have confirmed the votes that my uncle, Franco Rinaldi, took in the regional election of 2012. A sign that

the Messinese still have confidence in us and wish us well.⁴

Needless to say, this uncle has also been convicted in recent criminal proceedings.⁵ Whilst the misdeeds of the Genovese family got the most press coverage, other such candidates included Antonello Rizza, currently accused in four separate trials on no less than 22 charges.

M5S put an enormous amount of work into the Sicilian election. During the summer, Cancelleri had toured the whole island for weeks in the company of Luigi Di Maio - who has subsequently been elected as M5S's leader for electoral purposes and M5S candidate for prime minister - and Alessandro Di Battista, who is probably M5S's most effective orator in the conventional sense of the word, given that Beppe Grillo's capacity to hold a crowd still relies on a stand-up comedy routine.

This trio returned to the fray in October and early November, engaging in another frantic round of public speaking in the maximum number of localities. Whilst this campaign lacked the drama of Grillo's swim across the Straits of Messina during the 2012 Sicilian regional campaign, nobody could deny that M5S's national leadership put much more effort into this election than those of either the centre-left or centre-right, but perhaps the rather low attendance at their meetings, especially during August, should have served as an advance warning that in Sicily silence often counts for more than oratory in election campaigns. Matteo Renzi barely showed his face in Sicily, which probably further weakened the chances of his politically inexperienced candidates. Whilst Berlusconi's appearance in the last days of the campaign was more melodramatic, it was hardly the decisive factor.

M5S has been accused of being bad

losers by mainstream observers for drawing attention to the 'unpresentables' both during the campaign and after the result, but there can be no doubt that the Mafia threw its weight onto its opponents' side.⁶ The media's enthusiasm in publicising the fact that one M5S candidate had some sort of spent conviction that had led him to be dismissed from the Carabinieri (militarised police) for falling asleep and failing to turn up at a road block seemed more a bid to trivialise the serious criminality of many centre-right candidates than genuine even-handedness.⁷

Left divisions

In conclusion, it is clear that the PD's choice of presidential candidate was a very poor one - an inexperienced, almost apolitical, centrist candidate, without much charisma, could never compete with Musumeci or Cancelleri. However, the PD's decision to ally with Angelino Alfano's Alleanza Popolare (AP) was probably its worst error. The Tuscan, Renzi, presumably calculated that the Sicilian, Alfano, had not lost his home base during his years in Rome as interior minister and foreign minister. In the event, AP only scored 4.1% in Sicily, falling beneath the minimum threshold of 5% required to enter the regional assembly.

Whilst Alfano may have chosen to ally himself with Renzi at the national level, he had less control over his Sicilian members than he imagined - a large chunk of prominent Sicilian AP members defected to Musumeci's camp. Renzi's decision to ally with Alfano for the Sicilian election was guaranteed to drive the MDP away from any coalition with the PD; indeed, it actually led the MDP to ally not only with SI, but even with the PRC, in this election.

The division on the left - in the context of an island in which in any shape or form it has always been weak - probably increased the rate of abstention, once it became obvious that the real contest was between the centre-right and M5S. Moreover, far more centre-left defectors from Nicari gave their vote in the presidential contest to Cancelleri than to Fava, even if the left presidential candidate's additional personal vote of about 1% above the Left List (Cento Passi per la Sicilia) is an indication of the respect in which he is held by many serious left and anti-Mafia activists on the island ●

Notes

1. The complication of the new electoral law - the so-called *Rosatellum* - will make it very difficult for any party or coalition to win an outright majority.
2. It is likely that a large portion of Cancelleri's surplus over the M5S list vote came from centre-left voters anxious to prevent a neo-fascist gaining the regional presidency.
3. Matteo Salvini has recently dropped the word *Nord* from the Lega's official title in a bid to win votes in the south. Understandably, Umberto Bossi and other veterans of the Lega Lombarda/ Lega Nord are far from happy with this change of nomenclature.
4. *La Repubblica* November 7.
5. Both Genovese senior and Rinaldi deny all wrongdoing, and are appealing against all their convictions. Genovese junior - after emphasising that he was not an 'unpresentable', since he had no criminal convictions - claimed that his father was not one either, since he had not received "a definitive sentence" from the Cassazione (supreme court). Genovese junior boasted of "my personal consensus, especially among the young", but claimed this popularity amongst local youth had absolutely no connection with his father's use - or alleged misuse - of the EU funds for youth training.
6. The veteran leftwing intellectual, Marco Revelli, speaking at the Marseille European Forum on November 10, had no doubt about the Mafia's role in this election.
7. Since the election, one unsuccessful M5S candidate has been charged with defrauding at least two employees of the hotel he owns, but on the whole the M5S list seems to have been remarkably clean by Sicilian standards.

SWP

Floundering in wake of Corbynism

Peter Manson takes a look at the SWP's second pre-conference bulletin and the poverty of thought



How is the Socialist Workers Party coping in the era of Jeremy Corbyn? The SWP's second pre-conference *Internal Bulletin* (*IB* No2, November) provides us with quite a few pointers.

First of all, the organisation cannot be said to be overflowing with scores of comrades bursting with ideas. The three-month period before the annual conference (which will take place over the weekend of January 5-7 2018) allows rank and file members to communicate horizontally, ie, across the entire membership, through the three *IB*s the organisation publishes. However, there are only 13 contributions from individual members or groups of members in *IB* No2, taking up only 11 of the 26 pages - the rest are filled with official announcements and the four contributions from the central committee.

The first of these - 'Building the party' - confirms what we all know: the SWP, far from growing, is losing comrades to Corbyn's Labour Party. So, for the CC, "The key question is how can the SWP not only remain relevant, but also grow, at a time when the pull is towards the Labour Party."

Although the SWP, like the rest of the left, has cheered on Corbyn, it has stopped short of calling on all trade

unions to affiliate to Labour in order to directly influence the battle against the Blairite right. It also bemoans the fact that this internal battle is acting as a distraction from what the SWP sees as the 'real class struggle': demonstrations and, most of all, strikes for better pay and conditions. While there have been some strikes, according to the CC, "to most people it seems far more credible that Corbyn will dismantle austerity than the initiatives of the TUC and most union leaders".

The CC therefore concludes:

This presents a challenge for revolutionary socialists. We have to explain why struggle is possible, can be powerful and remains central now - and even more so if we have a Labour government.

In other words, Labour's internal battle is *not* regarded as part of the "struggle" to be fought - especially when potential recruits to the SWP are instead flocking into Labour. The leadership criticises those who it implies are not getting on with SWP 'business as usual', and who may have become demoralised by the lack of progress in "building the party":

... rather than embrace the new

Causes chosen by SWP are deliberately uncontroversial when it comes to courting liberals. Charlie Kimber, joint national secretary, has one aim and one aim alone - building his confessional sect



terrain, with all its contradictions and challenges, one response to the pressures of Corbynism is to effectively run away or 'batten down the hatches'. Essentially withdrawing from engagement with the outside world with the hope of maintaining the membership of our existing 'loyal' members rather than trying to recruit. Perhaps this is coupled with the view of re-emerging once Corbyn is in office and the pressures on the Labour government lead to problems that mean then 'it will be our time'.

So what is the state of the SWP membership? We are informed:

Our total party membership currently stands at 5,904 - about the same as last year. Just under 2,000 of these pay a regular subscription to the SWP ... So far this year 473 people have joined the SWP, of whom 420 remain members and 125 pay subs by direct debit.

Let us consider the above. First, only a third of the SWP's "membership" pays a subscription - for those recruited this year the percentage seems even lower. And how does the CC explain the fact that, out of the 473 people who have joined

in 2017, only “420 remain members”? Surely the other 53 could not have resigned already? What caused them to leave?

The answer, of course, is that we are not really talking about genuine ‘members’, as the word is generally understood. These are people who have been persuaded to fill in an application form - no more - and presumably those 53 have been written off when local comrades tried to contact them subsequently.

But the SWP’s existing cadre should not be disheartened:

We want to encourage as many newer as well as longer-standing comrades to come to our meetings. Effort should be made to contact all members each week and involve them in the life of the branch.

The fact that the leadership has to spell this out says it all: it is clear that the majority are paper members only, including so-called new recruits.

SWP ‘trustees’

So what is the situation on the ground, in the branches? “Martin and Anne (Ealing)” paint a very negative picture (only the first names of contributors are given for security reasons).

These two comrades are in fact long-term (and apparently isolated) oppositionists, who during the last decade blamed the leadership of John Rees and Lindsey German (who walked out to form Counterfire in 2010) for poor local organisation. They had hoped to see an improvement following their departure, but have been rather disappointed, it seems. However, they seem to be blaming SWP apparatchiks as a whole rather than just the leadership of joint national secretary Charlie Kimber. They write:

... so far the response to the leadership’s call-to-arms has been muted, to say the least. Raising the SWP banner in a town, with stalls and branch meetings, and also getting involved in the vital united front work is hard for comrades, but is more than possible. The movement is everywhere. There is nothing in the outside world stopping us doing this. The only obstruction, we would argue, is internal to the party.

They explain:

In essence, there are still comrades who, if they’re honest, regard this as ‘low level work’, done by ‘low level people’ ... In their view, a good, superior comrade is one that appears in brief cameo roles, talking down to people, accepting the plaudits and then retiring for long periods of inactivity.

Back in the 80s, claim Martin and Anne, “A layer of comrades appointed themselves as ‘trustees’”, who “felt themselves innately superior and tended to be haughty, humourless and often ‘too important to be civil’ to active members, who they shamefully referred to as ‘foot-soldiers’”. As a result, “the growth of local organisation with an active, thinking membership was seriously hampered”. In addition, “The old leadership unhelpfully bungled the turn to the movement by diluting our unique politics in our publications and, even worse, closing down the branches.”

So what is the situation now? They claim: “Unfortunately the old mindset is still alive and now bolstered by further generations of trustees - still remaining aloof from collective organisation, still promoting themselves and still devaluing both branch and members.”

Martin and Anne allege that there was a brief period of three years when “our little branch was able to flourish” because it was “free of trustees”:

It could build, hold at least two sales and a branch meeting every week, and be centrally involved in united front activity. Just five or six various regular comrades worked miracles.

But despite this there was constant veiled criticism and disparagement from trustees on the sidelines, of course always too busy themselves to show how it should be done. An active branch disconcerts local trustees. It inadvertently questions their commitment and political grasp.

As a result last September the conservative mindset asserted itself and took over the branch ... As a result, meetings now are intermittent ... and the trustee-led branch has been largely inactive in local united front activity ...

In our area there had been 12 active branches, but now there are none.

Martin and Anne say that this process and the ensuing demoralising “has been so unrelenting and for so long that there is hardly a rank-and-file membership left to do the necessary work”. They conclude: “We have somehow to break with the downturn mindset of celebrity, pecking orders and the denigration of the membership.”

Of course, it is impossible to judge how accurate all this is. But presumably there must be at least an element of truth, as far as local organisation is concerned, and what they say must surely reflect the low level of activity and the lack of enthusiasm amongst the rank and file.

‘Most pressing task’

As with *IB* No1, the issue that dominates the November bulletin is, of course, racism and the SWP’s number-one priority: building its “united front”, Stand Up To Racism. By the way, three north London comrades, in a piece headed ‘Hackney Stand Up To Racism’ describe SUTR as a “real united front”. After all, “The Greens (and even one Lib Dem supporter) have ... been involved.”

This reveals the dire political impoverishment represented by today’s SWP. For orthodox Marxists, certainly as formulated by the executive committee of the Communist International in December 1921, the term ‘united front’ refers exclusively to an alliance between *real* working class formations, ie, parties, whose aim is actually to expose the shortcomings of the reformists and win their followers over to revolutionary politics.

But that is the exact opposite of SWP practice. Not only do SWP-sponsored organisations like SUTR attempt to bring together groups and individuals from as broad a background as possible - there is no reason why, say, a local Tory ‘anti-racist’ could not be invited to speak at a SUTR event - but the SWP makes no attempt to base its toy town ‘united front’ on class questions. Far from it. That would defeat the purpose - which is to establish a liberal grouping, out of which the SWP hopes to recruit ones and twos.

And for this purpose anti-racism is just the issue. After all, who is *not* against racism today? The CC states:

We have identified that racism and resistance to it has become a central feature in Britain. That means every branch should be involved in anti-racist activity - crucially working alongside others to build SUTR at a local level.

However, in order to persuade us, against all the evidence, that the rise in racism has become “a central feature in Britain”, the SWP is forced to redefine the term, so that it now means opposition to immigration. The SWP has long taken the correct, principled stance against all immigration controls and for the free movement of people. But is it really a good idea to dub the vast majority of workers, who have not yet been won to this principled Marxist approach, ‘racist’ - or at least imply that they are still influenced by racist ideas?

In its long (and boring) contribution entitled ‘Fighting racism and fascism’, the CC reports: “Throughout 2017 we have argued that building Stand Up

To Racism ... into a mass anti-racist movement, alongside other activists, is the most urgent and pressing task facing us.” But it provides no compelling arguments either to support its claim that racism is on the rise or to back up its line that building a “mass anti-racist movement” is “the most urgent and pressing task facing us”.

This issue dominates all of the CC’s articles in *IB* No2. For example, in ‘*Socialist Worker* online and social media’ the leadership lists the 12 most important immediate tasks of the SWP weekly paper. Of these, no fewer than six are connected to building SUTR and anti-racism.

Similarly in ‘Politics in the workplace’, the leadership argues that “racism in its multiple and overlapping forms has become a constant feature of politics in Britain and in different ways this seeps into the workplace and is raised in debates inside the unions”. The CC states:

Whether it is the argument that migrants lower wages, whether freedom of movement for EU nationals should continue or be curbed after Britain leaves the European Union, demands to turn healthworkers into immigration officers by checking passports before providing free healthcare, to the pressures on public-sector workers to comply with the Islamophobic demands of the Prevent programme, building solidarity with refugees trapped in Calais and across Northern France, such questions are inescapable.

Note that none of the issues listed are examples of racism proper, as the term is usually understood. For example, how can opposition to the immigration of (overwhelmingly white) EU nationals be described in that way, however reactionary its advocates are? While I agree that the effect of the Prevent programme is “Islamophobic”, the only argument I have come across which equates Islamophobia with racism is that most Muslims have dark skin. Yes, but they are being targeted for their religion - backed up by the implied claim that Islam *per se* provides a breeding ground for the likes of Islamic State.

Despite all this, the CC urges the membership: “Every comrade in a workplace can raise anti-racist arguments and try to get workmates along to SUTR initiatives.”

Doubts

It goes without saying that no SWP comrade has yet dared to challenge the prioritisation of anti-racism in the way I have just done. However, as with October’s bulletin, a number of comrades seem to be implying doubts and are perhaps making such a challenge in a negative way - ie, they argue that other issues are actually important too!

For instance, in a contribution entitled ‘The party, anti-austerity and anti-racism’, “Huw (Bristol)” writes:

That anti-racist and anti-fascist work is very important for the movement as a whole and for the party is in my view not in doubt ... However, I am concerned that other aspects, which can be put under the label of anti-austerity, are seen as secondary in importance.

Huw argues that the two issues must be given equal priority, as in fact they are closely linked:

Our experience of the bedroom tax campaign a number of years ago was that we encountered at more or less every bedroom tax meeting a view that immigrants were taking up resources or myths around Muslims and housing which had become fairly commonplace.

The party rightly took the approach that we needed to both clearly counter such arguments, but to do so whilst being very serious about resisting the bedroom tax itself, and working with those people who were pulled by some

of the racist arguments.

Then there is ‘Building the fight against austerity and racism’ - written by five (obviously senior) comrades from different parts of the country, including a certain “Candy (Camden and Westminster)”. Now who do we know with that first name?

This states openly: “Our perspectives must see the fight against austerity as important as the fight against racism.” It berates the fact that “Initiatives over campaigns over schools funding, council cuts, pay and homelessness do not seem to figure much in the party’s perspectives.”

Let us leave aside the small matter of the Labour Party and the fight to build a revolutionary party around *politics*, not just trade union questions. However, the comrades state that, admittedly, “at the moment the struggle against austerity does not differentiate between revolutionaries and reformists in the same way as the fightback against racism does”. But they do not specify *how* this differentiation is supposed to take place - especially given the actual nature of SUTR. Perhaps they mean that a campaign against anti-migrant nationalism and for open borders would lead to clear, Marxist and internationalist conclusions, but they do not say so and anyway, as I have pointed out, the SWP does not attempt to transform SUTR into such a campaign.

Interestingly “Candy” *et al* state:

The party’s trade union and campaigning work is not just about recruitment. It is about developing leadership in the movement with the aim of winning disputes and campaigns in the short term. It [is] about being the best reformists, while clearly putting forward our revolutionary politics.

I am not sure that “being the best reformists” is quite the right way to put it! But, as with all other contributions to this *IB*, there is a complete absence of any argument for the centrality of Marxist politics in the here and now (I’m sorry, comrades, but ‘Build the SWP’ is no substitute for that.)

Wild claims

This bulletin contains other interesting features - not least the following claim in the CC’s ‘*Socialist Worker* online and social media’: “We have to win a reputation as a source that is biased in favour of the working class, but doesn’t make wild claims about, say, sizes of demos and, while celebrating every success, does not pretend that the left is always winning.”

Of course, *Socialist Worker* has never been known to exaggerate the size of demonstrations or the attendance at, for example, Unite the Resistance rallies, has it? We can only hope that this statement underscores a conscious change of policy in this regard, but I am not holding my breath.

There is a serious point here, however. While the left’s insistence on bigging up the events it has organised is intended to act as an inspiration, it is in reality counterproductive to imply that we are “winning” when the opposite is the case. This can only lead to demoralisation. We need to assess our strengths and weaknesses in an honest and forthright manner.

Another mildly interesting contribution comes from “Richard (Coventry)” and his ‘Economic growth, the permanent arms economy, state capitalism and orthodox Trotskyism’. As he did last year, the comrade claims that the SWP leadership is deliberately dismissing the ‘reality’ of economic growth - presumably for the same reasons as it has exaggerated the size of demonstrations. He writes:

For those who doubt that our party ignores the political and industrial impact of economic growth in our perspectives, please ask yourself when our perspectives last took account of economic growth. The answer is, not at all in the last 17 years. Yet the world and UK economy have experienced

economic growth for 16 out of the last 17 years.

To put it another way, the SWP decided that its perspectives must not take account of the economic realities in some of Britain’s biggest unionised manual workplaces, because to do so would contradict the theories of Michael Roberts.

Richard quotes an article in the SWP’s *International Socialism* journal, which states: “Western ruling classes are now beginning to suffer political payback for 40 years of neoliberalism and nearly 10 years of economic crisis.”

Of course, he is wrong to say that “10 years of economic crisis” is totally erroneous. The 2007-08 financial crash forced governments to intervene on a massive scale. Lehman Brothers was allowed to go down, but the danger was that the entire global financial system would follow it. Gordon Brown and George Bush came to the rescue. They went for a ‘socialism for the rich’ and bailed out the banks and insurance companies. As a result government borrowing reached heights never seen before in peace time. Government then imposed austerity on the masses and in effect printed money to the tune of billions of pounds, dollars and euros (quantitative easing). Doubtless there has been ‘growth’. But it is so anaemic it amounts to stagnation. For a system that is predicated on accumulation, that means crisis - certainly a crisis of underconsumption.

Richard also seems to believe that this ‘growth’ is having a serious negative impact on working class combativity - with the implication that ‘what is bad for them is good for us’. But this is also misplaced. Actual economic crises do not automatically produce working class combativity, just as actual growth does not necessarily inhibit it - the opposite could well be the case, and it goes without saying that the subjective factor - the question of leadership - is central in both situations.

Finally let me note the development reported by “Chris and Steve (Southwark)” in their ‘Using a card reader on SWP stalls’. They write: “We find increasing numbers of people who we meet who would be very happy to give a ‘donation’ to *SW* when they sign a petition, but they say ‘Sorry, I just don’t have any cash on me’.” So the branch paid £37 for a card reader and, although the bank takes a 3% commission on each transaction, things have changed for the better:

Whereas previously we would seldom sell anything other than *SW*’s (and badges) on a stall, in the past week we have sold an *ISJ*, two *Reviews*, four Corbyn pamphlets, a ‘Marxism and ecology’ pamphlet and a ‘Money tree’ pamphlet. All of these paid with a bank card.

Well, at least there are some SWP cadre taking the initiative - even if it is a practical rather than a political one ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.co.uk

Labour Against the Witchhunt organising meeting

Saturday December 2,
12 noon-3pm

Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1.

Progress report and campaign plans, plus update on suspensions and expulsions, including:

Tony Greenstein - suspended
Stan Keable, Labour Party Marxists - expelled

Marc Wadsworth, Grassroots Black Left - suspended

www.facebook.com/
groups/351457695278396

www.LabourAgainstTheWitchhunt.org

DEBATE

Poststructuralism and decline

Rex Dunn argues that sexism within the left is not the root cause for the rise of political correctness and identity politics

Recently we have witnessed another outburst over 'sexual misconduct' and 'sexual harassment', which is lasting longer than usual. But this time it raised its ugly head within the 'seat of democracy' itself. Defence minister Sir Michael Fallon confessed that his conduct fell below acceptable standards and fell on his sword. But other ministers hung onto their posts, despite being guilty of gross incompetence, even insubordination (although the latter proved to be a step too far). Then May received a reality check. Save Brexit! So political correctness had to give way to political expediency.

Others were not so fortunate. After being suspended from office over allegations of sexual misconduct, Welsh Labour minister Carl Sergeant killed himself (the fact that he was not told who his accuser was proved to be the last straw). One is reminded of the bad old days of McCarthyism: just replace the communist smear with allegations of sexual misconduct.

The latest outburst started with the scandal surrounding movie mogul Harvey Weinstein (hitherto a friend of Hillary Clinton). Within days it had gone viral worldwide. This was just after Channel 4's adaptation of Margaret Atwood's classic, *The Handmaid's Tale*, ended. It is a story about political correctness and what might happen if it ever became the ruling ideology! Therefore I think it is appropriate to reflect on this theme, starting with the story itself.

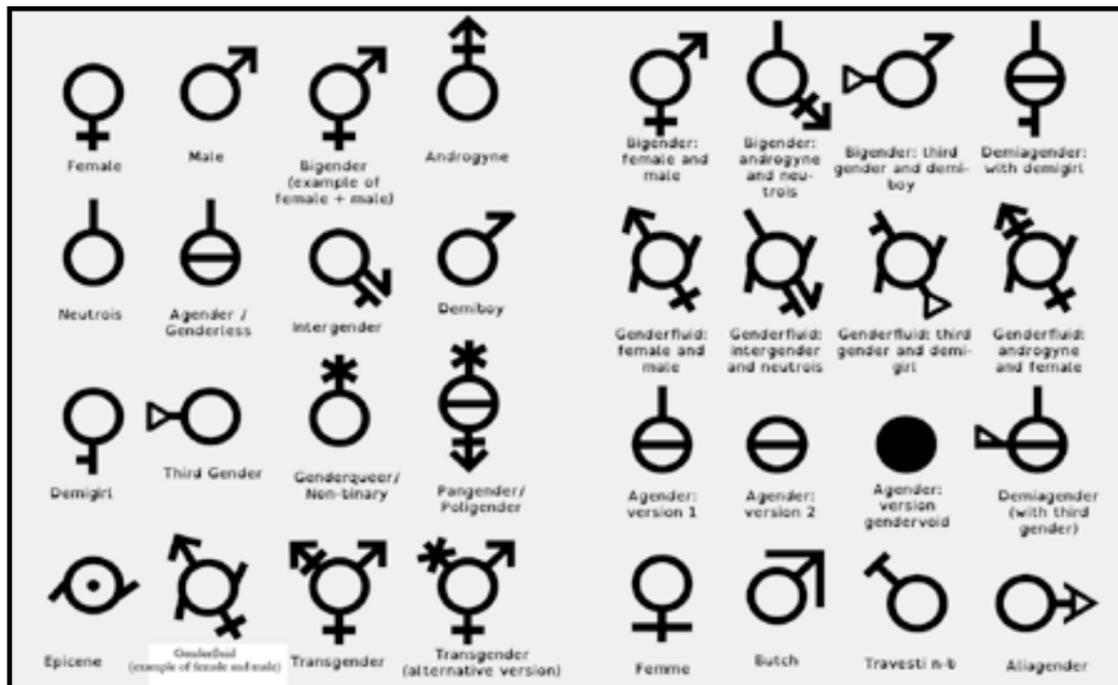
The Handmaid's Tale was written in the 1980s and predicts what the world might be like in the near future: ie, now. The story is narrated by Offred, a handmaid (whose name is derived from her master, Fred). Her thoughts are pervaded with nostalgia for a lost 'Eden', when women as well as men were 'free' to follow their sexual desires. She muses on the difference between past and present: Now there is more than one kind of freedom ...

Freedom to and freedom from ... women on their own. [Once] they wore blouses with buttons down the front. These women could be undone or not. They seemed to be able to choose ... [But in reality] We were a society dying ... of too much choice (pp34-35).

Men proved unable to cope with sexual equality. Some behaved very badly. Offred has to admit that things like 'date rape' also happened. On the other hand, the commander himself says, some women were so desperate not to be left by the wayside, they "starved themselves thin or pumped their breasts full of silicone, had their noses cut off. Think of the misery" (p231). Male sexual desire is deemed to be synonymous with sexism. (This cannot be responded to, for fear that a woman connives with being a sexual object). It must be punished.

Presumably Atwood was writing this in response to the fact that the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 70s had turned sour. For the religious fundamentalists, whom she satirises, "all that is holy is profaned". Women had won the right to control their own bodies, which removes the authority of both church and state. The contraceptive pill allowed women a degree of freedom, such as more access to education and employment; women could file for divorce on equal terms.

Although it might be weakened, patriarchy is still deeply embedded within class society. Unlike the sexual revolution itself, it stubbornly refuses to yield to the 'nihilism' of the bourgeois



It's all ... so confusing

mode of production. Misogyny refuses to go away (see also Erica Jong's novel, *Fear of Flying*, written in 1973, which she said was inspired by the ideal of erotic pleasure between men and women, but "there is no power game".) On the other hand, it is no good if a few women want to gain power over men in an egotistical power game, any more than it is for them to become prime minister or president of the United States, only to behave like their male counterparts: ie, they put their class interests first; the bottom line is to preserve the rule of capital at all costs!

Atwood's tale also depicts another problem: following a series of ecological disasters, women have become infertile; hence the need to hunt down and control fertile women. The Republic of Gilead (somewhere in New England) uses the state apparatus to impose a rigid code of sexual conduct, whilst the 'handmaids' (fertile women) are used as breeders. Sex is for procreation only. The state is ruled by 'commanders'; they are helped by 'guardians' (men who are denied relationships with women, ranging from soldiers to chauffeurs and general workmen). Then there are the female 'Marthas' (who run domestic affairs). They are answerable to the commander's wives, but still have the power to discipline 'recalcitrant' handmaids with cattle prods. Sometimes they order their charges to beat to death a man accused of rape. Anyone who is caught carrying out abortions is hanged publicly, as in olden times.

Liberal defeat

Hindsight is a wonderful thing and Atwood got it wrong. *The Handmaid's Tale* is a lament for the lost hopes of the sexual revolution. But the reasons why it failed are much more complex. As it turned out, the rise of political correctness was the result of developments within the secular sphere, not the religious one.

The defeat of the May events in 1968 had an adverse effect on the intelligentsia. Marxism fell out of favour and was replaced by something called poststructuralism, which ultimately led to the notion that 'Men are the problem' (not capitalism). Out of this came today's political correctness. It did not come about as a result of the ravings of fanatical preachers about sexual immorality, who were able, somehow, to spread the gospel far and wide. Rather, come the presidential election of 2016, the bible belt gritted its teeth and voted for an irreligious businessman, with a reputation for 'womanising', who is also

a bigot and a racist - as did a large swathe of middle America, which included many women, even a few black people.

Against the odds, the strategy of neoliberalism, upon which global capitalism has depended since the 1980s, was upended by an illiberal upstart. For the time being, Trump is the most powerful man in the world. He has his hand on the nuclear trigger. Yet he is an avowed isolationist ('America first!') and threatens to tear up existing international agreements on climate and trade.

The liberal wing of the bourgeoisie was defeated, at least for the time being. Its doctrine had sufficed during the previous decades, but now it was being rejected by at least half the population. Hillary Clinton lost despite being a staunch advocate of political correctness: women's rights, as well as the rights of gay, bisexual and transgender people, not forgetting black people. She also had the backing of the traditional media, along with the entrepreneurs who own the social media. Last, but not least, she had the support of Hollywood and most of the entertainment industry.

How did this happen? 'It's the economy, stupid', as someone famously said. Trump's victory clearly shows that the American working class, in particular, rejects the liberal version of neoliberalism, because political correctness does nothing to stop their living standards from falling. As a result, instead of ensuring that we have a better, more tolerant society, political correctness appears to have lost its power to glue an increasingly pluralistic society together; instead it has become more like an insect repellent! Thus its advocates become more shrill.

Themes

In order to understand the contradictory role of political correctness in society today, I offer the following themes:

1. Political correctness started out as a movement pledged to stamp out offensive language and behaviour associated with sexism and racism. But now it has become associated with the idea that 'men are the problem' in society. In other words, not only are the old sexist ways unacceptable: it is also claimed that male sexual abuse of women has reached epidemic proportions (although no clear evidence is given). Therefore the state should intervene and *police* 'inappropriate behaviour' of all kinds, whereas previously it was accepted that sexual relations are a private matter:

most of us are endowed with sufficient sensitivity and social awareness to be able to sort out this among ourselves. On the other hand, there has always been a minority of men who commit serious offences against women, such as domestic violence and rape. But there are laws in place to deal with such offences.

Women are more empowered today than they were yesterday. So why do they need the state or some institution to intervene on their behalf? The number of serious sexual offenders among men must be roughly the same proportion of the population as they were before, although they are more likely to be reported. But if things really are as bad as the establishment would have us believe, then bourgeois society is in big trouble. 2. We are living in a culture wherein a small but growing number of men feel ashamed about being heterosexual. They now have the opportunity to change their sex, thanks to bio-technology. Some analysts see a connection between the present ethos and the rise of the transgender phenomenon. Certainly male to female transsexuals are three times more common than female to male.¹

3. The idea of gender fluidity is popular, because it is media-driven - ie, sensationalist, which appeals to young people in particular; including children (some of whom have their parents' support).

4. At a theoretical level, this is linked to the ideas of poststructuralism - the 'logics of disintegration' which arose in the 1970s and 80s. But without the poisonous legacy of Stalinism - in particular the defeat of 1968 - there would be no poststructuralism; without the latter, there would be no political correctness in its present form!

5. Poststructuralism is closely linked to the theory of postmodernism. The latter may be interpreted in two ways: (i) it stands for the rise of a new movement within the arts, based on new media, although it does away with traditional aesthetics dating back to antiquity, which were re-engaged with by the enlightenment philosophy; (ii) the concept has also been broadened to include the idea that late capitalism has ushered in a whole new epoch for humanity, based on new technologies, such as the digital media, as well as bio-technology and artificial intelligence.

6. The 'logics of disintegration' is reflected in the rise of identity politics, as an antidote to sexual and racial stereotypes under the impact of the commodity form, mass consumerism and the mass media society: ie, as a search

for individuality. But this is based on (i) a rejection of all 'totalising theories' and (ii) the methodology of subjective idealism (as opposed to Marxism and dialectical materialism), which leads to the valorisation of ideas such as pluralism and relativism; difference or fluidity. Hence identity politics, as a new political form, becomes the 'perfect' vehicle for movements such as second- and third-wave feminism, Black Lives Matter, etc, although this form is now being undermined by the rise of intersectionality: ie, it is being split asunder by interlocking conflicts between the various sub-groups.

7. Political correctness provides a fig-leaf for liberal neoliberalism, since the ideas of liberty and equality are extended to the market; therefore it should not be interfered with by government. Hence these ideas have the enthusiastic support of corporate capitalists, backed by the main bourgeois political parties. Neoliberalism stands for the following:

- Society should be shaped by the free market;
- Privatisation is needed to make public services more efficient;
- The public sector subsidises the private sector through tax redistribution
- What remains of the public sector is infiltrated by corporate capital
- Once corporate interests take over, the rule of monopoly capital has an unfair advantage over private individuals; thus the idea of the free market no longer applies
- This creates enormous inequality between those at the bottom and those at the top
- The public is hoodwinked by corporate-speak in the name of liberty and equality, because it uses such terms as 'freedom', 'choice' and 'accountability' (to the market model). Instrumentalism rules!

Thus we end up with the neoliberal ethos, which argues that this is for the 'greater good', dressed up by the ideology of political correctness.

8. The latter also plays a role in the new middle class political movements, which emerged after the financial crisis of 2008. They have had considerable success (at least in the short term) in organising the masses against the bourgeoisie's austerity strategy, which were imposed as a way out of the crisis: eg, the Occupy movement, Podemos in Spain, Syriza in Greece, the Catalan separatist movement, etc. But leftwing populism, in whatever form, is a diversion for the new rise in the class struggle in the last few years (however distorted), because it continues to espouse illusions in reformism, such as the parliamentary road to power (with the masses as election fodder); wealth redistribution and Keynesian economics (public borrowing to finance growth), epitomised by such slogans as 'For the many, not the few'. By contrast, the revival of revolutionary socialist ideas and Marxist parties is the only way forward for the masses; otherwise the present structural crisis of capitalism will continue to deepen.

9. 2016 marked a watershed moment, when neoliberalism's new illiberal wing won out against the failed policies of its liberal wing. The rise of rightwing populism, based on the anger of the so-called 'left behinds' - viz, the increasingly pauperised middle class - provided the impetus for Trump's victory and the election of anti-immigration governments in central Europe. What they all share in common is a rising xenophobic and nationalist outlook, which threatens further economic and political disintegration.

First and foremost, poststructuralism has to be seen as part of the poisonous legacy of Stalinism itself. The left intelligentsia abandoned Marxism, only to end up lost inside an intellectual fog of its own making, which continues to

linger. Yet this comes at a time when capitalism is further down the road of decline and transition.

As Atwood makes clear in *The Handmaid's Tale*, political correctness is not a crude ideological offensive. (Those who support its ideas no doubt believe in them - their anxiety or paranoia is palpable.) It has spread beyond the intelligentsia to society's hallowed institutions. Recently the archbishop of Canterbury was reported to have said that any child should be allowed to wear male or female clothing to school, since it is important to the development of their individual identity. Clearly he has bought into the 'politically correct' idea that sexual stereotypes are the root cause of predatory male behaviour. (But, as Atwood also points out in another novel, *The Robber Bride*, women can behave likewise - although they do so by exploiting their role as sexual objects.)

The problem with political correctness is that it has an unstable foundation. Given the 'logics of disintegration', in both theory and practice, the fight against sexism and racism is based on the notion of the fluidity of forms, whereby ultimately you can become a transgender (for the small minority who undertake full sexual reassignment, this is a long and difficult process, which is irreversible), or you can become a 'sexless third gender'. The latter is contrary to Marx's notion of the essence of things, whereby an entity or form is the basis of the characteristics which make it what it is; hence we can talk about how it functions.² Similarly poststructuralism's logic of disintegration produces the notion of the fluidity of the gender form, which aggregates temporarily within identity politics as a *political* form, in order to represent the interests of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups, only to disintegrate yet again, following the rise of intersectionality. Therefore now the women's movement has to contend with new conflicts within it: between white/black women; middle class/working class; straight/gay; second-wave/third-wave feminism, etc. This undermines the fight against sexism and racism.

Women's movement

The evolution of the women's movement since the 1960s is another example of 'negative dialectics' in action. The negation of the negation leaves the struggle worse off than it was before: first-wave feminism (aka socialist feminism) grew out of the revolutionary movement that sprang up during the Vietnam war in the 60s and 70s. Socialist feminism is premised on the idea that capitalism is responsible for the exploitation and oppression of both sexes, although men act as its agents via the ideology and practice of patriarchy, linked to sexist behaviour, which predates class society itself. It had long been assumed that men are the 'natural' leaders of society: for centuries they were the sole owners of property and the basis of inheritance; they dominated education and the structures of power; finally, since they were the breadwinners, they had to be the head of the family, and so on.

However modern capitalism, via the commodity form, then the post-war boom, broke down many of these structures. But not all of them - therefore patriarchy and sexism stubbornly refuse to go away. So for socialist feminists, women have to organise themselves to fight against patriarchy wherever it exists, in order to change men's consciousness, so that the revolutionary party is fit for purpose.

This did not happen. Second-wave feminism emerged as a negative response to this failure, reinforced by the fact that, due to the continuation of sexist behaviour among men, the sexual revolution had turned sour. Thus second-wave feminists decided that 'men are the problem' after all; hence women can do without them sexually.

(Camille Paglia personifies this trend.) *Wikipedia* provides a good analysis of third-wave feminism:

Third-wave ideology focuses on a more poststructuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality. In 'Deconstructing equality-versus-difference: or the uses of poststructuralist theory for feminism' Joan W Scott describes how language has been used as a way to understand the world. However, "poststructuralists insist that words and texts have no fixed or intrinsic meanings, that there is no transparent or self-evident relationship between them and ideas or things; no basic or ultimate correspondence between language and the world". Thus, while language has been used to create binaries (such as male/female), poststructuralist feminists see these binaries as artificial constructs created to maintain the power of dominant groups ...

Some third-wave feminists prefer not to call themselves feminists, as the word 'feminist' can be misinterpreted as insensitive to the fluid notion of gender and the potential oppressions inherent in all gender roles ... Others have kept and redefined the term to include these ideas ...

Third-wave feminism seeks to challenge any universal definition of femininity ... In the introduction of *To be real: telling the truth and changing the face of feminism* [Rebecca Walker] writes: "Whether the young women who refuse the feminist label realise it or not, on some level they recognise that an ideal woman born of prevalent notions of how empowered women look, act or think is simply another impossible contrivance of perfect womanhood, another scripted role to perform in the name of biology and virtue."³

Here we can see a rejection of the biological basis of gender, on the grounds that it is synonymous with sexism; whereas sexism is a social construct, which can be eradicated as part of the struggle for socialism.

The *Wikipedia* article on identity politics quotes from "leftwing author Owen Jones", who argues that identity politics often marginalises the working class:

In the 1950s and 1960s, leftwing intellectuals who were both inspired and informed by a powerful labour movement wrote hundreds of books and articles on working class issues. Such work would help shape the views of politicians at the very top of the Labour Party. Today, progressive intellectuals are far more interested in issues of identity ... Of course, the struggles for the emancipation of women, gays and ethnic minorities are exceptionally important causes. New Labour has coopted them, passing genuinely progressive legislation on gay equality and women's rights, for example. But it is an agenda that has happily coexisted with the sidelining of the working class in politics, allowing New Labour to protect its radical flank, while pressing ahead with Thatcherite policies.⁴

There is a problem, only so far as what we now call the LGBT movement fails to develop a level of consciousness which would allow it to identify with the working class. But it is prevented from doing so by its adherence to poststructuralist theory.

As for intersectionality, this breaks down different aspects of identity within identity politics: middle class/working class women; black/white women. There is no 'one size fits all' approach. On the basis of women's reported experiences, it leads to discrimination and abuse within feminism - so mainstream feminism is unable to unite its component parts, which leads to further fragmentation. This is even before we get to the important question of class unity.

A reactionary ideology must be tolerated out of respect for *la différence*: eg, Muslim women who want to continue wearing the veil should be allowed to do so; there is no need to debate with them and try to explain (i) the importance of destroying patriarchy wherever we find it, because it is the basis of men's power over women in class society, regardless of religion or culture; (ii) the importance of preserving the idea of secular society, which is undermined by bourgeois multiculturalism. Rather the secular argument insists that religion is a private matter and should not be given special status, because patriarchy and the oppression of women are an integral part of all religions. Therefore we have to struggle for the right to criticise all cultures that are dominated by patriarchy.

In this connection I would like to make six points:

- Third wave feminism is heterogeneous in character.
- It is a fragmented movement, with a tendency towards sectarianism.
- Since it is derived from poststructuralist studies, it is based on subjective idealism.
- Identity politics is not the way forward; rather it leads to isolation and further fragmentation.
- Apropos the women's movement as a whole, many of its leaders are happy to rely on the bourgeois media and even the state to help their cause: eg, those who call for the implementation of codes of conduct, grievance procedures, etc within institutions, in order to stamp out male predatory behaviour.
- This stands in contrast to the Marxist critique of capitalist society, which states that no oppressed group in society can liberate itself on its own. Rather the whole system and its state has to be overthrown by the working class and its allies, which must act independently, united in a single revolutionary movement - albeit one which respects the rights of different groups.

As Marxists, we should make this clear in our propaganda and interventions. We should not take sides in the struggle within the women's movement. In this regard Paul Demarty is right to draw attention to second-wave feminists, who insist on "the chromosomal requirements of the sisterhood - the so-called 'trans-exclusionary radical feminists or terfs', who are then ... hounded out of universities by the local student left"⁵. But he should have followed that up by saying we defend the right to free speech of all minority groups: ie, we are opposed to the 'no platforming' policy in principle. At the same time, we have the right to criticise both wings, as well as the disintegrating tendencies within identity politics, etc.

Post-capitalism

As an aside, how far can we push nature's envelope? In 2013, two American academics, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, issued a 'Manifesto for an Accelerated Politics', affirming "mastery, technology and the liberator possibilities of capitalism if pushed beyond its limits". This includes the "post-gender dreams of radical feminism" and even more: ie, the possibility of a "new kind of human being ... an interventionist approach to the human", an embrace of "individual bodily experimentation", set against "restricted images of the human". All this amounts to a "new human with a new body", in conjunction with the creation of a new society, whose agency is the "internet generation".⁶ As Atwood says in *The Robber Bride*, "manufactured alternatives become the truth". Homo Deus here we come!

It is difficult to disagree with the criticism that post-capitalism is just another example of technological utopianism. As Marxists, our answer must be that only communist society, in which "the associated producers regulate their interchange with nature rationally, bring it under their common control, instead of being ruled by some blind power, can establish the material basis for the development of human

power which is its own end, the true realm of freedom".⁷ But first there has to be a social revolution, consciously organised, whose agency is the working class; otherwise the material basis for such a transformation will not be established. Whether communist society will resemble the fantastic dreams of the post-capitalists is highly unlikely.

Guy Debord invented the concept. He defines it as follows:

It is the very heart of society's real unreality ... news, propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment ... [which] serves as the total justification for the conditions and aims of the system ... [and] governs all time spent outside the production process itself.⁸

But in line with the new age of sexual fluidity:

- The traditional media has seized on the transgender phenomenon, in the name of liberty and equality (also because of its novelty factor), in order to push up its ratings - although this is disproportionate to its actual size.
- Apropos the social media, it is assumed to be a bespoke medium which caters for the interests of each individual. In reality it is policed by the companies in the name of political correctness.
- In line with the current ethos, the Advertising Standards Authority has introduced a code of conduct, which restricts the depiction of women as sexual objects in order to sell products.
- Hollywood (home of disgraced movie mogul Harvey Weinstein) also exercises self-censorship for the same reasons, when it comes to graphic scenes of a sexual nature. On the other hand, the entertainment industry as a whole has ratcheted up graphic scenes of violence, which have become the new pornography.
- The traditional pornography industry, which once rivalled Hollywood commercially, is now in decline. It has been overtaken by internet porn. So far no attempts have been made to regulate this.

When feminists appear on TV, they speak about the need to 'empower women'. At the same time, they omit to mention the fact that millions of women in the public sector are among the lowest paid; that not nearly enough money is being spent on women's refuges, which exist in order to protect women against abusive partners, and so thousands of women are vulnerable to further abuse.

In the real world, the working class sticks to the old ways, even though these are distorted by sexual stereotypes. Therefore it does not take kindly to political correctness, associated with the idea of policing what should be a private matter between individuals. Atomised though they may be, the masses stubbornly adhere to the idea of binary opposites within nature or the biological basis of human sexuality. This does not mean that men should not adopt feminine roles within sex and vice versa, although the principle of binary opposites still holds (even within LGBT relationships). On the other hand, as I have shown, the idea of fluidity of gender forms sprang from the intelligentsia - ie, poststructuralism - with the broad support of the middle classes. Hence the biological basis of sex is denied: everything, including sexuality, is a 'social construct'! Yet without advances in medical technology, this would not be possible. For most trans people, this is also a lifestyle choice, despite the fact that a high proportion of them suffer from physical and psychological side effects.

Understandably, therefore, for most working class people, transgenders are at best looked upon as a special kind of celebrity, thanks to the role of the media. At worst this leads to attacks against LGBT people (not just gays). Meanwhile, we now have the theory of intersectionality, which has led to more sectarian disputes within the LGBT community. It is no wonder that the majority of people find the whole

thing confusing.

Decline and transition

I would argue most of the above is a symptom of capitalist decline and transition. Hillel Ticktin states that decline occurs

when the poles of a contradiction become more and more difficult to mediate ... What happens, however, if there is no mediation possible between the poles of a contradiction? Then disintegration ensues.⁹

Ticktin concentrates on the mode of production itself, as opposed to Marx's economic base/superstructure model: ie, he does not give sufficient weight to the superstructure - in particular, what happens in the absence of the subjective factor (consciousness). Therefore we do not end up with a communist society. That said, he acknowledges that

Some people argue that decline must show itself as an absolute decline, in which there are visible signs of a civilisation which is going in a downwards direction ... The standard of living, growth, morality, education and the overall standard of learning, from this point of view, must also decline. In so far as this did occur, we are talking about the decay of society itself, quite apart from the decline of the mode of production.¹⁰

Whilst I agree that the decline of the mode of production is the result of objective tendencies, I disagree with the implication that Ticktin sometimes gives: ie, that these objective tendencies might lead to the transition to socialism. But if the subjective factor fails to develop - namely a revival of revolutionary consciousness - surely there will be no transition to socialism. Therefore, on the one hand, we can observe the "evolution of capitalism towards greater centralisation and government control and so the alteration of value and the limitation of the market", despite the bourgeoisie's hypocritical stance on democracy.¹¹ But, on the other, given the contradiction between this and the disintegration of culture and society in general, it appears that we will have a form of transition which is worse than existing capitalism.

So where do we go from here? First and foremost, as Peter Dews says, "the logics of disintegration can ultimately be resisted on logical grounds".¹² The intelligentsia has to return to the "totalising theory" of Marxism, otherwise all is lost ●

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Notes

1. Those who undertake sexual reassignment surgery are far fewer than the number of people who identify as transsexual; but the latter is increasing rapidly, especially among 18-24-year-olds. This does not include those born with biological defects, which is less than 0.01% of the population. As for the connection between transgender and mental health problems, this is difficult to verify. I would prefer to say that the transgender phenomenon is a symptom of the *Zeitgeist*, augmented by the 'real unreality' of the media. But on the question of the connection between suicide and transgenders, according to the US National Transgender Discrimination survey in 2011, 41% of transgenders have attempted suicide, against a background of physical assault, harassment and job loss.
2. Cf Scott Meikle's explanation of Marx's approach to the value form: The latter metamorphosises and becomes the basis of the various epochs, "until it finally universalises itself over the whole of society with the attainment of its final form, capital, where the supply of labour itself has the value form thrust upon it". Thereafter it begins to decline. (S Meikle *Essentialism in the thought of Karl Marx* London 1985, p10).
3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third-wave_feminism.
4. Wikipedia, Owen Jones, *The demonisation of the Working Class*.
5. P Demarty, 'The negative-sum internet' *Weekly Worker* October 26.
6. O Hatherly, 'One click at a time' *London Review of Books* June 30.
7. K Marx *Capital* Vol 3, Moscow 1966, p820.
8. G Debord *The society of the spectacle* London 1994, p12-13.
9. H Ticktin, 'Decline as a concept and its consequences' *Critique* August 2006, pp154-55.
10. *Op cit* p156.
11. *Op cit* p161.
12. P Dews *Logics of disintegration* London 1990, pxi.

REVIEW

Capitalist hell

William Clare Roberts *Marx's inferno: the political theory of Capital* Princeton 2017, pp282, £21.40

There is an awful lot of 'Marxology' (writing about what Marx allegedly really said and why) out there. It still continues to be produced, in spite of Marx being repeatedly officially pronounced to be 'old hat' in one way or another, and no doubt there will be more for the man's 200th birthday (May 5 2018).

Most of this is crap, but some of it, in contrast, is illuminating, even if it is debatable. For example, Jonathan Sperber's 2013 *Karl Marx: a nineteenth century life* is poisoned by the mistaken belief that marginal-utility equilibrium theories 'disproved' older economic views (marginal utility theories, being inherently unfalsifiable, cannot possibly disprove anything); nonetheless Sperber is very illuminating on Marx in his 19th century political context.

William Clare Roberts' book *Marx's inferno* is similarly enlightening, even if its argument is perhaps problematic. The grand theme of the book is that volume I of *Capital* is to be read as an intervention in debates in the left of the 1830s-60s, and one structured by the literary device of following the form of Dante's *Inferno*.

In that work Dante, guided by the Roman poet, Virgil, descends through the circles of a Hell, which is a roughly conical pit divided into terraces or ditches, each for a particular class of sin. The first circle is Limbo (virtuous non-Christians); the next four circles are for those affected by lust, gluttony, greed and anger. The sixth circle, the City of Dis, houses heretics; the seventh is for the violent; the eighth for fraudsters, subdivided into 10 sub-classes; the ninth, a frozen lake, for traitors, with Satan as a giant at its centre.

The *Inferno* is, in fact, the first of the three parts of Dante's *Divina commedia* (*commedia* meaning here merely a non-tragedy). In the second part, *Purgatorio*, Dante ascends an antipodean mountain, Purgatory, which also has nine levels where the repentant soul is purged of sins, mainly corresponding to the 'seven deadly sins': in order, pride, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice, gluttony, lust. From the summit of Purgatory, he ascends through the nine celestial spheres of *Paradiso*: the moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the 'fixed stars', the *primum mobile*, which are populated by groups of the dead, grouped in relation to the four cardinal and three theological virtues, each level getting closer to god.

For those of us who do not read medieval Italian and are therefore dependent on translations, the *Inferno* is much the most readable of the three - both for its grotesque horrors and for its satire. Hence it is also the part of the *Commedia* which has been most adapted, and so on, in modern culture.¹ Hence it would not be particularly surprising that Marx should construct his structure round the *Inferno* only, as Roberts' argument supposes.

Method

Roberts' reading of Marx's appropriation of the *Inferno* is rather simpler than Dante's structure. He divides Hell into four parts (p27). The first part, 'upper hell', covers sins of incontinence: circles 1-5 (actually 2-5), *Inferno* cantos 4-8. The corresponding Marx is 'Commodities, exchange and money' in *Capital* chapters 1-3. The second part is 'Dis' covering sins of violence: circles 6 and 7, cantos 9-17 (the heretics have gone missing). In *Capital* this is capital and exploitation, chapters 4-11. The third is Malebolge: circle 8, cantos 18-30. In Marx it is the capitalist mode of production and accumulation (chapters 12-25). The fourth is Cocytus (sins of treachery), circle 9 and cantos



Inspired by Dante?

31-34. In *Capital* this corresponds to the 'primitive accumulation of capital' in chapters 26-33.

There is no doubt that there are allusions to the *Inferno* in *Capital* volume 1. That said, there are a great many literary allusions in the book. The explanation of the structure of the book in terms of the *Inferno* depends in part on Roberts' general claims about method, in part on his particular readings of the text through this method.

The discussion of method has three elements. The first is that Marx's arguments must be read with and against the arguments of other theories in circulation among radical movements and especially in the First International (1864-71): Roberts lists Owenism, Fourierism, Saint-Simonianism, the 'social republicanism' of James Bronterre O'Brien, and Proudhon's mutualism (p2).

The second is to read *Capital* 'as political theory', which is some respects another way of making the same point, but is also to read it together with republican and liberal theorists. It is, further, an argument against reading *Capital* volume 1 through Hegel's *Logic* (pp10-12) - and equally against reading it through and against the 'classical political economists' (pp12-14).

The third element is the claim that Roberts is writing about *Capital* volume 1 only, and not about Marx's writings as a whole. He discards both Marx's writings on related topics before *Capital* volume 1, the drafts Marx left of what became *Capital* volumes 2 and 3, the *Theories of surplus value*, and the unpublished correspondence. He does so on the basis that *Capital* volume 1 is, unlike these other elements, a finished published work.

I make one point here which has been partially made by other reviewers. Roberts is right in principle that a published author, not writing with a view to censorship, should be taken to have intended to write what is published and not the rejected drafts he discarded or left unpublished. But there is, in fact, a contradiction between Roberts' second and third methodological claims. We can legitimately read Marx as political theory and against Proudhonism and other such trends, because we know that Marx was a political actor engaged immediately with these other trends. We know this because of Marx's unpublished correspondence with other political actors, published statements and minutes of the First International's bodies, and so on; and in relation to Proudhonism in particular, because *The poverty of philosophy* and the *Grundrisse* also show us Marx engaged polemically with Proudhon's economics. Without the unpublished drafts and correspondence, it would be obvious that the right method for reading *Capital* volume 1 would be 'through'

Hegel's *Logic* (very visible in parts of the book) and 'against' the 'classical' and 'vulgar' 19th century political economists, who are explicitly engaged at several points of the book.

Andy Seal has suggested that at work is Roberts' commitment to the disciplinary methods of work of political theorists, focused on 'great books' even when they attempt to textualise these, as opposed to the 'archivalism' of historians of ideas - or, I might add, of political historians, or of Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* (which Roberts discards in a footnote on p6 as uninformative, on the ground that it only tells us what Marx (and Engels) said about other authors).²

Descent

Chapter 2, 'Taenarus' (the entry to Hell), makes Roberts' general case that Marx may have modelled the structure of *Capital* volume 1 on the *Inferno*. The argument begins with the proposition that Marx thought that the existing left oversimplified the 'problem of capitalism', so that he needed a structure which would force and present the descent into the depths as the key to understanding the surface, and Dante could do so. Further, he argues, the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* uses a literary model from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for the exposure of the French bourgeoisie as the assassin of the revolution; this makes the *Inferno* as a literary model more plausible. Moreover, the idea of capitalist modernity as a kind of hell was already present in Fourier and other French lefts of the 1830s-40s, and elaborated by Proudhon; Marx's scheme is precisely addressed to Proudhon's version of political economy. Like Dante descending into Hell to escape from it, the workers' movement must descend into the capitalist depths to understand it.

Chapter 3 is 'Styx: the anarchy of the market' (Styx is the river of the underworld which in Dante largely occupies the fifth circle). This part of *Capital* volume 1 is interpreted by Roberts as involving a loss of self-control and inability to plan for the future; thus mapping onto the sins of incontinence in Dante. The starting point, he argues, is civic republicanism and Christian moralism, which were intermingled in early socialist writing. The idea involved being subject to an arbitrary power as tending to corrupt the ability of the subordinate to be virtuous, producing *akrasia* - a persistent tendency to act against one's better judgment; and also in circulation was the idea of money and finance as 'mysteries', which concealed real decision-making. Marx's argument in the early chapters of *Capital* is directed, Roberts argues, against all forms of socialism which imagine that 'true' values could be found in the absence of the money

mechanism or through some form of reformed money mechanism. Roberts takes this a step further to argue for 'impersonal domination' along the lines of Moishe Postone's *Time, labour and social domination*; the result is universal *akrasia* and domination by economic laws working behind our backs. But Postone (Lukács and other Lukácsians) fail to grasp that the domination of the impersonal other is itself objectionable for its impact on the decision-making capabilities of the actor.

The result of the chapter is that

Instead of containing only highly abstract (and perhaps wrongheaded) economics, or neo-Hegelian conceptual mastication, these chapters compose the beginnings of a critical political theory of capitalism. They contain, not a theory of price, but an account of the structure of human relations in a commercial society (p102).

The problem of this line of argument is the same as that of all lines of argument which attempt to dodge the supposed 'wrongheadedness' of Marx's 'economics'. The moral critique of capitalism as producing dependence on impersonal force and *akrasia* is totally irrelevant if the laws of the capitalist economy identified by the political economists were really natural laws, existing under the surface of antiquity and feudalism and only discovered in capitalism, so that there was no practicable alternative to capitalist order for a modern society.³ The idea that one can make moral critiques without empirical claims is thus revealed as an illusion.

Chapter 4 - 'Dis: capitalist exploitation as force contrary to nature' - argues that Marx in part ii of *Capital* volume 1 is concerned with redesigning the concepts of the role of force in capitalist society, and of exploitation, which already existed in radical thought, starting with Owen's talk of force and fraud, and with the Saint-Simonian school and later Proudhon developing the idea of 'exploitation' - in both cases starting with ground rent. Marx, Roberts argues, focuses on exploitation in the factory and in relation to the working day and work-rates; he depersonalises it; and he emphasises its tendency to revolutionise machinery and technique. This is 'force against nature' because capital has an unlimited appetite for work and time, and because dead labour (machine) tyrannises over living labour (human workers): "Overwork and meaningless work are the rule and tendency of capitalist production ..." (p142).

Chapter 5 is 'Malebolge: the capitalist mode of production as fraud'. Roberts asks where there is to be fraud, given that Marx supposes labour-power to be purchased at its value. "The *sine qua non* of fraud," Roberts says, "is a certain discrepancy between appearances and reality, seeming and being" (p147). Without being conscious of it, Roberts here follows the mid-19th century English common lawyers who borrowed a narrow definition of fraud from the Roman republican jurist, Gaius Aquilius Gallus, reported by Cicero in his *On duties*, in preference to the broader definition which had been used later in Roman law and earlier in common law.⁴ By doing so, he sets up an unusual difficulty in finding fraud in capitalism.

The fraud Roberts finds is the false promises of abundance: "... the capitalist mode of production betrays its promise of wealth and leisure by its subordination of the worker to an organisation of work that cannot but be despotic." The issue again

involves engagement with Proudhon, who imagines that one can have the free exchanges of the capitalist market without the tendency to concentration and domination in the factory.

Chapter 6 - 'Cocytus: treachery and the necessity of expropriation' - addresses the last eight chapters of *Capital* volume 1 on 'primitive accumulation'. Why are they there? Roberts argues that 'primitive accumulation' occurs through the betrayal of their subordinates and their own feudal and public duties by the landlord class and public officials in the 16th century, followed by a betrayal of their benefactors by capitalist farmers and industrialists in the 18th. The state now emerges as a dependent agent of capital. The result is that independent producers and cooperatives cannot resist; and that colonisation projects intended to restore the independent producers are replaced by schemes which artificially raise the price of land in order to force the existence of a proletariat (Edward Gibbon Wakefield's policy for South Australia and New Zealand). There is no way out without confronting the question of the state.

Chapter 7 is the conclusion: 'Purgatory, or the social republic'. GA Cohen argued that Marx wrongly failed to offer an alternative social design, due to the "obstetric conception" of the material conditions of socialism growing in the womb of capitalism. Roberts argues that Marx said more about the future than Cohen admits. Rather than full equality, he aims merely for the emancipation of the working class and its association in cooperatives and between cooperatives through a regime of the type of the Paris Commune. Roberts argues that the workers' party cannot come to power unless the working class has come to share these aims. The approach is, he argues, derived from Owen - and is a form of civic republicanism: the aim of freedom from domination.

I have offered here chiefly a summary of Roberts' argument, with fairly limited criticisms. I have taken this approach because I think that the argument is, in fact, illuminating. How far so is variable in the individual parts - the idea that *Capital* is largely engaged with Proudhon is not new. I would be quite cautious about chapter 3's and chapter 4's "impersonal domination", and the reason is rather fundamental: it seems to me that the earlier part of *Capital* volume 1 is largely a counterfactual description of what capitalism would be if left-Ricardian, Proudhonist, etc, reforms were introduced. On the other hand, I find the idea in chapter 6 that the account of 'primitive accumulation' exposes the need of capital for the state, and the failures of 'exit' strategies, very helpful and one which reconnects to Marx's actual political interventions.

The schema as a whole is thus helpful in making sense of this part of *Capital*. Certainly worth reading ●

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Notes

1. A convenient but incomplete list is at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dante_Alighieri_and_the_Divine_Comedy_in_popular_culture.
2. <https://s-usih.org/2017/03/leftovers-william-clare-roberts-and-marx-manuscripts>.
3. See, for example, Nicholas Vrousalis's review of Roberts in a forthcoming issue of *Capital and Class*: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2924536. This relies on David Schweickart's critique of Albert's and Hahnel's 'Parecon' (<http://homepages.luc.edu/~dschwei/parecon.htm>).
4. M Macnair, 'Sham: early uses and related and unrelated doctrines' in E Simpson and M Stewart (eds) *Sham transactions* Oxford 2013, pp47-48.

CLIMATE



Tonnes and tonnes of it belching out daily

Production for production's sake

Optimism over Bonn and COP23 is misplaced, writes **Simon Wells**

The 23rd Convention on Climate Change (COP23) in Bonn came to an end last week. According to Patricia Espinosa, the UN's chief official on climate, it represented the continuing negotiations between governments to set out an "operating manual" to implement the 2015 Paris agreement by 2020.

According to the pro-business Climate Group:

To a large extent, the conference's modest objectives - namely moving forward with developing the rules for the Paris agreement and agreeing how to conduct the first post-Paris stock-take of collective climate action - were met.

Concerns about how president Trump's decision to withdraw the US from the Paris agreement would affect the talks were also allayed, with the rest of the international community (largely) continuing discussions as normal.

On top of that, a significant US observer community of business, state and city leaders unequivocally demonstrated their commitment to bold climate action.¹

I am afraid that is rather optimistic. COP23 came at a time when the Global Carbon Project released figures showing that carbon dioxide emissions looked set to rise by two percent in 2017 after having remained flat for the last three years - according to some, this increase results from the expansion of coal-fired power stations in China. If this trend continues, keeping temperature rises

below 2°C compared with pre-industrial levels will be unachievable. On top of this, the Union of Concerned Scientists has stated: "Especially troubling is the current trajectory of potentially catastrophic climate change due to rising GHGs [greenhouse gases] from burning fossil fuels."²

The Paris agreement aimed to gradually reduce GHG emissions, but Donald Trump's announcement that the United States, despite being the second highest emitter of carbon dioxide, would be withdrawing from the agreement, was hardly a trivial side-issue. True, a coalition of US states have committed themselves to "developing a policy to clean up pollution, make polluters pay and move toward a transportation system that runs entirely on clean, renewable energy". However, the official US line remains committed to fossil fuel use and nuclear energy as so-called 'climate mitigation strategies'.

And, yes, while Trump has promised to liberate US industry from its environmental shackles, there are many in the US who claim to be for a '100% renewable' world. For example, Californian governor Jerry Brown is touted as one of the green heroes and 'Trump resisters' who promotes carbon offsetting through 'cap and trade' schemes. However, this particular mechanism merely exchanges verifiable emissions, plus transparent and legal requirements to reduce them, with a market-based system that allows the user to pollute by buying up carbon credits from doubtful and unverifiable sources. There is no

public input, and it is the poorest who suffer under 'cap and trade'. Jerry Brown, though feted by much of the mainstream media, is obviously promoting a false solution.

Protestors at COP23 chanted "Keep it in the ground" with reference to fossil fuels. But, when Brown was interrupted during one of the sessions, he responded to the activists with: "Let's put you in the ground, so we can get on with the show here." What he promotes is a techno-capitalism that will generate fat profits and supposedly save the planet.

Another aspect of the Paris agreement is the 'loss and damage' clause, which compensates vulnerable countries most affected by climate change. Naomi Klein and George Monbiot are amongst those who advocate a tax on the polluters and argue for "the urgent replacement of fossil fuels, by mid-century at the latest, with renewable sources of energy assisted by increasing the rate of the Climate Damages Tax over time".³

This is not so far-fetched as it sounds, now that evidence has emerged that shows the oil industry was aware of the consequences of its own actions - it had been warned about it by its own scientists as far back as the 1950s. As we know, the energy industry continues to play down, deny and obfuscate the evidence, and through a public relations campaign deliberately promotes misunderstanding. But how effective a global tax would be - even assuming it was agreed - is a moot point. How would it overcome global inter-state competition and allow the

big carbon emitters to continue making profits?

While those with illusions in COP23 still hold out hopes, what about the *actions* of the big global powers? China now accounts for around a third of all CO₂ emissions. True, that amounts to some 7.7 tonnes per person, compared with the US's 16.1 tonnes. But the so-called 'developing world' is determined to catch up with the so-called 'developed world'. CO₂ emissions in India, Brazil, Russia and Indonesia are remorselessly growing. Those heading the league table of per-capita emitters like to be seen to be doing something: eg, Norges Bank, which oversees the world's largest sovereign wealth fund, advised the Norwegian government it is going to dump all its shares in oil and gas companies. But it amounts to tinkering.

Closer to home, the Labour Party is committed to the Paris agreement, but also to 'safeguarding' the oil and gas industry. Likewise, it is committed to making 'green' gestures. There is, in fact, nothing radical about the Labour manifesto, with its calls for Keynesian growth and economic nationalism. The problem is the system of capital itself, which depends precisely on never-ending growth and increased production, thus making continual rises in carbon emissions a distinct danger ●

Notes

1. www.theclimategroup.org/news/cop23-reflections-bonn.
2. <https://academic.oup.com/bioscience/advance-article/doi/10.1093/biosci/bix125/4605229>.
3. <http://climateandcapitalism.com/2017/11/16/make-fossil-fuel-giants-pay>.

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly worker

**Leonard's
victory is a
welcome blow
against right**

Protecting the northern flank

The right's grip on the Scottish Labour Party is starting to slip, writes **Paul Demarty**. But there is a long way to go

After what the pundits like to call a 'tense campaign', the leadership of the Scottish Labour Party has been won by Richard Leonard.

Leonard is a long-standing GMB union bureaucrat turned politician, and was the *de facto* left candidate; his opponent, Anas Sarwar, had recently begun providing vaguely leftwing mood music, given the circumstances, but hardly made a convincing job of it. Sarwar had a long way to row back, and is a multi-millionaire. He cuts a strange figure as a Corbynista. The left - including, for present purposes, unions like Unite - rallied around Leonard, and he won by a comfortable - if not crushing - margin. His majority was much greater among trade unionists than among the general membership: not a surprise in itself, but also an indication that the general membership north of the border is not quite so numerically dominated by the Corbyn levy as in England.

Leonard himself has attempted to place some distance between himself and Corbyn, and is hardly the picture of a starry-eyed fan. We shall yet see what sort of political role he actually plays. For now, however, the psephology speaks for itself - only a tiny minority of MSPs supported him and, assuming he sticks to the guns he is assumed to carry, he will find himself in much the same bizarre situation as Corbyn does in Westminster.

Leonard hopefully puts an end to a long series of wretched rightwing hacks occupying the Scottish Labour leadership - a dynasty which took a commanding and apparently unassailable lead for Labour north of the border and pissed it away. Numerous indices might be cited in evidence of this, but the Scots apparat's great achievement is without doubt the reduction of Labour's Caledonian headcount in the Commons from 41 to a nadir of *one* after the 2015 general election. In spite of this catastrophe, Scottish Labour has held out far more thoroughly against the encroachment of the left into its leadership than its brothers and sisters in England and even Wales managed - the cure was always 'more of the same' for these self-immolating scoundrels.

It was, of course, the notorious Jim Murphy who was in the top seat for the 2015 catastrophe - a Blairite fixer whose ill fortune gave us, among other things, the *Jim Murphy presiding over disasters* blog, in which he was Photoshopped onto the bridge of the Titanic, signing Fernando Torres for Chelsea and so on. Perhaps that is a mite unfair, since without the Labour Party's obsequious obedience to the Tories during the referendum campaign, loyally repeating every fear-mongering browbeat placed on the autocue in front of them, he surely could not have lost so badly. But naturally he was an enthusiastic participant in *that* error too, even getting egged for his trouble.

Even before that, the Scottish National Party had made expert use of the Barnett money (extra treasury cash for Scotland, Wales and Northern



Kezia Dugdale: fame was the spur

Ireland) to provide concessions to the wider population, including Labour's working class base. This left the likes of Murphy's predecessor, Johann Lamont, frothing about "dependency culture", thus strengthening the Nats' claim to represent a leftwing alternative to the Westminster parties. Without the Holyrood majority the SNP gained off the back of that political dynamic, there may not even have been a referendum

to serve as the occasion of Scottish Labour's extraordinary suicide attempt.

Since Murphy's departure, it has been the job of Kezia Dugdale to steady the ship. On the face of it, they are similar sorts of people. Both got to where they are through the royal road to Blairite hackdom: the student union (Leonard took the more old-fashioned approach of working for a major union for 20 years, although Lamont remains

the last of them to have ever had a real job). There is a big difference between Murphy's generation - who came of age at the tail-end of Kinnock's purges, and had to develop a killer instinct fast - and hers, who inherited a corpulent and complacent apparatus with scarcely a serious challenger in sight. Murphy was thus better able to fight dirty, defenestrating Lamont after the referendum result with an efficiency that would impress Nick Clegg. Dugdale was basically the last one left in the room - a short-beaked pigeon if ever one flew over George Square.

No sooner was Dugdale in post than the situation in the national Labour Party shifted dramatically, with the election of Corbyn as leader. Dugdale participated in the ham-fisted chicken coup the following year, before getting into a bit of a pickle over whether or not she believed that Corbyn could unite the party. Like many, she will have been waiting patiently for the 'madness' to end. Then May finally got round to calling her snap election - and the madness did not end after all. As a result, Dugdale's position became untenable, and it was unlikely that Corbyn's office would take a lackadaisical approach to replacing her with someone 'safe'.

Get her out of here

Her political seriousness may be judged by her subsequent announcement that she would be participating in *I'm a celebrity, get me out of here!* - the infamous ITV 'reality' show in which various Z-listers compete to show the most dignity while eating a dingo's glans. Even by the show's forgiving standards - it may as well be called *I used to be a celebrity, what do I have to eat to get back in there?* - Dugdale is a nonentity.

We cannot imagine what she hopes to gain from it, but she is at risk of losing her political career entirely. Labour's Holyrood faction is beginning disciplinary procedures against her, for failing to inform the party and parliament of this engagement. At best, her allies are embarrassed into silence; at worst, they are ex-allies.

She promises to donate her salary for this period to charity - a gesture that tells us first of all that she has it to spare, and second of all that she understands nothing of the moral issues at work. If she considered diverting taxpayers' money to some favoured brand of do-goodery while messing

about on TV rather than the appropriate task of an elected representative, then she should have said so in her election material, and the good people of Lothian could have made their own judgment. By this action, she makes her contempt for her electorate clear - it is not she who serves them, but they who serve her and her vulgar pursuit of fame. We wish her an early exit from the island - and a warm welcome back to Scotland.

With elections in Holyrood not due until 2021, the immediate significance of the vote will be felt first of all elsewhere than in Scotland. Labour's national executive has recently gained two permanent seats - one each from Wales and Scotland. This was the bright idea of one Ms K Dugdale, and initially meant two further rightwingers to keep the whole thing finely balanced. Now that she has flounced off to the Antipodes, of course, the picture looks different; the NEC is nudged again to the left. There is perhaps now an operative majority on it for the leadership, assuming (as seems likely) the election of the left slate from the constituencies. That makes a lot of difference for those parts of the apparatus that have hitherto acted as factional property of the right - one thinks of the bungling traitors of the compliance unit, and the plainly compromised general secretary, Iain McNicol - who will have, at the very least, to tread more carefully.

In Scotland, meanwhile, things are still pretty grim. There are now seven Labour MPs following the June 2017 general election, as the SNP inevitably lost its near total dominance of the Scottish delegation to the Commons. And in Holyrood Labour is only the third largest party. The raw membership numbers are hardly encouraging either - Labour has some 20,000 members in Scotland, compared to 120,000 for the nationalists. The Corbyn surge has hardly made a dent.

The Labour right has put itself through the utmost exertions to prevent mass initiative getting the upper hand in the party in these tumultuous last two years, and in Scotland it has so far been broadly successful. Before a serious Labour challenge to the SNP's petty nationalism can be taken seriously, however, that must change - and it is the pro-capitalist, British chauvinist right that presents the major obstacle. If only they were all as useless as Kezia Dugdale ●

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