

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly **worker**



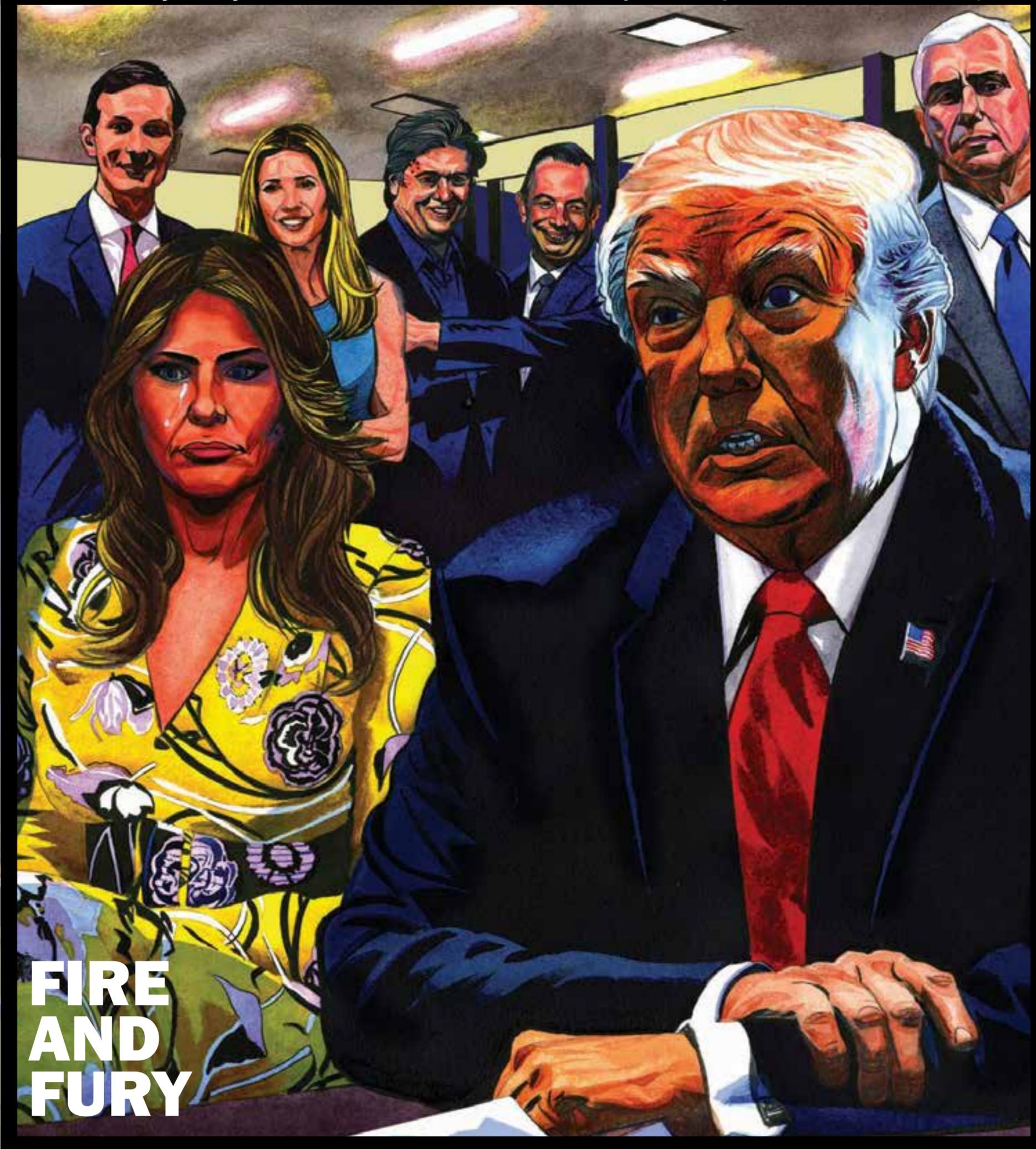
A republic! Not an Islamic Republic! Iranian workers say no to both wings of theocracy

- Letters and debate
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- Poststructuralism

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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**FIRE
AND
FURY**

LETTERS



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

Left elite

Bruno Kretzschmar is unfortunately typical of leftist defenders of the European Union proto-superstate (Letters, December 21).

Cocooned in their self-congratulatory refracted hall of mirrors, for them this bureaucratic, undemocratic edifice has somehow become intertwined with common-sense notions of 'socialism'. They - the defenders of the EU against the burgeoning force of capitalism, the bankers, the elites and the ruling class - see themselves as the front line of the class war, when in reality the reverse is the case. Everyone outside this hall of PC-received wisdom sees that the entire world banking empire and pillars of the capitalist system, the former US president and the ruling class of Europe, the elite from the church, the Lords and 75% of MPs are singing in the same choir.

The BBC and big business, the stock exchange spivs and intelligentsia are standing arms linked with them. The left EU cheerleaders see in the autocratic structures not obstacles to socialism in even its weak national parliamentary form, never mind some revolutionary vision of a United States of Socialist Europe, god help us, but a facilitation of it.

The fate of the anti-austerity programme and defiance of the International Monetary Fund and the European Bank by popular leftist Greek socialists demonstrated that. The current overruling of the Polish parliamentary programme of legal reform by the EU demonstrates that, whatever the wrongs and rights of that legislation, any idea of a national parliament doing anything outside the dictates of the EU commissioners will hit a brick wall. Those such as Bruno who seem to think that a pro-EU Corbyn would squash the referendum result and then implement his wide-ranging programme of nationalisations, state subsidies and public service financing just do not see how utterly contradictory those objectives are. The EU will simply *not allow* such a programme to be enacted, as it would be against the spirit and intention of EU trading rules.

The drawing of the Churchillian dog in the Union Jack waistcoat illustrating Mike Macnair's article ('Labour tails Tory rebels', December 21), on a different subject, is perhaps the way in which Bruno and the liberal pro-EU left see 'out' voters. Reality in our neck of the woods, however, is radically different. It is not necessary here to try and explain again to southern-based leftists the reason why solidly proletarian, militant trade unionist and rock-hard Labour-voting constituencies in the former industrial heartlands voted for 'leave' by up to a two-thirds majority, but it has nothing to do with that wretched flag or memories of 'empire' or xenophobia. It has everything to do with sticking two fingers up to the ruling class and liberal consensus on what they have decided is good for us. We have had a lifetime of that and ended up on the rust pile with the industries we worked in. Bruno will not understand this, but the anti-EU vote in the traditional working class heartlands was a class response to what was seen as yet another ruling class manoeuvre to shaft us again.

The very rare exposure of a solidly working class audience in Barnsley on a recent BBC *Question time* showed without question what that audience thought about vacillation on withdrawal from the EU. The audience was keen to tell its Labour representatives on the panel not to "stab us in the back".

Bruno's advice to Labour to come

out loud and clear for staying in the EU and squash the referendum result would be the kiss of death. Having had what seemed to be assurances from Labour that it would respect the withdrawal vote, with all that meant in terms of the single market and EU regulations, those areas swung back behind Jeremy Corbyn and returned to the Labour fold. Those who passionately believed in withdrawal got out on the knocker and round the streets in a new push for Labour. This happened nationwide and the real social issues confronting folk came back to the fore, while the Tories loomed large in their sights again.

Sadly, since that time, the 'line' on the EU has wavered, with too many front-bench spokespersons pushing something less than leaving and something a lot more like actually staying. This has set loose despondency and disillusionment in the northern, traditional Labour constituencies once again. It is the classic snatching of defeat from the jaws of victory. These areas will cut their wrists before they would vote Tory, and Ukip is a non-runner, so we will be looking at mass Labour abstentions and, despite everything which has happened, another Tory victory.

Far be it for me to tell the sodden Parliamentary Labour Party what to do, but as a sheer matter of political fact there is time yet for anti-EU leftist and centrist MPs to tell the truth about their constituents' actual view on this subject and warn Corbyn how dangerously close the fat is to the fire. It cannot be fudged or ignored if they expect to retain and regain those traditional Labour seats they need for victory.

But there is a worse conclusion, I fear. The 'left' itself is becoming perceived as just another brick in the ruling class elite's wall - a distant 'other' class, whose social values and mores are in a different world than ours. The working class as a conscious, self-identifying class could come to see the left - at least in its pro-EU, liberal PC, middle class genre - as its enemy! And that opens the door to a dangerous political vacuum.

David John Douglass
South Shields

Who defeated IS?

Before answering that question, what is Islamic State of Iraq and Syria? Can the public overcome its chronic amnesia and think back to the sudden appearance of IS dressed in brand new black uniforms, gleaming white Nikes and driving Toyota trunks? They seemed to appear out of nowhere in 2014. IS looked as if it were a mirage when it appeared, or more likely a CIA-staged scene from Hollywood.

No sooner had IS appeared than it went on a head-chopping binge that repulsed and frightened the US public. Washington officials, including secretary of state John Kerry, rang the alarm that this hoard of Islamic crazies wanted to invade the US and "kill us all". A well-compliant mainstream media swallowed Washington's script and regurgitated it to frighten a US public. The public gave its silent consent for more war really aimed at Bashar al-Assad.

The next question is, who created IS? It "can trace its roots back to the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian. In 2004, a year after the US-led invasion of Iraq, Zarqawi pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden and formed al Qa'eda in Iraq" (*BBC News* website, December 2 2016). Al Qa'eda in Iraq did not exist until after the US invasion by the Bush-Cheney administration.

The US invasion of Iraq was based on pure, unadulterated lies that Saddam Hussein supported al Qa'eda, was involved in the September 11 attacks on the US and had weapons of mass destruction. Al Qa'eda in Iraq was predictable blowback resistance

against a US illegal invasion. Bush, who admitted that he created his own reality, had hallucinations of a grateful Iraqi people, having just been bombed back to the stone age with shock and awe, throwing kisses and flowers at the US expeditionary force as liberators.

Then came the failed surge in 2007, when the US allied with Sunnis to defeat the remnants of the Iraqi Ba'ath Party, which was Arab nationalist, neither Sunni nor Shia. The cynical sponsoring and siding with radical Islam goes back to the British 'great game' of the early 1900s. It was the British double-dealing with both Sunnis and Shias to supplant the Ottoman empire, and turn Sunni against Shia to divide and conquer south-west Asia. It is the story of Lawrence of Arabia, Winston Churchill and World War I.

One could then pick up the story after World War II, when the US was opposing Arab anti-colonial nationalism and communism during the cold war. It was the 'grand chessboard' strategist, Zbigniew Brzezinski, who in the 1980s convinced Jimmy Carter to back the Islamic radical mujahedin mercenaries and destroy Afghanistan in order to lure the Soviet Union into a Vietnam-type trap. Brzezinski was so proud of his success that he would later rhetorically ask to his shame, which is more important - "some stirred-up Muslims" or winning the cold war?

If Brzezinski was so clever, he would have learned from the British early 1900s south-west Asia super-spy, Gertrude Bell. As she would later say, the British empire encouraging and sponsoring radical Islam backfired into a big failure. But the US does not know history, not even its own history of repeated blunders of encouraging and sponsoring radical Islam against Arab anti-colonial nationalism.

So instead the US enlisted the most radical rightwing fascist regime in the history of the world, the absolute monarchy of Saudi Arabia, to bankroll Sunnis against Arab nationalism. They gladly funded US regime-change projects against secular Arab states. The US - flush with cash from the Saudis - went about encouraging, training and paying mercenaries from all over south-west Asia to overthrow Assad, who did not share the US role as the world leader of capitalist globalisation. Instead, he was using Syria's wealth for the benefit of his people, just like Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi. "Assad must go," chanted Obama, Clinton, Kerry and Saudi Wahhabis. To the US it did not matter how many Syrians, Libyan or Iraqis died. As Madeleine Albright had said, "500,000 dead Iraqi children are worth it".

It was the US and its allies in the absolute Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States that created IS. Mercenaries from all over the Muslim world were recruited and even supported by the United States Airforce. The mainstream media gave the cover story that the US was backing 'well-vetted, moderate Islamists'. The mainstream media are criminal co-conspirators for spreading war propaganda, *The Guardian* being one of the worst offenders, with a few rare exceptions, such as Trevor Timm's reporting.

Now, with the ringing in of 2018, we can expect the US to be patting itself on the back for defeating IS in 2017. The real story is that it was Assad, Russia, Hezbollah and Iran that defeated it (so far). For those without amnesia, they may remember back to when Russia released videos of endless convoys of black-market IS oil tankers heading into Turkey. IS was partially funding itself with stolen oil and enriching the black marketeers of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Somehow the US, with all of its technology and thousands of bombing missions in Syria, never saw all those tankers. Nor could they find IS fighters, so instead they bombed the Syrian army. The US only saw what it wanted to see and what it wanted to bomb. It

was not IS. There are videos of Russian jets taking out IS oil tankers.

Some of the mainstream media grudgingly acknowledges that Russia had a hand in rolling back IS. Even then they downplay the Russian contribution to a support role, rather than the primary force. Instead they give the credit to "the US and 67 other nations from around the world". It was, they say, the US that "trained, supported and provided air support" to local Syrian rebel good guys, the mythical democratic moderates, that the US was supporting. City after city and village after village were destroyed by IS, US bombing and an invisible US moderate rebel force, as hundreds of thousands of Syrian casualties and refugees were created.

According to the mainstream media, the Russians stepped in late "to provide air support for the Syrian government backing the regime of Bashar al-Assad against rebels threatening his rule, but also targeting some IS territory". Unmentioned is that Russia was legally 'invited' by the legitimate government of Syria, while the US and its coalition are committing a war crime of aggression against a fellow member country of the United Nations.

Now we are going to be hearing that one year of Trump did what eight years of Obama could not do. We are going to be hearing more about how in just one year IS went from attracting thousands of foreign fighters to its anti-western cause and plotting devastating terror attacks all over the world to surrendering *en masse*. It was the US-led bombing campaign and US-backed and trained forces that defeated IS, supposedly.

Yes, after six-plus years of the most powerful military force in the history of the world, with the most technologically advanced weapons ever invented, and an annual military budget of \$1 trillion, the US finally defeated a rag-tag, mercenary paramilitary of about 30,000 fighters.

The whole story of the US war on terrorism is an incredible and unbelievable tale of pabulum that Washington and its mainstream repeaters have been feeding to the US public since 9/11. It stinks.

David William Pear
Florida

Abject disaster

The Stop the War Coalition was not founded to oppose the war in Iraq. It was founded to oppose the war in Afghanistan. So it has been right from

the very start. Our arbitrary intervention in an Afghan civil war that has now been going on continuously for 40 years has been an abject disaster from the outset, and it continues to be so.

We are now effectively back to supporting the Taliban, whom we created, against the local franchise of Islamic State, which did not exist until we took out the bulwark against such things in Iraq. By far the most prominent politician in the western world to have said all of this throughout every one of these adventures is Jeremy Corbyn.

David Lindsay
Lanchester

Peaking again

Arthur Bough shows that for Marx there was no permanent crisis of capitalism (Letters, December 21). However, the view that there is no permanent crisis of capitalism is plain wrong, if this, indeed, was the view of Marx. At the same time, it is easy to see how Marx could have arrived at this conclusion back in the 19th century, when most economists put money before energy in the rise of modern capitalism.

I have argued that Marxism contains flaws - some of them are quite serious and are of a fundamental nature. The view that there is no permanent crisis of capitalism is a flawed 19th century view, based on the fact that, for Marxism, like classical bourgeois economics, money is primary and energy is secondary, if it is mentioned at all. The problem is that 19th century economics and Marxism does not recognise the primary role of cheap energy in the birth and development of modern capitalism. In short, industrial capitalism grew out of cheap energy and depends on it for its long-term survival. In the absence of cheap energy, there would be a permanent crisis of capitalism because the system is based on production for profit.

The peaking of world oil production of the conventional sort, followed by the annual decline of oil production, leads to a supply crisis, triggering worldwide inflation. This will mean a permanent crisis of the capitalist system at every level, if a replacement for cheap oil is not found. Massive amounts of unconventional oil, like the Canadian tar sands, exist and will be economical to produce when conventional oil prices increase with a decline in supply, but no-one is suggesting that this oil will be cheap.

Tony Clark
Labour supporter

Fighting fund

For a fantastic 2018!

Our December fighting fund just reached our £1,750 target, with £24 to spare! Between the date of the last Weekly Worker of 2017 - December 21 - and the end of the year a total of £345 was received.

The star of the show was undoubtedly comrade KN, who sent us a cheque for £100, with the words, "Here's to a fantastic 2018 - for the Weekly Worker as well as the working class!" There was another cheque (£25 from TB), while a total of £155 came in through standing orders. Special thanks go to PB and JT, who both forked out £50. Meanwhile JT paid £50 via PayPal, added to by a more modest £5 from JP.

All in all, we received £345 in the last 10 days of the year, taking our final fund for 2017 to £1,774.

As for 2018, in the first 10 days no fewer than 24 standing order

donations - all within the range of £5-£30 - came our way. I will mention only the £30 donors: thank you, SW, AC, CG and HN. There was a single cheque - £50 from BT - and two PayPal donations (£15 from US donor PM and £10 from ET, who lives rather closer to home).

All that comes to £437 - not bad, but slightly behind the going rate, as a third of the month has already gone, so we really should be looking at nearer £600 by now. But after last year's successes I'm confident we'll make that £1,750 target yet again. Please make sure we do ●

Robbie Rix

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

LAW

Building up steam

Labour Against the Witchhunt secretary Stan Keable reports on the debates and decisions

Whatever their intentions *The Independent* and *The Times* gave the January 6 Labour Against the Witchhunt meeting some considerable publicity.¹ The actual meeting itself can have left no-one in doubt that the campaign does not and will not tolerate anti-Semitic views within its ranks, not least as presented by the small 'Trotskyist' organisation Socialist Fight.

This essential prerequisite for an effective campaign against false allegations of anti-Semitism by Labour's right wing was endorsed when the meeting voted overwhelmingly in favour of the steering committee motion:

LAW condemns anti-Semitism and all forms of racism. Those groups or individuals, such as Socialist Fight, who promote a form of anti-Semitism - for example, the view that imperialist support for Israel has any connection to the 'overrepresentation' of Jews in the ruling class; or that Jews are 'an oppressor people'; or that Jewish campaigns in support of the Palestinians such as Jews Against Zionism, Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods or Jewish Voice for Labour are racist because they operate on the basis of a supposedly 'Jewish moral superiority' - are not welcome in LAW.

The motion also excluded "Those, such as the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, who conflate anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism and criticism of Israel ..."²

Our "Calling all witches" appeal brought together around 60 comrades and not only from London. The meeting went on to make plans to develop the campaign, including setting up individual membership at an annual fee of £10 (£5 unwaged), and now Labour Party branches and CLPs, together with trade union branches, can affiliate for £25 (national bodies £100). LAW will picket the Labour national executive committee meeting on Tuesday January 23, demanding that the NEC reins in rogue general secretary Iain McNicol and his compliance unit of paid witchhunters - ostensibly acting on the instructions of the NEC - and we will picket the forthcoming disciplinary hearings of Marc Wadsworth (January 24, London), Tony Greenstein (January 26, Brighton) and Jackie Walker (date to be announced). Moshé Machover, reinstated in October after a party-wide outcry, to McNicol's embarrassment, has agreed to be honorary president of LAW.

The campaign calls for Labour to implement the Chakrabarti report and stop the 'automatic' expulsion of socialists, without due process, using the bureaucrat's dream, rule 2.1.4.B. LAW also opposes the weaponisation of the so-called International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of anti-Semitism (crucially its 'examples', many of which conflate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism). These 'examples' have been used to suspend party members, removing their membership rights indefinitely. LAW has sent a submission to the Corbyn democracy review, which was agreed by the meeting, and can be used as a model for branches and CLPs.³ Moshé will be speaking alongside Ken Loach, Jackie Walker and Marc Wadsworth at Conway Hall



on January 29 - LAW's first public meeting, to be followed next day by our Birmingham public meeting.

Debate

Keeping things in perspective, a number of speakers for the SC motion emphasised that, although SF's views irrevocably lead to the conclusion that Jews are "a problem", SF leading lights Ian Donovan and Gerry Downing are not "personally anti-Semitic". Pete Firmin, supporting the SC motion, nevertheless insisted that, while that was certainly the case for Gerry, "his politics are" anti-Semitic. Among those opposing the exclusion of SF, Steve Forrest said Gerry's formulations are "clumsy, but not anti-Semitic," while Graham Durham thought SF were "bonkers, but not racist". Simon Hines, Islington North, opposed the SC motion because it excludes comrades on the basis of their views - which, of course, is true, but necessary. Simon is suspended on fake allegations of anti-Semitism, for saying such things as "Israel supports IS" and "Ruth Smeeth MP was not in tears" when she walked out of the Chakrabarti launch meeting.

Combating Ian Donovan's defence of Gilad Atzmon, Roland Rance said that "Zionism is deeply anti-Semitic. It is a racist movement. Atzmon came to the conclusion that Zionism is right - that Jews outside Israel do live a dog's life." Moshé Machover challenged SF's view that Jewish solidarity with Palestinians promoted "Jewish moral superiority". Jewish solidarity groups, he said, are "not a form of identity politics. They are fighting for Palestinian rights, not for their own rights." Jackie Walker spoke out against the view that this debate over the nature of LAW, including the exclusion of anti-Semitism from our campaign, was a diversion. "This debate is not a distraction", she said. "It is at the core of what we are doing." Absolutely right.

Despite the scare stories being spread, there was never any likelihood of physical conflict at the meeting. After a 90-minute debate, SF supporters respected the vote. The SC motion was carried by approximately 34 to 16, while Gerry Downing's own motion ("This meeting rejects the motion to expel Socialist Fight from LAW and rejects the accusations of anti-Semitism against them") was lost by a similar margin. SF then withdrew from the meeting, while a number of comrades who criticised SF's political views but voted against its exclusion stayed in the meeting - and remain in LAW. The meeting then proceeded to plan the development of the campaign.

Both the newspapers mentioned above had reproduced the malicious and irresponsible lie spread by rightwing blogger Guido Fawkes,⁴ under the rubric of "Loony left" and "Split amongst loony Labour anti-Semites" (evidently, for Guido, critics

of Israel and the settler-colonial project of Zionism are necessarily anti-Semitic), to the effect that a punch-up was in the offing at the venue. Guido reproduced a tweet by one Dave Rich, which read: "Reject Bogus Left Anti-Semitism is having its own meeting on Saturday in the same pub as Labour Against the Witchhunt. Same day, same time, same place, same subject - but on opposing sides."

"You couldn't make it up," wrote Guido. But he did! 'Reject Bogus Left Anti-Semitism' was not a rival organisation: merely a Facebook 'event' set up by Gerry Downing to mobilise SF supporters to the LAW meeting.

These fake news predictions, plus a couple of emails warning of potential trouble, were enough to persuade the landlord of the Calthorpe Arms, where the meeting had been scheduled to take place, to cancel LAW's booking - an unfortunate precedent for a traditional left meeting place which has seen many debates, but never leftwing violence. LAW quickly booked an alternative nearby meeting room, but comrades from both sides of the argument assembled - peacefully, together - in the bar of the Calthorpe Arms, before walking round the corner to a larger room in the nearby pub.

During the meeting, Tony Greenstein mocked SF's "theory that the Jewish question is still relevant today: ie, that Jews fulfil a distinctive social or economic or political role under capitalism"; and he drew attention to Gerry Downing's recent interview with, and Ian Donovan's defence of, the "notorious anti-Semite", Gilad Atzmon.⁵ Gerry Downing said that in November SF had been "autocratically excluded by the three people", Stan Keable, Tony Greenstein and Jackie Walker (ie, the LAW steering committee, in its November 22 statement) and that, at the December 2 LAW meeting, "We won the vote". In fact none of the three motions debated on that day had been carried.

Strangely, stretching the imagination beyond breaking point, Gerry claimed that we were "in a bloc with Iain McNicol", signalling to him that "If we give you SF's head on a plate, perhaps you will treat us better". In fact, as the SC motion states, LAW stands for "the lifting of all suspensions and expulsions ... connected with the rightwing witchhunt of Corbyn supporters". We do not want Labour's rightwing, pro-imperialist warmongers and austerity promoters, or their paid officials led by general secretary Iain McNicol, deciding "automatically", without due process, who is and who is not a Labour Party member.

The meeting ended with a call to support the Change.org petition to the NEC for suspended LP member Dave Watson of Walthamstow, raised a collection of £146, and agreed our next organising meeting: 1pm-4pm, Saturday March 3 at the Union Tavern. Book your rail tickets early this time ●

Notes

1. *The Independent* January 2, *The Times* January 6.
2. <http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1184/calling-all-witches>.
3. www.labouragainsthewitchhunt.org/category/model-motions.
4. <https://order-order.com/2018/01/02/split-among-loony-labour-anti-semite>.
5. See Tony Greenstein's extensive report of the meeting, the debate, and the arguments on his blog: <http://azvsas.blogspot.co.uk/2018/01/decisive-victory-as-labour-against.html>.

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday January 14, 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 дума' (continued).

Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1.

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

Solidarity with the oppressed in Iran

Tuesday January 16, 6pm: Public meeting with Yasmine Mather (Hands Off the People of Iran) and Austin Harney (PCS). Room 4.3 (4th floor), Public and Commercial Services union headquarters, 160 Falcon Road, Clapham, London SW11. Speakers: Organised by Hopi: <http://hopoi.org>.

Turkey under the state of emergency

Saturday January 20, 10am to 4pm: Conference. NUT, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BD.

Register here: www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/turkey-under-the-state-of-emergencycampaigning-to-win-change-tickets-41226776398

Organised by Solidarity with the People of Turkey: <http://spotturkey.co.uk/>.

Labour Against the Witchhunt

Tuesday January 23, from 11am: Picket of Labour's NEC meeting (12-4), Southside, 105 Victoria Street, London SW1.

Monday January 29, 6.30pm: Public meeting with Ken Loach, Moshé Machover, Tony Greenstein et al, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1.

Tuesday January 30, 7pm: Public meeting with Jackie Walker, Marc Wadsworth et al. The Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B1.

Organised by LAW: www.labouragainsthewitchhunt.org.

Living under threat of nuclear war

Wednesday January 24, 7.30pm: Public meeting about North Korean tensions. Jesus Lane Friends Meeting House, 12 Jesus Lane, Cambridge, CB5 8BA.

With Dr Tim Coles who will talk about his book: *Fire and fury: How the US isolates North Korea, encircles China and risks nuclear war in Asia*.

Event page: www.stopwar.org.uk/index.php/events/local-stop-the-war-events/2829-24-jan-cambridge-north-korea-living-under-threat-of-nuclear-war

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

Air pollution - a union issue

Friday January 26, 1pm to 4pm: Meeting for trade unionists, PCS offices, 3rd floor, Merrion Centre, Leeds LS2. Registration required. For further information contact Janet Newsham: 0161 636 7558;

janet@gmhazards.org.uk.

Organised by the TUC: www.tuc.org.uk/events/air-pollution-%E2%80%93-trade-union-issue.

Discrimination and the law

Friday January 26, 8.45am to 4pm: Conference, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. For trade unions, law centres, etc.

Organised by TUC:

www.tuc.org.uk/events/tuceor-discrimination-law-conference-2018.

Palestine solidarity

Saturday January 27, 9.30am to 5pm: Palestine Solidarity Campaign AGM, London Irish Centre, 50-52 Camden Square, London NW1. Please register by January 20.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign:

www.palestinecampaign.org/events/psc-annual-general-meeting-2018.

Showtime from the front line

Tuesday January 30, 6.45pm: Political comedy with Mark Thomas, the Old Market, 11a Upper Market Street, Hove BN3.

Organised by the Old Market:

<http://theoldmarket.com/shows/mark-thomas-showtime-frontline>.

Trade unions, class and power

Tuesday January 30, 7pm: Political lecture and discussion, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Part of a series of four classes delivered by Mary Davis. £20 waged; £12 unwaged.

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

NHS in crisis

Saturday February 3, 12 noon: Demonstration. Assemble Gower Street, London WC1.

Organised by People's Assembly and Health Campaigns Together:

www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Grassroots Black Left

Wednesday February 7, 6.30pm: Launch meeting, Portcullis House, 1 Parliament Street, London SW1.

Organised by Grassroots Black Left: www.facebook.com/GrassrootsBlackLeft.

Starting a co-op

Thursday, February 8, 1pm to 5pm: Information and education event, Cooperatives UK, Holyoake House, Hanover Street, Manchester M1. Free entry.

Organised by Cooperatives UK: www.uk.coop/uniting-co-ops/events-calendar/is-a-co-op-right-for-you-manchester-08-02-18.

Britain's housing crisis

Wednesday February 14, 7pm: Discussion, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. First in a three-part course. Waged: £15; unwaged: £9.

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

For an anti-war government

Thursday February 15, 7pm: Anti-war rally against Trump visit, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1.

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

CPGB wills

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

LABOUR**Palestinians are being dispossessed**

Falsefully accused of anti-Semitism

Moshé Machover - recently reinstated into the Labour Party - has written this testimony on behalf of Tony Greenstein

This testimony is addressed to the Labour Party National Constitutional Committee in connection with its hearing called to consider accusations of 'anti-Semitism' that have been made against Tony Greenstein by person or persons unknown.

I am a dissident Israel citizen, born in Palestine in 1936. I have been living in London since 1968 and am a naturalised British citizen. I am a member of the Labour Party, Queen's Park branch (Hampstead and Kilburn constituency).

I have known Tony Greenstein for over 40 years as a staunch socialist - active in defence of the rights of workers, in particular the unemployed - and against all racism, including anti-Semitism. In line with this, he is an uncompromising opponent of the Zionist project of colonisation and of Israel's Zionist regime, which makes it a colonising settler state. He has devoted much scholarship and thorough research to the history of Zionism and the dialectic of its complex and paradoxical relationship with anti-Semitism. Having myself also done much reading on the subject, I find his statements on it well grounded in fact.

In what follows I address three related questions. First I discuss the nature of Zionism, then the conflation between opposition to Zionism and

anti-Semitism. Finally I deconstruct the deliberate misdefinition of 'anti-Semitism' and its weaponisation as a means of attacking leftwing critics of Israel.

What is Zionism?

Zionism is a political movement that combines an ideology and a project. While - like most political movements - it comprises a variety of currents and shades of opinion, they all have a common core.

The core of Zionist ideology is the belief that the Jews of all countries constitute a single national entity rather than a mere religious denomination; and that this national entity has a right to self-determination, which it is entitled to exercise by reclaiming its historical (or god-given) homeland - pre-1948 Palestine (Eretz Yisrael, the Land of Israel).

Here, for example, is an authoritative formulation:

Zionism is the national revival movement of the Jews. It holds that the Jews are a people and therefore have the right to self-determination in their own national home. It aims to secure and support a legally recognised national home for the Jews in their historical homeland, and to initiate and stimulate a revival of Jewish national life, culture and language.¹

However, this claim begs a couple of questions. Do the totality of Jews constitute a nation in the modern secular sense, to which the right of national self-determination is applicable? This is at best extremely questionable, and has in fact been denied by many Jews, who assert cogently that Jewish identity is not national, but primarily based on religion.

Thus, when Lucien Wolf - distinguished journalist and leading member of the Conjoint Foreign Committee of British Jews - was confronted with Chaim Weizmann's effort to obtain what was to be known as the Balfour Declaration, he wrote a worried letter to James de Rothschild, dated August 31 1916:

Dear Mr James de Rothschild
At the close of our conference with Dr Weizmann on the 17th inst, you asked me to write you a letter defining my view.

....

I have thought over very carefully the various statements made to me by Dr Weizmann, and, with the best will in the world, I am afraid I must say that there are vital and irreconcilable differences of principles and method between us.

The question of principle is raised by Dr Weizmann's assertion of a Jewish nationality. The assertion

has to be read in the light of the authoritative essay on 'Zionism and the Jewish future' recently published by Mr Sacher, more especially those written by Dr Weizmann himself and by Dr Gaster. I understand from these essays that the Zionists do not merely propose to form and establish a Jewish nationality in Palestine, but that they claim all the Jews as forming at the present moment a separate and dispossessed nationality, for which it is necessary to find an organic political centre, because they are and must always be aliens in the lands in which they now dwell (Weizmann, p6), and, more especially, because it is "an absolute self-delusion" to believe that any Jew can be at once "English by nationality and Jewish by faith" (Gaster, pp92, 93).

I have spent most of my life in combating these very doctrines, when presented to me in the form of anti-Semitism, and I can only regard them as the more dangerous when they come to me in the guise of Zionism. They constitute a capitulation to our enemies, which has absolutely no justification in history, ethnology, or the facts of everyday life, and if they were admitted by the Jewish people as a whole, the result would only be that the terrible situation of our coreligionists in Russia and

Romania would become the common lot of Jewry throughout the world.²

And on May 24 1917, as negotiations that were to lead to the Balfour Declaration were at an advanced stage, Alexander and Claude Montefiore - presidents respectively of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and of the Anglo-Jewish Association - wrote a letter to *The Times* in the name of the Conjoint Committee of these two bodies, protesting against the fallacies and dangers of political Zionism. After declaring their adherence to Lucien Wolf's position, the writers went on to say that the theories of political Zionism undermined the religious basis of Jewry, to which the only alternative would be

a secular Jewish nationality, recruited on some loose and obscure principle of race and of ethnographic peculiarity. But this would not be Jewish in any spiritual sense, and its establishment in Palestine would be a denial of all the ideals and hopes by which the survival of Jewish life in that country commends itself to the Jewish conscience and Jewish sympathy. On these grounds the Conjoint Committee of the Board of Deputies and the Anglo-Jewish Association deprecates earnestly the national proposals of the Zionists.

The second part in the Zionist

programme which has aroused the misgivings of the Conjoint Committee is the proposal to invest the Jewish settlers [in Palestine] with certain special rights in excess of those enjoyed by the rest of the population ...

In all the countries in which Jews live the principle of equal rights for all religious denominations is vital to them. Were they to set an example in Palestine of disregarding this principle, they would convict themselves of having appealed to it for purely selfish motives. In the countries in which they are still struggling for equal rights they would find themselves hopelessly compromised ... The proposal is the more inadmissible because the Jews are and probably long will remain a minority of the population of Palestine, and might involve them in the bitterest feuds with their neighbours of other races and religions, which would severely retard their progress and find deplorable echoes thought the Orient.

The view - evidently held by these leaders of the British Jewish community - that Jewishness is religion-based rather than a national category relies on basic facts. Indeed, the only attribute shared by all Jews around the world is the religion, Judaism, practised by them or by their recent forebears. Further, a necessary and sufficient condition for a non-Jew to become Jewish is undergoing a religious conversion: *giyyur*. Thus Jews can belong to various nations: a Jew may be French, American, Italian, Scottish, etc. But Jewishness excludes other religious affiliations: a Jew cannot be Muslim, Hindu or Roman Catholic.

Another fatal weakness of the justifications of Zionism as implementing an alleged right of Jewish national self-determination is that, whatever group of people the right of national self-determination may apply to, it does not entitle them to pick and choose at will the territory over which they may exercise that right. Claims that the group's alleged distant ancestors lived in the coveted territory many centuries ago, or that it was promised to them by a deity in whose existence many of them happen to believe, or that they have long wished to possess it, are simply not good enough. The right to self-determination certainly does not license any group to colonise a territory long inhabited by other people.

But the key fact about the Zionist project is precisely that it is a project of colonisation of Palestine - an inhabited land; and it is precisely this essential fact that is conveniently omitted by the definition of Zionism offered by its present-day propagandists. They avoid the word 'colonisation' like the proverbial plague; it has become too compromising.

Earlier Zionist leaders and ideologues had no such qualms. Thus, for example, Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880-1940) - the political and spiritual progenitor of five Israeli prime ministers, including Binyamin Netanyahu³ - used in his seminal article, 'The iron wall' (1923), the term 'colonisation' repeatedly and unselfconsciously to describe the Zionist project:

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

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

nature cannot be changed ...

Zionist colonisation must either stop or else proceed regardless of the native population. Which means that it can proceed and develop only under the protection of a power [ie, Britain - MM] that is independent of the native population - behind an iron wall, which the native population cannot breach.⁴

Many years later, Zionist historian Yigal Elam wrote:

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

From the viewpoint of national theory, Zionism needed a fiction that was incompatible with the accepted concepts of national theory ... [It] needed a much broader conception than the simplistic one. In this other conception ... referendum of the worlds Jews superseded referendum of the population of Palestine.⁵

Conflation with anti-Semitism

As we have seen, Zionism is a political ideology-cum-project. The State of Israel - a product of the Zionist project as well as an instrument for its continuation and extension - is, like any state, a political entity.

Israel has been in military occupation of the West Bank and the besieged Gaza Strip for over 50 years and is exercising harsh oppression over millions of Palestinian Arabs, who have no civil or national rights. It has been avidly stealing their land and colonising it with illegal, exclusively Jewish settlements. Israel may not be worse in this respect than other states that ruled over other nations and colonised their land - for example, Britain in its former colonies, such as Kenya.⁶ But Israel is also no better than other colonising states, nor is there any reason to expect it to be any better: colonisation has its own logic, and generally involves harsh, racist oppression and occasional atrocities, justified by the 'need to keep order among the natives'. Israeli officially inspired and fomented racism is by now widely known and condemned.⁷

Opposition to Zionism and to the colonising regime and policies of Israel is therefore a legitimate political position. It only becomes illegitimate if it is motivated or accompanied by illegitimate aims or arguments: for example, such as stem from generalised hatred or prejudice against Jews as Jews. But such illegitimate motives or arguments need to be proven before accusing an opponent of Zionism and Israel's regime of 'anti-Semitism'; they cannot simply be assumed or taken for granted. In the absence of proof, accusation or insinuation that anti-Zionist discourse and opposition to the Israeli regime are *per se* 'anti-Semitic' is a despicable calumny.

Nevertheless this kind of calumny has often been maliciously made; and latterly it is often directed against people on the left, including members of the Labour Party. I have been besmirched in this way by some party officials - for which they have yet to apologise. And many others, including Tony Greenstein, are victims of similar character assassination.

Jews in the diaspora, including this country, are deeply divided in their attitude to Zionism and Israel. Many have made attachment to Israel part of their Jewish identity, as a supplement - and in some cases as a surrogate - to their religion, Judaism. They support Israel 'right or wrong' and tend to assume that hostility to Zionism must be motivated by anti-Semitism.

But an increasing number of Jews have a very different attitude: they are deeply offended by the actions of a state that claims to be the 'nation-state of the Jewish people', and professes

to represent all Jews and act on their behalf. They abhor the implication that they, as Jews, are complicit in Israel's crimes. Jewish opponents of Zionism include many secular Jews, as well as the ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) community, whose long-standing and deep-seated hostility to Zionism is based on their religious faith.⁸

Opposition to Zionism has been increasing among younger Jews, especially those on the left, including the Labour Party. This is the firm impression I have formed through extensive contacts and it was indeed corroborated by events and general atmosphere at the party conference in September 2017. This trend is not fully reflected in the various polls and surveys that purport to show much Jewish support for Israel. The reason is that these polls suffer from an inbuilt statistical bias. Since there is no database listing all Jews in Britain, the samples used by the polls miss out on the very large number of persons of Jewish background who are not affiliated to any synagogue or other official or semi-official Jewish organisation. And it is those not included in the sample space who tend to be less inclined to Zionism and attachment to Israel.

Deliberate misdefinition

Jewish opposition to Israel's colonisation of Palestinian land and oppression of the Palestinian people is part of a growing trend in progressive public opinion around the world. This is reflected in the rapid growth of the global campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS), aiming to apply economic and political pressure on Israel to end its violations of international law.

Faced with this serious damage to its image, the Israeli government has taken steps to attack and discredit its critics by a variety of means, fair and foul. Worldwide operations with this object are orchestrated by the Ministry of Strategic Affairs. Since 2015, this ministry is headed by cabinet member Gilad Erdan, who is also minister of internal security and information. Erdan himself is on record as stating that his "achievements should be kept hush-hush".⁹ *The Guardian*, reporting on his secret meeting in London in September 2017 with disgraced Tory minister Priti Patel (following her return from a 'holiday' in Israel), comments:

Erdan's ministry was asked in 2015 to "guide, coordinate and integrate the activities of all the ministers and the government and of civil entities in Israel and abroad on the subject of the struggle against attempts to delegitimise Israel and the boycott movement" ... Erdan has been put in charge of large-scale efforts to target foreign individuals and organisations ... [with] staff recruited from the Mossad foreign intelligence agency, the Shin Bet domestic intelligence agency, and the military intelligence directorate.¹⁰

One of the main weapons in these "efforts to target foreign individuals and organisations" who criticise Israel, especially those who support BDS, is to accuse them of 'anti-Semitism'. In this campaign, Erdan's operatives in foreign countries harness local pro-Israel lobbies. An exposé of how such an undercover operative, Shai Masot, worked in this country, and his attempts to meddle in the Labour Party, was provided in January 2017 by Al Jazeera in a fascinating four-part TV series, *The lobby*.¹¹

Since Tony Greenstein's accusers are concealed behind a veil of anonymity, it is impossible to ascertain whether, or to what extent, their efforts (which involved formidable trawling for 'incriminating' material) received help, encouragement and guidance from

Erdan's operatives. But in light of the Al Jazeera revelations - which included illustration of false accusations of 'anti-Semitism' - this supposition cannot be entirely ruled out. In order to dispel suspicions of this kind, the identity of the accusers must be made known and they must be subjected to cross-examination, as natural justice demands.

A weapon regularly used in the false accusations of 'anti-Semitism' is the set of 11 illustrative examples appended to the so-called working definition of anti-Semitism proposed by a US-based group calling itself 'International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance' (IHRA). To the best of my knowledge, the Labour Party has not adopted the illustrative examples, but only the definition itself:

Anti-Semitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.

However, the accusations made against Tony Greenstein quote the illustrative examples and make extensive use of them. While the definition itself is in my opinion unsatisfactory, the examples are deeply problematic. Most of them are concerned not with Jews as such, but with Israel, and are deliberately designed to ring-fence Israel against robust criticism and conflate hostility to its Zionist regime with 'anti-Semitism'. These examples have indeed been harshly criticised by eminent legal authorities: Hugh Tomlinson QC¹² and retired appeal court judge Sir Stephen Sedley.¹³

Please consult these authoritative opinions and note their warning that applying the examples may well conflict with the right to free speech. Here I will illustrate the absurdity of the examples by examining two of them.

Example 7 of alleged anti-Semitism appended to the IHRA definition is: "Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination: eg, by claiming that the existence of a state of Israel is a racist endeavor [sic!]."

Now, as Sir Stephen Sedley has pointed out, this begs several questions. Let me spell them out.

What is the relationship between the first and second part of this example? How does the 'eg' part of the statement have any connection with the first part? It is clearly possible to affirm that there exists a Jewish people and it has a right to self-determination, but at the same time to believe that its alleged implementation in the State of Israel is a racist endeavor.

● Do the totality of Jews around the world constitute a distinct nation, to which the right of self-determination would apply? As I have shown above, it is perfectly legitimate to assert that Jewishness is not a national but a religious category. And this has indeed been argued by eminent Jewish leaders. But the internationally recognised political right to self-determination applies to nations, not to religions.

● Does the Jewish community in this country constitute part of a non-British national minority, entitled to seek self-determination in another country? ● Does a group that is assumed to have the right of self-determination thereby also have right to colonise a territory inhabited by other people and displace these indigenous inhabitants? Surely not! But the Zionist project from its beginning, more than 100 years ago, did arrogate to itself such a 'right'.

● Can an endeavour of colonisation - which Zionism is, and openly declared itself to be in its early days - avoid being racist towards the indigenous people of the colonised territory? I know of no example of non-racist colonisation; and the Israeli settler state definitely conforms to the general rule.

Example 10 of alleged anti-Semitism appended to the IHRA definition is: "Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis."

Now, comparisons of this kind have in fact been made by Israeli scholars. As recent examples, let me refer you to two articles by professor Daniel Blatman, a historian of holocaust and genocide in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem¹⁴ and to a report about a pronouncement made by professor Ofer Cassif, who teaches politics and government at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.¹⁵

But look again at that example 10. Let me concede for a moment that comparing contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis is an unjustified slur. But slur against what or whom? At worst, it could be a slur against a state, Israel; and as such it may well upset supporters of that state and those who still believe in it. But how can it possibly be a slur against the Jews, and hence 'anti-Semitic'? Well, the only way in which it could bear such an interpretation is if we hold all Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

However, example 11 of anti-Semitism appended to the IHRA definition reads: "Holding all Jews as collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel."

This is evidently correct: it is indeed clearly anti-Semitic to hold all Jews collectively responsible for the deeds of Israel. But if we accept that example 11 is indeed a true example of anti-Semitism, as it clearly is, then the assertion that example 10 is a true example of anti-Semitism is itself an anti-Semitic assertion!

Thus the set of 11 examples taken together is self-contradictory and self-incriminating. They ought to be discarded; and most certainly they should have never been used so shamefully to smear Tony Greenstein - a veteran campaigner against all racism ●

Notes

1. Zionism on the web: Zionism defined (www.zionismontheweb.org/zionism_definitions.htm). For similar but briefer formulations, see, for example, Jonathan Freedland in *The Guardian*, March 18 2016 (www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/mar/18/labour-antisemitism-jews-jeremy-corbryn); or Eylon Aslan-Levy in *The Times of Israel*, December 8 2013 (<http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-trouble-with-anti-zionism>).
2. Photocopy of typewritten original in B Destani (ed) *The Zionist movement and the foundation of Israel 1839-1972*, 10-volume set: *Political diaries 1918-1965* Cambridge 2004, Vol 1, p727. My emphasis.
3. The others are Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Shamir, Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert.
4. 'The iron wall' ('*O Zheleznoi stene*'), published November 4 1923 in the Russian-language journal *Rassvvet* (Dawn); English translation: www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/quot-the-iron-wall-quot.
5. Y Elam, 'Hanahot hadashot leota tzionit' ('New assumptions for the same Zionism') *Ori* No2, winter 1967; my translation (emphasis in original).
6. M Perry, 'Uncovering the brutal truth about the British empire' *The Guardian* August 18 2016.
7. See, for example, comment by the senior Israeli journalist, Akiva Eldar: 'Israeli defense minister's comments highlight "plague of racism"' *Al Monitor* December 14 2017 (www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/12/israel-xenophobia-racism-minorities-human-rights-liberman.html).
8. See A Ravitzky, 'Ultra-Orthodox and Anti-Zionist' (www.myjewishlearning.com/article/ultra-orthodox-anti-zionist).
9. www.facebook.com/gilad.erdan/photos/a.225201850853267.56972.207139259326193/1265886783451430/?type=3&theater (August 7 2016).
10. 'What did Israel hope to gain from Priti Patel's secret meetings?' *The Guardian* November 8 2017.
11. www.aljazeera.com/investigations/thelobby.
12. 'Opinion: In the matter of the adoption and potential application of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Anti-Semitism', March 8 2017 (<http://freespeechisrael.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/TomlinsonGuidanceIHRA.pdf>).
13. Talk delivered at a meeting in the House of Lords on March 27 2017: <http://freespeechisrael.org.uk/sedley-ihra/#respond>. Revised version: 'Defining anti-Semitism' *London Review of Books* May 4 2017.
14. 'The Israeli lawmaker heralding genocide against Palestinians' *Ha'aretz* May 23 2017 (www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-1.791115); 'Smotrich's stage-by-stage plan' (Hebrew) *Ha'aretz* June 10 2017 (www.haaretz.co.il/opinions/.premium-1.4158915).
15. 'Hebrew U professor: Israel today similar to Nazi Germany' *Jerusalem Post* June 23 2017 (www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Hebrew-U-professor-Todays-Israel-similar-to-Nazi-Germany-497731).

POLEMIC**Understanding poststructuralism**

We need to debate the development of diverse ideas and movements in their historical context, both before and after 1968. Only then can Marxism recover and move forward, argues **Rex Dunn**

Why return to the subject so soon? Firstly, without an attempt to define what post-structuralism stands for, we cannot expect to have a proper understanding of it. I included such an attempt in my first article on this subject, but it was cut for reasons of space.¹ I reintroduce it here. Secondly, I appreciate Comrade Mike Macnair's and Paul Demarty's recent contributions, which have helped me clarify my own ideas.²

That said, both comrades fail to understand my position on poststructuralism. This can be summarised by the following five points:

- Firstly, poststructuralism is part of the return of anti-foundationalist ideas within philosophy, whereas structuralism is not. This has to be understood historically, although, of course, things develop dialectically; there is no clean-cut cause and effect.

- Secondly, poststructuralism was a reaction to the anti-humanist, determinist approach of Stalinist 'diamat' and its western philosophical offshoot, structuralism, epitomised by the work of Althusser. This tradition was directly responsible for the betrayal of more than one revolution.

- Thirdly, poststructuralism was not a direct consequence of 1968 (that would be crude reductivism). Rather the defeat of the latter gave it a huge leg-up in the intellectual stakes, which enabled it to discredit all the old totalising theories (eg, Marxism, Freudianism). As a result poststructuralism, which is based on anti-foundationalist ideas, emerged as the dominant discourse within western thought, both in France and America. But it had been simmering away for a long time, waiting for its opportunity to come to the fore.

- Fourthly, poststructuralism ran out of steam ages ago. But its very nature, as 'the logics of disintegration', prevents the emergence of a new cohesive outlook. This is reinforced by Stalinism's poisonous legacy (communism = totalitarianism). Meanwhile, coincidentally, poststructuralism has provided a convenient intellectual fig-leaf for the ruling class and its post-consensus project; ie, neo-liberalism, which promotes the 'free market' on a global basis, or the commodification of 'everything'. Changes in the economic base, such as deindustrialisation in the advanced countries, the decline of the organised working class, went hand in hand with the celebration of fragmentation and pluralism. This in turn inspired a new form of political activity or identity politics, whose common denominator is political correctness, within which, increasingly, 'men are the problem'. Compare the rise of second and third-wave feminism, the transgender phenomenon and so on.

- Fifthly, This is reflected/reinforced as a new 'postmodern' *Zeitgeist* by the bourgeois mass media. Hence we find ourselves in the present impasse: the ongoing class struggle is split asunder, the working class is rendered impotent, whilst capitalism as a system lurches from one crisis to another under the weight of its constitutive contradictions. Thus, given the absence of the subjective factor (revival of the revolution), the system continues to decline and, if left to its own accord, it will transition into something worse. (The weakening of the value form is a symptom of this.)

In the light of the above, there is a definite connection between the origin of poststructuralism and Stalinism. But this has to be seen in terms of the latter's long-term negative impact on western philosophy, as well as its poisonous legacy, following 1968.



Paris, May 1968 ... If only things were different, things would be different

Apropos western philosophy, on the one hand, philosophical Marxism had begun to degenerate as early as the 1930s, continuing into the post-war period. On the other, this provided breathing space for the emergence of ideas which became the basis of structuralism/poststructuralism. To this end, I shall concentrate mainly on the 'battle of ideas'. In order to develop my argument, I shall deal with the following in this order: foundationalism; anti-foundationalism; Stalinist diamat/structuralism; poststructuralism.

Foundationalism

Foundationalism is associated with the ideas of Descartes and Kant, as well as Hegel and Marx, although those can be traced back to the Aristotelian tradition. It may be summarised as follows: (i) An objective theory of knowledge is possible. Basic insights cannot be called into question, unless proved false by reason and empirical facts. The laws and categories of a body of ideas correspond to those of nature. (ii) On the basis of these insights, 'more general propositions can be inferred'. (iii) Therefore we have the foundation of a philosophical system. (iv) Philosophy itself is foundational, being grounded in reason.

Anti-foundationalism is the antithesis of the above. It is exemplified by the work of the American, Richard Rorty. His *Philosophy and the mirror of nature* (1980) is derived from the work of Wittgenstein and Heidegger in the 1930s. The former is best known for his work in analytical philosophy during the 1920s: ie, the application of pure logic to ideas, language, irrespective of the real world. The latter's *Being and time* (1927) is influenced by Husserl's *Phenomenology*. But in the wake of Nazism and Germany's *Götterdämmerung*, Heidegger's later work "provides a theoretical basis for existentialism": the idea that "being is the proper and sole theme of philosophy" (1975).

In *The basic problems of philosophy* of the same year, he developed his theory of *Dasein* ('being there'): human beings are literally thrown into "the world of contingency or facticity" and

must therefore strive towards authenticity rather than fall back (*verfallen*) ... the prospect of ceasing to be: *Dasein* is being towards death. The care (*Sorge*) and anxiety (*Angst*) induced by the prospect of being-towards-death can be overcome

only by 'resoluteness' and striving towards authenticity.

(Cf Adorno, although Heidegger does not show a great deal of concern for the deadening impact of industrial capitalism and the culture industry; he is more concerned with metaphysics.)

To save space, I shall leave aside his affinity with Nazism here. Crucial to Heidegger of this period is the idea of *Hermeneutics*, the "art or science of interpretation" and "the more strictly linguistic tradition associated with [his pupil] Gadamer". The latter asserts:

For Heidegger, hermeneutics is no longer a matter of textual interpretation [as with studies of the *Bible* during the period of the Reformation], but an interpretive mode of being in the world, orienting oneself to it. Perhaps the most important single influence on contemporary hermeneutics [cf the work of Paul de Man in the 1970s], however, is the adage in a fragment of Nietzsche's *The will to power* (1901), where "positivism which halts in phenomena" is refuted in the proclamation: "No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations."

The "paradox" of hermeneutics is that it is "inevitably a circular process". The detail can only be understood within the whole: "it is impossible to step outside it. Meaning cannot be grasped from 'outside', precisely because 'there are only interpretations'."³

Stalinist 'diamat' and structuralism

The former stands for 'official communism' or Stalinist 'dialectical materialism', which, given its authoritarian origins, barbarism in practice, and objectivist bias in terms of its 'philosophy', was a monstrous distortion of Marxism. The Stalinist view of history may be summed up as: history is on the side of the proletariat and the achievement of communism is inevitable, regardless of mistakes by the leadership (ie, the Soviet party). History cannot be pushed by subjective factors, such as leftwing adventurism - eg, the student uprising of 1968 - despite the fact that this led to the largest general strike in history, whilst tens of thousands of workers occupied their factories, not because they were low paid, but because they wanted an alternative to wage-slavery and having to keep up with the conveyor

belt. What a moment!

On the other hand, in the name of 'socialism in one country' and the defence of its own privileges, the Stalinist democracy wanted 'peaceful coexistence' with capitalism: therefore it had to smash the social revolution wherever it re-emerged, beginning with the Spanish uprising in 1936. Setting aside its occupation of eastern Europe as part of a peace 'dividend' with imperialism, during the cold war, (i) Stalinism gave limited support to national liberation movements, as long as they were based on the Soviet model (bureaucratic centralism); (ii) as long as they remained within the straightjacket of nationalism (eg, Korea, Vietnam); (iii) therefore they must not be allowed to spill over into a 'hot' war with imperialism: ie, direct conflict. (iv) Previously, of course, in large part, because of its own theoretical and strategic mistakes, Stalinism had failed to stop the rise of fascism and another world war. This opened the door even wider to the rise of the USA as world hegemon, economically, militarily and culturally.

Therefore it is not at all surprising that all of these events were reflected in the degeneration of western Marxism, beginning with the rise of the Institute of Social Research in the 1930s. The latter began to separate the superstructure from Marx's base/superstructure model, either as a way forward for the masses (cf Benjamin's theory, *The work art in the age of mechanical reproduction*) or as an impediment to revolutionary consciousness. (Similarly, after his American experience, Adorno develops his theory of the *culture industry*, based on rational pessimism, as opposed to Marx's rational optimism). This continues into the post-war period under the auspices of the Frankfurt School, aka Critical Theory, ending with Habermas (ie, neo-Weberianism). All this has to be taken into account, *as well as* the ideas of Marxism's philosophical opponents (eg, Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Levi-Strauss, despite the latter's leftist leanings, etc).

Poststructuralism

Comrade Paul Demarty fails to point out that, ultimately, poststructuralism must be seen as an anti-foundationalist reaction to structuralism. According to David Lacey in his *Dictionary of critical theory* (2001), it appears in 1966, just when structuralism was at its zenith. In that year Derrida wrote a paper which

he called deconstruction: ie, a criticism of structuralism as a "meaningful concept". But the two concepts did hold one thing in common: a fixation with language, in a dualist relationship with the material world. (But instead of obeying a Saussurian rule-bound system, signifiers and signified behave in an arbitrary manner, as a basis for the construction of meaning.)

By the early 1970s Barthes was speaking of "awakening from the dream of scientificity", associated with semiology and structuralism. But he was unable to make a complete break. Therefore, "When the Sorbonne was occupied by revolutionary students in May 1968, one item of graffiti proclaimed that 'Structures do not take to the streets', to which an anonymous hand added: 'Nor does Barthes'. Another alleged: '*Althusser a rien*' (Althusser is no good)."⁴ Thus poststructuralism covers everything from a new historicism to a new postcolonial theory, based on a rejection of foundationalist ideas, via its insistence on the plurality and instability of meaning, a distrust of scientific enquiry; in a word, the abandonment of the Enlightenment project (cf Marx).

To be more theoretical: poststructuralism was:

(i) a *reaction* to 'repressive reason' in its modern form; on the one hand, *official* Marxism itself; on the other, Marxist-oriented structuralism, along with Freudianism; all of which are 'totalising theories', associated with crude determinism. Althusserian structuralism, for example, introduces the concept of ideological superstructures, as the products of law, religion and the state:

In his substitution of [an] ensemble of practices, under the delegatory guidance of the economic, political, ideological and theoretical, Althusser breaks with the dualism of ideas/material forces ... All levels are constituted as practices, and all practices are material ... Both the ideological and the theoretical are redefined as practices which produce particular products and, as such, are as much material forces as economic and political practices.⁵

Therefore it becomes possible to rationalise the May events of 1968: eg, in the words of comrade Macnair himself, as "plain spontaneism or anarcho-syndicalism" (cf the *official* communist view!).⁶ Would it not be better to argue that 1968 was an incipient social revolution which would have had a very good chance of succeeding, had the Parti Communiste Français, which was a mass workers' party, been revolutionary? Surely that is the point!

(ii) Poststructuralism also rejects the idea of the human as a potentially centred and self-determining subject.

(iii) It is influenced by aspects of Kantian philosophy (in particular, the idea that, although objective reality exists, it can never be fully knowable), along with Nietzsche's attack on "repressive reason". Consider the example of Foucault (one of the 'big four'). In an early essay, he focuses on Nietzsche's *Genealogy of morals*, wherein "he recounts 'the long story of how responsibility originated. [That] a reflexive relation to the self, and in particular an internalised moral concept of behaviour, can only be inculcated through threats and violence."⁷ But, following Nietzsche, true human freedom is to be found in instinctiveness: "The hostility towards self which is the foundation of moral consciousness, the torment of which [he] contrasts favourably with the 'naive joy and

innocence of the animal’.⁷⁸

(iv) Given its anti-foundationalist approach, in its search for a new humanist theory, poststructuralism descends into the “logics of disintegration” and becomes complicit with the capitalist system itself: ie, as a set of intellectual ideas, it dovetails nicely with a society dominated by the commodity form within a market structure. Yet the latter is an example *par excellence* of instrumental reason (as Adorno correctly points out). It subordinates the human to “production for production’s sake”. Therefore, from the standpoint of the human it is irrational and destructive of both man and the environment. Thus, as an unintentional consequence poststructuralist ideas end up reflecting the irrational basis of capitalism: ie, they end up being anti-human, which is indeed ironic. (See my comments on Lyotard below.)

The ‘big four’

What follows, of course, is only a summary. Poststructuralism came about mainly as a result of the work of the following, the ‘big four’:

- (i) In the 1950s, Lacan started to work through structuralism and ended up overturning Freud’s ‘biologism’: cf Merleau Ponty, who “seeks to blunt the edge of Freud’s reductionism, arguing in *The phenomenology of perception*, that the significance of psychoanalysis is less to make psychology biological than to find a dialectical process in functions thought of as ‘purely bodily’, and to reintegrate sexuality into the human being.”⁷⁹ But for Lacan, “Bodily functions no longer play a central role”; rather they become “sites of intersubjective negotiation”.¹⁰ The stick between biological and psychological/social factors begins to be pushed towards the latter. This is fine, unless there is a separation between the two, which destroys the dialectical relationship.
- (ii) In 1967 Derrida provided a critique of structuralism; but in the process he substitutes relativism for the objectivity of concepts: “speech constitutes the object”, but it is based on the notion of *différance*; instead we have “intertextuality”, whereby the meaning of the text is “modulated by other contiguous texts” (ie, the “endlessness of meaning”).¹¹
- (iii) Writing in the 1970s, Foucault develops a central theme: “order is motivated, at the most fundamental level, by a fear of the chaotic”. Echoing Lacan, he argues:

Biological theories of sexuality, juridical conceptions of the individual, forms of administrative control in modern nations, led ... to rejecting the idea of a mixture of the sexes in a single body, and consequently limiting free choice of ... individuals. Henceforth everybody [had to have] only one sex.¹²

For Foucault, sexuality (sexual stereotypes) are imposed on the subject by “the side of power” (cf Nietzsche). This is relativism (ie, it is one-sided, and serves the interests of those in power). But what is the alternative? As Dews explains, his “relativism clashes with his political commitments”. Therefore in order to contest the ‘truth’, he has to resort or appeal to “some ‘prediscursive experience’, or natural reality outside of all perspectives”.¹³

(iv) Lyotard abandoned Marxism after 1968. He correctly concludes that modernisation goes hand in hand with the expansion of the market economy:

commodification is an ambivalent, double-edged process. But because it continuously overthrows and desacralises tradition, the expansion of the commodity form has a liberating, ‘revolutionary’ effect ... is most tangible in the ceaseless experimentation of modernist art. Yet the capitalist labour process also abstracts from the living individual, absorbing libidinal energy into the indifferent circuits of commodity exchange

By the time of *Economie libidinale* (1974) ... the sign - whether word or commodity - is portrayed as always invested in the libido. Thus, just as Foucault concludes that liberation is a form of servitude, since our apparently ‘natural’ sexuality is the product of power, so Lyotard discovers servitude is a form of liberation, since even the anonymity and indifference of the commodity form can function as a conductor of libidinal ‘intensity’!¹⁴

But on the other side of the Atlantic similar developments were taking place within philosophy - ie, parallel to the French ‘school’. Here too anti-foundationalism had come back into fashion. To return to Rorty’s *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*, this may be summarised as follows.

- (i) He challenges Kant’s idea that there is a permanent historical framework for the theory of knowledge.
- (ii) Also Locke and Descartes, who argue that knowledge is a set of ideas which faithfully mirror external nature; that there are objective truths that exist prior to scientific discovery, which lead to indisputable insights, both before and after discovery (eg, some of the ideas of Aristotle, which he developed over 2000 years ago).
- (iii) Rorty argues that (i) and (ii) is not realism, only a “metaphor of seeing”. Therefore if philosophy is to progress, it must rid itself of this metaphor.
- (iv) Language is not a matter of representation, but of conversation: “Language is a tool, not a mirror” (cf the hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer: “meaning cannot be grasped from outside ... there are only interpretations”).
- (v) The philosopher “can only prolong the conversation between various discourses”. Therefore it is “improbable that any final agreement will be reached”.
- (vi) Taken things to an extreme, Rorty has been accused of “absolute relativism, in which no value-judgments can be made about anything”.¹⁵ From a Marxist standpoint, all this is equivalent to a movement from dialectical materialism to subjective idealism and relativism.

Essentialism

From a foundationalist perspective, poststructuralism marks a return to the *atomism* of Democritus and Epicurus, whereby reality is reduced to “atomistic small bits that combine and repel in a void”; hence it is difficult to account for “the persisting natures of things, species and genera on that basis”.¹⁶

Ipsa facto we have the basis for the “logics of disintegration”. As Marxists we should not be ‘buying into’ any of this - that is, if we wish to remain foundationalists, which is where Marxism comes from. If we choose the former, then we are helping to dig Marxism’s grave.

Let us start with Marx himself: it was he who gave material form to *essentialism*, based on his reading of Aristotle:

- (i) The concept of *essence* states that there can be no account of any entity, “without admitting a category of form (or essence), because what a thing is, and what things of its kind are, cannot possibly be explained in terms of their constituent matter (atoms); since that changes while the entity retains its nature and identity over time” (eg, the natural human body). “A whole entity can be anything from an amoeba to a form of human society, or an astronomical system.”¹⁷
- (ii) Marx also makes use of the Aristotelian concept of *telos*: “the form or ... condition towards which an entity develops by its nature [cf *necessity*], unless its development is interrupted (either by external *accident*, or, in the case of a nature which contains a constitutive contradiction, by the way in which that contradiction develops).”¹⁸

As I have argued previously in this paper (Letters, December 7 2017), because Marx gives his own concept

of *telos* a material form, there is no question of a guiding intelligence other than humankind itself. Therefore, if the subjective factor (revolutionary consciousness) is absent, especially at critical moments, history is prone to accidents which frustrate its necessary development. In regard to the latter, its importance is clearly expressed by Marx himself in his *Preface to the critique of political economy - a mature work*, published in 1859:

A social formation never comes to an end before all the forces of production which it can accommodate are developed, and new, higher relations of production never come into place before the material conditions of their existence have gestated in the womb of the old society ... Bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production ... growing out of the conditions of life in society for individuals, but at the same time the productive forces which are developing in the womb of bourgeois society create the material conditions for the resolution of the antagonism. With that social formation the pre-history of human society draws to a close.¹⁹

Marx, of course, was not a determinist, who relied solely on the objective forces of history. He gave equal emphasis to the necessity for the subjective factor as well - ie, the need for “communist consciousness” (defined in the *German ideology* as the consciousness of “the necessity of a fundamental revolution”). The future is not decided. Thus Marx was the first to introduce the idea, ‘either socialism or barbarism’:

On the one hand, there have started into life industrial and scientific forces which no epoch of former human history had ever expected. On the other hand, there exist symptoms of decay, far surpassing the horrors recorded of the latter times of the Roman empire. In our days, everything seems pregnant with its contrary ... this antagonism between the productive forces and the social relations of our epoch is a fact, palpable, overwhelming and not to be controverted.²⁰

Let me return to that other factor within Marxist historiography: ie, the role of accident in history. In the epoch of capitalist decline, which was well under way by the early 20th century, the October revolution occurred at the right time, but in the wrong place. This was, of course, a consequence of the betrayal of German social democracy in 1914 (see my letter in *Weekly Worker* December 7 2017). Suffice to say that accidents of history can frustrate necessity: ie, the social revolution itself.

Waves of feminism

Strictly speaking, comrade Macnair’s account of the waves of feminism is correct: therefore in my first article, I was wrong to attribute the ‘first wave’ to the rise of socialist feminism in the 1970s (whereas this dates back to the 1800s!).

But he should have realised that my intention was to highlight the importance of socialist feminism to Marxism and the revolution. It grew out of Marxist studies in the 1960s - eg, the work of Juliet Mitchell - although it was developed further by women’s experience of their own struggles within Marxist groups in the 60s and 70s (I am speaking from first-hand experience of the International Marxist Group here, before it degenerated!). They were right to demand women’s caucuses in order to combat male sexist behaviour within an erstwhile revolutionary party.

Socialist feminism, of course, stands for the need of both men and woman to struggle against patriarchy, as an ideology and form of behaviour,

whereby men seek to oppress women sexually, and in many other ways as well. Therefore patriarchy creates a primary division within all class societies, which is why it became a pillar of capitalist rule. However, because it is *socially* constructed, it can be overturned in the struggle for socialism. But in the epoch of capitalist decay - ie, today - political correctness has morphed into an ideology which asserts that ‘men are the problem’. This can only deepen the divisions within the working class and make it even harder to rebuild class-consciousness.

But surely I was right in my account of second- and third-wave feminism; therefore it is comrade Macnair who is wrong: In a recent article,²¹ he attributes “identity politics”, “political correctness” and “second-wave feminism” to the rise of

the soft *Maoist* left [my emphasis] in the United States, which grew out of the black civil rights and anti-Vietnam war movements. Radical feminism - the claim that gender oppression underlies class and is more structurally fundamental - began with Kate Millett’s *Sexual politics* and Shulamith Firestone’s *The dialectic of sex*, both published in 1970.

He should have added that they then went on to say that women must break with men, which is why we call them radical feminists. But the real point here is the fact that Maoism is a *variant of Stalinism*. No wonder they got it wrong theoretically! In this case, one can see a direct link between Stalinism and new forms of politics, coincidental with the rise of poststructuralism, whose ideas would provide a platform for third-wave feminism and identity politics.

Therefore it is disingenuous on Macnair’s part to insinuate that, “muddled or otherwise”, when I use the expression of “waves”, I am reinforcing the “construction of a teleology (in the bad sense), in which each ‘wave’ is better than its predecessor”. Nothing could be further from the truth. Given my support for the idea of socialist feminism, as opposed to my critique of second- and third-wave feminism, especially the latter, clearly I am inferring that second- and third-wave feminism are yet another example of a negative dialectic at work.

However, comrade Macnair is right to point out that second-wave feminism is exemplified by women such as Kate Millett: ie, her notion that Lawrence’s, Miller’s and Mailer’s “depictions of sexuality are deeply rooted in fear of femininity and express a murderous urge to suppress it”; therefore a “puritan revulsion” from heterosexuality is appropriate; otherwise women are “defiled”.²² Camilla Paglia is another example of this tendency.

It is entirely their right to come to these conclusions and to develop a lifestyle contrary to the heterosexual majority. But, as Marxists, we also have the right to criticise them in open debate. Macnair is correct when he says that Paglia “has criticisms of ‘poststructuralism’ and of ‘transgenderism’ along lines very similar to comrade Dunn’s - if from a libertarian (and imperialist culture-warrior) angle rather than a Marxist one”. On the other hand, I would argue that it is not necessary to change one’s sex in order to combat sexual stereotypes. Rather the fight to change society is more important! As for the third wave, there is no need for me to repeat what I have said already in my previous article.

Conclusion

Contra crude reductionism: *vis-à-vis* Wittgenstein and Heidegger, as the forerunners of anti-foundationalism and modern hermeneutics, both were working independently of the Marxist tradition (albeit not oblivious to the rise of Stalinism: eg, the purges of the 1930s): ie, within the sphere of

speculative philosophy or metaphysics (which includes Nietzsche’s revolt against “repressive reason”). Post-1968 their ideas gained currency among the founders of poststructuralism (eg, the work of Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard).

This may be seen as part of a reaction to the determinist and anti-humanist claims of Stalinist ‘diamat’, in the first instance, followed by its offshoot, Althusserian structuralism (ie, closed, inflexible systems, which originated under the auspices of bureaucratic centralism). Thus the sceptical theoreticians of poststructuralism reject the idea of a centred human subject (ie, one who is able to develop a consciousness that, since it is man-made, society must be radically changed, and which can be shared collectively). Whereas Rorty is a cold war ideologue, who is “bitterly hostile to Marxism”, arguing that “American democracy is the best sort of society to have been invented”.²³

Fundamentally, if it was not for Stalinism’s repressive role - as exemplar of arguably the worst form of barbarism in modern times, which has left a poisonous legacy, the ideological equivalent of the fallout from a nuclear explosion - 1968 might have turned out differently. Therefore we would not have had the rise of poststructuralism, the “logics of disintegration”, which provides a basis for third-wave, if not second-wave, feminism (since the latter still adheres to the biological origins of sex and gender). So now we have to deal with the new political forms or identity politics as well.

Last but not least, the ideology of political correctness has degenerated into the idea that ‘men are the problem’, which is oversimplified and a danger to man as a ‘species being’. Therefore by one means or another, if not directly, poststructuralism and its offshoots emerged as the dominant intellectual currency. Today it may be spent as an intellectual force, but its *raison d’être* makes it difficult for “the logic of disintegration to be resisted on logical grounds”²⁴ - ie, for a return to foundationalism within philosophy, along with the need for Marxism as a totalising theory.

Thus we must wait for another 1968. But we have to build strong Marxist parties first, because they need to be in place before this happens. Otherwise history will repeat itself - there is the rub!

Meanwhile, on the one hand, capitalism continues to decline, whilst, on the other, society as a whole continues to disintegrate ●

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Notes

1. ‘Poststructuralism and decline’ *Weekly Worker* November 23 2017.
2. M Macnair, ‘Historical inaccuracies and theoretical overkill’ *Weekly Worker* November 30 2017; P Demarty, *Letters Weekly Worker* December 7 2017.
3. D Lacey *Dictionary of critical theory* London 2001. See sections on Wittgenstein, Heidegger and hermeneutics.
4. *Ibid* (see ‘Poststructuralism’).
5. T Lovell *Pictures of reality* London 1983, p31.
6. M Macnair *op cit*.
7. P Dews *Logics of disintegration* London 1990, p156.
8. *Ibid* p 156.
9. *Ibid* p68.
10. *Ibid* p64.
11. *Ibid* pp9,10,11.
12. *Ibid* p166.
13. *Ibid* p189.
14. *Ibid* p166.
15. D Lacey *op cit*. See section on Richard Rorty.
16. S Meikle *Essentialism in the thought of Karl Marx* Illinois 1985, p9.
17. *Ibid* glossary, pp177-78. See also Meikle’s explanation of Marx’s approach to the value-form: the latter metamorphoses and becomes the basis of the various epochs, “until it ... 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.” After that it can only decline (p10).
18. *Ibid* p179 (my emphasis).
19. T Carver (ed) *Marx, later political writings* Cambridge 1996, pp160-61.
20. K Marx, ‘Speech on the anniversary of the people’s paper’ in *Marx-Engels On Britain* Moscow 1962, pp466-67.
21. *Weekly Worker* November 30 2017.
22. D Lacey *op cit*. See section on Kate Millett.
23. *Ibid*. See section on Richard Rorty.
24. P Dews *op cit* preface, pix.

REVIEW

Fire in the hole

Michael Wolff *Fire and fury: inside the Trump White House* (Little, Brown 2018) pp336, £14.99

The appearance of Michael Wolff's extraordinary account of Donald Trump's presidency has already become the pre-eminent *succès de scandale* of 21st century letters thus far.

The White House response has been trenchant and hysterical, with the president denouncing it as a complete fiction, and the latest in what the book reminds us is a long line of press secretaries reinforcing the condemnation. Legal action is threatened against Wolff, publisher Henry Holt and - not uninterestingly - Trump's former chief strategist, Steve Bannon. It is surely more than mere gratitude that led Wolff to thank in his acknowledgements, pointedly, the libel lawyer he hired to give *Fire and fury* a once-over. The truth is that Trump has blundered directly into what is now called the 'Streisand effect', whereby attempts to suppress some item cause it to spread more rapidly among outraged enemies.¹ Even British readers, whose much trumpeted national veneration of liberty reaches no further than the door of the libel courtroom, will benefit from the *samizdat* PDFs circulating online once Trump's legal team cast an eye over the Atlantic in pursuit of a cheap victory.

What we find, in whatever format, is a very peculiar book, albeit compulsively readable, droll and frankly horrifying. The sourcing of various anecdotes in here is a particular problem, to which we shall return; certainly, there is a great deal of eyebrow-raising material, which will be confirmed or refuted in the coming months and years. If even a third of it is true, however, Americans are living through some of the most preposterous events in modern political history. Certainly, those looking for evidence that Trump is *not* what he often appears to be in the presentation of his hated enemies in the media - a narcissistic, vindictive man-child, a demonic cross between King Joffrey of *Game of Thrones* and Father Dougal from *Father Ted* - will not find it in Wolff's book.

It almost reads like a *roman à clef* from which the author has forgotten to excise the real names; the protagonist is not Trump, but those surrounding him. They are, as the jerry-built Kremlinologists of Pennsylvania Avenue often tell us, an odd bunch, and the forward motion of Wolff's 'novel' derives from the tension between the generals, the bankers, the close family and Bannon (who looms problematically large, and serves as a puckish anti-hero). Each have their own objectives, and (according to Wolff) wildly divergent political outlooks; but all are united in their basic conception of their task - managing Donald, keeping him on the straight and narrow. As their mutual infighting grows in intensity, the various factions find themselves constantly blown off course by the unpredictability of the man at the centre of the fiasco. It would be a great political satire, except that it might be actually happening.

Pleading the 25th

Most of the controversy surrounding *Fire and fury* is focused on the portrait of the president himself. Official American society is deeply divided on Trump - is he an idiot (I choose the word that means both stupid and mad, for they are of a piece here), or is he actively and shrewdly malevolent, an evil demagogue - even (given the Russiagate business) a traitor? The portrait in these pages fits squarely

in the former camp.

Trump, it is alleged, reads nothing, directly consuming information only from cable news and face to face meetings (some of the White House staffers concluded that "for all practical purposes he was no more than semiliterate"). He will ignore anything that bores him, anyone who lectures him in the manner of a professor, anyone who acts as if they are smarter than he is, often walking out of meetings. His trademark extemporising, speechifying style is crudely effective in front of a friendly crowd, which he seems to read masterfully, but downright bizarre elsewhere. There are a few speeches reproduced almost verbatim here, and in print they read like the mutterings of a psychotic - the less amiable the audience, the worse.

Far from a diabolical figure, Wolff's Trump is almost pitiable, a man oddly unable to understand anything of the situation he is in, reacting with joy to any praise or sycophancy, and rage to anything he interprets as hostile or condescending. He cannot understand why the liberal media outlets do not admire him, and resents it with the fury of a scorned child. He can conceive of it only in terms of personal, individual animosity (a long-running thread of the book, presumably fed to Wolff by Bannon himself, is the latter's attempts to explain that his enemies are not individuals, but institutions - "He thinks he can fire the FBI," Bannon remarks). In the favoured vocabulary of the man himself - Trump is a moron, and a sad loser.

By the end of Wolff's narrative (and again Bannon is the source quoted), there is talk of the 25th amendment to the US constitution - section 4 of which allows the vice-president and cabinet to declare the president unfit, for health reasons, to continue in his or her duties. Together with impeachment over the Russian question, the 25th amendment is a reminder that even so exalted an office as that of president of the United States is vulnerable to spectacular reversals.

Russian dancing

The essential difficulty with this narrative is that, by the very nature of his enterprise, Wolff is reliant entirely on the immediate circles of courtiers around Trump, who by their own admission are quite as busy undermining each other as they are being undermined by The Donald. Is he really that bad? The truth is - we cannot know. Trump is clearly accustomed to being surrounded by yes-men and women, and prolonged exposure may be harmful; he has people to take care of rocky details in his real-estate-cum-self-promotion business, but is hostage to the independent ambitions of those around him. He clearly suspects many of those ambitions to be actively and deliberately hostile to his interests - this much can be gleaned from the occasional

glance at @realDonaldTrump on Twitter. On the other hand, it is difficult to see how he has *survived* as long as he has if he is as daft as he appears here.

We must abandon the question, as only speculation is possible. The greatest interest, from our point of view, in fact has to do with the last question - exactly how far Trump's paranoia is justified. Here, the book's account is intriguing in many respects.

Though the disastrous handling of the Russian collusion scandal provides Wolff with his major narrative beats, he is very careful not to pass judgment on the *substance* of the allegations except where the record is undeniable. He concludes, as all sensible people must, that the notorious meeting between Donald Trump junior, Jared Kushner, Paul Manafort and co and Russian intelligence assets did happen, and that the intrepid Trump clan hoped to get some dirt on Hillary Clinton by these means. Yet Wolff calls the venture "imbecilic" and seems very much of one mind with Bannon (again), who claimed "the Trump campaign was not organized enough to collude with [even] its own state organizations".

Hanlon's razor preponderates - "never ascribe to malice what is adequately explained by stupidity". For Wolff's interviewees, the meeting was a matter of desperation: at the time, in the middle of summer 2016, the Trump campaign was looking at a bruising defeat, and therefore it was assumed that the family had nothing to lose by procuring Russian dirt. The peculiar nature of the Trump family makes it vulnerable to such misfortune. The patriarch, after whom the others are patterned, is bourgeois in extraction and bank balance, but profoundly petty-bourgeois in outlook - a man who projects onto big business (and, by extension, politics and life in general) the zero-sum hustle of the market stall trader. Donald Trump is exactly the sort of person who would read one of Donald Trump's books. He is Del-Boy Rex. The Russian business is not the result of especial Machiavellian deviousness, but of catastrophic tactical short-termism.

The threat has nothing to do with the Russian contacts as such, according to Wolff's protagonists. The problem is merely that, by firing FBI chief James Comey, Trump allowed a special prosecutor to be appointed, and such prosecutors - in a society where everyone is guilty of something - can be relied upon to find *something*. (Luxury real estate, being as it is an excellent and suitably popular means of money-laundering, is especially vulnerable to diligent legal research.)

On top of that, he made powerful enemies. "If you fuck with the intel community," Jared Kushner was allegedly told by an unnamed senior Republican, "they will figure out a way to get back at you and you'll have two or three

years of a Russian investigation, and every day something else will leak out."

Swamp creatures

The real interest of this problem is revealed if we turn it around.

Put it this way: if it is risky for the president to take on the FBI, the reverse is also true - it is risky for the chief of the FBI to take on the president. Comey found that one out the hard way. Yet the 'intelligence community', or parts of it, clearly *is* out to see blood flow in the West Wing - surely not a situation the spooks would want to be in. Trump's presidency as such is already evidence of a colossal failure of the American establishment to keep its house in order; the civil and military apparatuses of government and the media that, following Bannon (again!), Wolff calls "the swamp" are guilty of a monstrous failure that in Tokugawa Japan would demand immediate ritual suicide on a wide scale.

The Russiagate business, the relentless strategy of tension pursued by CNN and friends - they *appear* to be a glorious offensive against a possibly treasonous interloper, but are in fact a desperate scrambled, immune response. This ought not to have happened at all; and while the tortuous complexity of constitutional 'checks and balances' is supposed to limit executive power, the framers surely did not anticipate active and irreconcilable hostility between the president and more or less everyone else. Trump is there in the first place because the swamp *failed* to do its job and maintain 'business as usual' in the starry firmament of American politics.

For an illustration, we can do no better than Wolff's account of Trump's Afghanistan troop surge. Trump had struck an isolationist note on the campaign trail, and surely understood that the American mission in Afghanistan was a disaster. Yet his was also a macho, grandstanding appeal; so he could not very well be seen to retreat. His response was one that Wolff has him resorting to a lot in these pages - ignore the problem. Not ignoring it, however, were the instruments of 'official' foreign policy. General HR McMaster knew that a substantial troop surge of 60,000 or so would be necessary to have a serious chance of victory, but - Trump or no Trump - that would be politically impossible. So they pushed for a modest surge of a few thousand or so, which would keep the side going for a couple more years. Trump's initial response was scathing:

For two hours, he angrily railed against the mess he had been handed. He threatened to fire almost every general in the chain of command. He couldn't fathom, he said, how it had taken so many months of study to come up with this nothing-much-different plan ... To Bannon, the meeting was a high point of the Trump presidency to date. The generals were punting and waffling and desperately trying to save face - they were, according to Bannon, talking pure "gobbledygook" in the situation room.

In the end, of course, he was talked round; but what interests us here is surely that his first response was basically *correct*. He was being sold a bad bill of goods.

The McMaster plan really was a dry political calculation that would nevertheless cost American and Afghan lives, merely prolonging an

intractable war to the benefit of nobody at all - a course of action that made sense only as ... what? As a *tactical* political manoeuvre, which would evade both immediate defeat and the great cost of large-scale military escalation. Trump's great strength as a campaign-trail demagogue was his recognition of the absurd contradictions that encumbered all his opponents. He would have no leg to stand on if Afghanistan and Iraq were not actually disasters.

But such is the whole reality of politics according to 'the swamp': it is a *game*, both magical and bound by fiendishly complex rules, a sort of n-dimensional quidditch. Wolff treats politics in much the same way, bewildered at Trump's sheer incompetence and unpreparedness for office; but his time with the Trumpites has taught him at least to feel bad about it.

Gospel according to Steve

Foremost among those Trumpites, of course, is Bannon, and so we turn finally to a necessary health warning. Trump's litigious instinct has sniffed out his former ideological hit-man in all this furore and, whatever the outcome of the legalities, we must say that this book is skewed Steveward throughout. It is Bannon's arch-enemies, Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump ('Jarvanka'), who come out again and again as the authors of the most extreme stupidities (including the firing of Comey). Wolff describes them as basically Democrats, which might be true, but might also be the sort of thing Bannon would think about them.

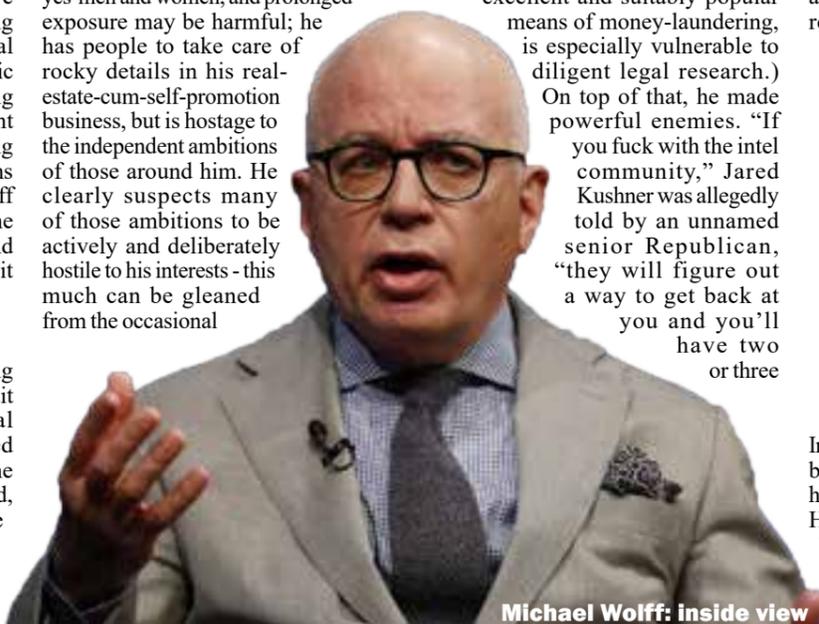
Bannon has a dark magnetism to the denizens of the swamp; perhaps the greatest indictment of the intellectual culture of the American establishment is that this absurd charlatan is apparently the most profound 'man of ideas' they have seen for a generation or two. His combination of paleoconservatism and Keynesian stimulus politics is innovative to the same degree as whatever chip shop it was that, observing both chips and gravy and cheesy chips on its menu, first alighted on the divine combination of chips, cheese and gravy. His cosmopolitan name-checking is impressive only to people whose historical knowledge is enfeebled enough to let him get away with it.

There is, admittedly, also the matter that - contrary to the corrupt courtiers and swampy careerists - he is the only actor in all this who seems to think that Trump's election actually *means* anything important. In any event, it is extremely difficult to shake the impression that *Fire and fury* is basically the story of Steve Bannon's glancing blow at mainstream politics, in the course of which he is amply congratulated for being so scandalous. Indeed, the book ends with him starting off to continue his 'revolution' in permanence, pursuing economic nationalism now against the president he claims (apparently to Wolff's satisfaction) he created. "It's going to be wild as shit," he says. The same prognosis, surely, must be true for our author ●

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Notes

1. The reference is to singer Barbra Streisand's ill-starred attempt to suppress a photograph of her hideous Malibu McMansion, but the phenomenon is older, and Peter Wright's *Spycatcher* - a tell-all memoir of life in MI5 - is probably the greatest 'serious' example of it on this side of the pond.



Michael Wolff: inside view

IRAN

Past and present

Some on the left seem to have learnt something. But, argues **Andrew Bowker**, the fight for anti-imperialist solidarity must be stepped up - particularly in the Labour Party

One of the most striking things about the latest developments inside Iran is how disingenuous much of the mainstream English-language commentary has been. As Yasmine Mather makes clear elsewhere in this paper, the situation on the ground is far more complicated than the dominant (mis)representation of the demonstrations as either the latest stunt on the part of the disgruntled 'principalist' faction of the regime, or an imperialist plot hatched in conjunction with the royalists or the dodgy, marginal sect known as Mujahedin-e Khalq.

The highly skewed reporting of the inspiring protests in Iran makes it all the more important for the left outside of Iran to provide an accurate account of the rapidly unfolding situation, as well as to raise solidarity with those affected by the regime's brutal crackdown. In what follows, I wish to provide a brief overview of how sections of the British left have responded to a wave of anger and defiance perhaps not seen in Iran since the revolution of 1979.

Hopi

As readers may be aware, in the recent past the British left's politics on Iran have, with a few exceptions, certainly been found wanting. In order to illustrate this point, let us turn the clock back a decade or so to recall the revealing relationship between this country's main anti-war campaign, the Stop the War Coalition, and Hands Off the People of Iran (Hopi).

Founded a decade ago, the latter group had two related aims: to oppose all imperialist intervention (including sanctions) against Iran; and simultaneously to support those fighting against the theocracy: in particular workers, but also leftwing students, women's campaigns and so forth. The sharp and principled message of the campaign garnered extensive support from various strands of progressive opinion in Britain. The PSC union and Aslef both affiliated and the campaign's honorary president was none other than one John McDonnell MP, who did some sterling work in getting out the message into the wider workers' movement.

Soon after its foundation, however, the campaign found itself embroiled in a rather heated controversy, which sheds some important light on the British left's attitudes towards Iran. As an anti-war grouping, it was quite natural that Hopi would affiliate to the Stop the War Coalition, which had been responsible for coordinating some huge demonstrations against the Iraq war in particular. It was headed by Andrew Murray (now Unite's chief of staff) and Lindsey German, who at the time was still a leading light in the Socialist Workers Party (she eventually split away with her co-thinker, John Rees, to form the Counterfire grouping in 2010). The coalition consisted of a broad range of different parties and campaigns, which - for all their differences on various issues - all came together in opposition to the military adventures of the US/UK governments.

At least until 2007, that is, when Hopi's affiliation to the coalition was rejected. Adding insult to injury somewhat, at the particular conference where this decision was made, an Iranian exile spoke against Hopi's continued affiliation on the grounds

that a lot of misinformation and lies were being spread about the Islamic Republic. (This was, of course, quite true - particularly because, at that point in time, Iran was directly in the crosshairs of imperialism and the propaganda campaign demonising the country was being ratcheted up). However, what our Iranian exile then proceeded to offer was, well, little other than misinformation and lies. To much applause from SWP comrades mobilised to vote against Hopi's affiliation, she argued that Iran is *not* a repressive or undemocratic country and that, while there is some persecution of homosexuals, for example, there is a much higher rate of sex change operations there than in Europe.¹

The reasoning - if one can call it that - behind this intervention went something like this: Iran is a supposedly 'anti-imperialist' country and, as such, even progressive, leftwing criticism of the regime can only confuse people, thereby playing into the hands of warmongers George W Bush and Tony Blair. For this reason, there is no way that a campaign such as Hopi can possibly become an affiliate of the Stop the War Coalition.

Hopi comrades patiently countered these criticisms and - against the smears of being soft on imperialism - made a strong case that anti-imperialism and internationalism must go hand in hand. Remaining silent on, or apologising for, the crimes of the Islamic Republic can only weaken our exposition of the crimes of US/UK imperialism. Over and again Hopi attempted to affiliate to the coalition, but over and again the application was rejected - often in a bureaucratic and dishonest fashion, which sought to avoid having a fully informed debate on the issue at all costs. Indeed, looking back on this whole torrid affair, I cannot help but feel that the arguments Hopi activists were bringing to the anti-war movement at this time were never really had out in full. For this reason, it is difficult to gauge the precise impact the campaign has had on the politics of the left in this country.

Shifts and tensions

There are, however, some encouraging signs that sections of the left which once rejected Hopi's arguments are now coming to similar conclusions. Although the Stop the War Coalition is yet to comment on unfolding events in Iran, the SWP seems to have had a welcome change of approach. In an interview with two Iranian socialists in *Socialist Worker*,² for example, Nick Clark asks how the left should respond to those such as Trump and Binyamin Netanyahu, who have recently proffered their bogus solidarity for the demonstrations (Bush once did something similar in relation to striking Iranian bus workers, it should be recalled). The responses given by both comrades are sensible and principled. Nima, for example, replies as follows: "The left has to take a side with those who are on the street, but definitely warn against the role of imperialism." Massoud (not his real name) expands on this point:

It's unprincipled for the left not to support the protests. This just leaves it to the right to influence such a movement... These are real working



Emily Thornberry: awful

class people fighting. When you are silent or say you are suspicious, they put their hopes in the bourgeois opposition and imperialists.

Quite correct. The German-Rees Counterfire split from the SWP has also published its own article on the events in Iran, written by Naz Massoumi. It makes some solid points regarding the diversity of the protests and why some of the more marginal Iranian nationalist or 'pro-Aryan' slogans should be taken with a pinch of salt. However, the article draws a slightly different conclusion to Massoud and Nima in *Socialist Worker*:

But the consequences of these protests should not be underestimated. We have, in neighbouring Syria, an example of where a genuine social revolutionary uprising seeking to overthrow the Assad regime, in the context of a civil war and foreign interference, quickly came under the tutelage of imperial powers. As such, the left in Britain must avoid the twin errors of simply supporting the protests in Iran without adopting a critical perspective on its political direction or, conversely, *uncritically backing the Iranian government against US imperialism* (my emphasis).³

It is quite right that international solidarity is not the same thing as uncritical cheerleading. Solidarity means engagement, criticism and the attempt to outline clear perspectives. But it is precisely on this score that the article's conclusion is clearly wanting. The article seems to sit between two stools. On the one hand, there is a call for support for the demonstrations. Yet it also seems to imply that if sections of the protestors should come under the tutelage of 'regime change from above', then we will have to side with the Iranian government - albeit critically, of course.

So perhaps not much has changed in the Counterfire camp. After all, what is wrong with arguing that we should, as a matter of basic principle, look to promote and support those - genuinely anti-imperialist - forces inside Iran which are fighting against their own government *and* are opposed to regime change from above? Isn't this precisely

the kind of "critical perspective", the "political direction" which the Iranian left should be fighting for?

Somebody who seems to have grasped this fundamental point is the commentator and Labour activist Owen Jones. In response to Zac Goldsmith's newly found 'support' for the Iranian people, Jones tweeted:

I support a democratic Iran and anyone who fights for it. I also oppose the calamitous western interventions you supported. Also, your racist failed mayoral campaign means you should be treated as a pariah in public life.

Further: "Solidarity with any Iranian protestors who are fighting for democracy and freedom, both from a vicious regime and from US domination."⁴

What is interesting about comrade Jones is that, 10 years ago, he had initially joined in with the chorus of lies against Hopi, portraying the campaign as a pro-imperialist organisation along the lines of the left-Zionist Alliance for Workers' Liberty. But, not least because of Hopi's sharp condemnation of the AWL and its soft-peddling on imperialism, Jones saw the error of his ways and apologised to Hopi comrades. Hopefully the stance he has taken on the recent protests will be adopted and taken up by others in the Labour Party.

Silence and confusion

For the role played by the Labour Party leadership has hitherto been incredibly disappointing. While he is not exactly wet behind the ears when it comes to the politics of Iran, John McDonnell has, as far as I can gather, not yet commented on the situation. The same goes for Jeremy Corbyn - something which the rightwing press is keen to exploit. It goes without saying that Corbyn and McDonnell should be defended from such criticism by the pro-imperialist press. They have no lessons to learn from such people.

But their refusal to take a clear stance is only adding fuel to the fire of the right. It would be much better if they were to condemn the mendacity of the imperialist press *and* come out in opposition to the Islamic Republic's treatment of the social movements. Instead, however, they appear to have let shadow foreign and commonwealth secretary Emily Thornberry take the lead on this matter. Given that she recently argued that the colonial-settler state of Israel is a "beacon of freedom, equality and democracy"⁵ in the Middle East, the outcome of this has been predictably dire.

Her statement on Iran recognises that there are

clearly large, spontaneous public outpourings within the protests that we [it is not entirely clear who she means by 'we' - AB] can all understand and support: trade unionists campaigning for workers' rights; women fighting against arcane laws governing their clothing and sex lives; working class communities protesting about unemployment and the cost of living; and young people appealing for greater political freedom.⁶

However, she is rather more guarded when it comes to voicing actual solidarity for these forces as the basis of longer-term,

radical change. She feels that such a move, especially when the exact nature of the protests is supposedly still so unclear, would not amount to the kind of "sensible, cautious, thoughtful foreign policy our country needs". Concluding, she writes:

So it would be easy to say: let's throw our weight behind the Iranian protests, even if we don't fully understand what they are; let's pursue the overthrow of the Iranian regime, even if we don't know what would replace it; and, as for the future, let's just assume it will all work out for the best. Yes, that would all be very easy and probably quite popular, but it would also be totally reckless and irresponsible.

But why can she not simply call for support for progressive demands and an end to the repression? Her response, insofar as it is one, seems to be informed by the notion that taking a clear line is tantamount calling for western invasion or regime change from above. ("We were promised the same thing [ie, progress and change - AB] about Iraq and Egypt and Libya and Syria", she writes, in a quite remarkable amalgamation of vastly different episodes in recent history.)

She is, of course, correct to point out that 'regime change from above' can only bring disaster for the Iranian people. The human tragedy created by western sanctions, wars and regime change in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya is obvious - not least to the Iranians who witness the arrival of desperate refugees in their country.

It would seem that our future foreign secretary's main goal regarding Iran is to bank on upholding the nuclear deal, and use this to get the supposedly more 'liberal' mullahs around the negotiating table, facilitating reform and democratisation. As she puts it, the nuclear deal must be a "bridge to something better and broader".

Perhaps the ruthless behaviour of Hassan Rouhani's 'reformist' government in cracking down on the protests since she penned her statement will cause her to rethink this approach. At any rate, the workers' movement can, and must, do much better than this. In order to break with the false dichotomy between defending a reactionary regime and/or expressing illusions in the imperialist world order, anti-imperialism and international solidarity must be combined. It is a matter of some urgency that principled anti-imperialist solidarity finds its way into our trade union branches, as well as into the politics of the Labour Party from the CLPs upwards.

The fundamental message must be: No to imperialist intervention! No to the Islamic Republic! Hands off the People of Iran! ●

Notes

1. A transcript of this remarkable speech, which includes citing the success of an Iranian female racing driver to undermine the notion that Iran is a misogynistic society, is available online: <http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/695/lie-number-five-iran-is-undemocratic>.
2. <https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/45909/Iran+in+revolt+++Iranian+socialists+on+what+sparked+the+protests+and+why+they+matter>.
3. www.counterfire.org/articles/opinion/19389-why-are-people-in-iran-protesting.
4. <https://twitter.com/OwenJones84/status/948327729161699328>.
5. <http://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/thornberry-mark-balfour-by-recognising-palestine>.
6. www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1786917414691631&id=142202379163151.

IRAN

With the protestors

Yassamine Mather counters the current misinformation about events



The protests and demonstrations that started in Mashhad and other towns in Khorassan province on December 28 were the culmination of months of similar actions by workers calling for an end to job losses, privatisation and the systematic non-payment of wages.

They were supported by many of the impoverished masses, including shantytown dwellers, some of whom have even been forced to sell their organs to pay for absolute necessities. It is not surprising that these demonstrations continued for many days in over 60 urban centres across the country. Despite severe repression, more than 1,000 arrests, 22 deaths and at least two 'suicides' in prison of young protestors, the demonstrations are continuing, albeit on a much smaller scale. The protestors are angry and fearless, and their grievances are reasonably clear.

Yet what began as outrage against rising prices, unemployment and poverty has evolved into something overtly political, with slogans against corruption and against the dictator, ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Donald Trump and Binyamin Netanyahu might have picked up the wrong end of the stick, but everyone else, including Khamenei and his president, Hassan Rouhani, agree that 'it's the economy, stupid' - and, of course, in a dictatorship, be it a multi-faceted one, economic protests tend to be immediately politicised.

Basic food prices have sky-rocketed in the last few weeks, with the price of eggs rising by 40% in a matter of days. In some of Iran's major cities, rents have risen by 83% in the last three years alone. Mass unemployment

is a big issue - particularly in the provinces where the protests emerged. The rate of inflation may have fallen from 35% under the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, but it remains at unsustainable levels.

Despite being controlled by the factions of the Iranian regime, the relative diversity of the media inside Iran has ensured that most people are aware of, and indeed well-informed about, the multi-billion-dollar corruption scandals, in which all factions of the regime are implicated. Rouhani's government, senior ayatollahs associated with more conservative factions of the regime and the former populist president, Ahmadinejad (who claimed to be the defender of the disinherited), are all embroiled in corruption and embezzlement. Ahmadinejad and his close allies are currently facing criminal charges concerning major corruption. But the upshot of both factions exposing their opponents' bribery and fraud is that Iranians are increasingly conscious of the venality of the entire Islamic regime.

Contrary to initial claims by Rouhani's allies, the protests were definitely not part of a plot by "conservative factions" to discredit his government. In Khorassan province, it was clear that the main target of most demonstrators was Khamenei. In the last few days, the most common political slogans were "*Marg bar dictator*" ('Death to the dictator'), "*Khamenei, haya kon mamlekato raha kon*" ('Khamenei, you should be ashamed - leave the country alone') and

From economic protest to politics

Slogans denouncing supreme leader Ali Khamenei were widespread and deeply worrying for the regime

the more polite slogan, requesting that Khamenei stand down: "Seyed Ali [Khamenei], excuse us. Now we have to stand up."

In the northern city of Rasht there were initially anti-Rouhani slogans, but they soon became focused on the dictator himself. In Tehran, the student protestors' chants were far more radical: "*Na eslahtalab na ossoul gara*" ('No to the reformists, no to the conservative principalists'). Then there was 'Student-worker unity' and 'No longer should there be a choice between bad and worse'.

So can we accept claims by sections of the Iranian government, including the supreme leader, that these protests were organised by the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia? Obviously not. In the last few days leaders of the Islamic Republic government in both its factions have admitted that there is economic hardship, and that youth are dissatisfied ... Of course, as expected, the security forces and some political leaders have also blamed foreign intervention for the fact that the protests spread so quickly. Such claims cannot be taken seriously. In fact it would be damaging to the government if allegations made last week by the leader of the Revolutionary Guards - that foreign powers had agents in more than 50 towns and cities in Iran - proved to be true.

Nostalgia

Having said that, foreign media - in particular TV stations clearly associated with Saudi/Israeli funding, as well as *Voice of America* and to a lesser extent

BBC Persian - have run a sustained campaign based on nostalgia for the era of the shah. The campaign reached new dimensions in the last few years. The Pahlavi era is shown, in footage taken from the 1960s and early 1970s, as a time of 'women's liberation'.

Of course, some of us know what the shah really thought of women, based on an interview he gave to Oriana Fallaci. In response to her question: "If there is a monarch whose name has always been associated with women, it's you. And now I'm beginning to suspect women have counted for nothing in your life."

The shah replies:

I fear your suspicion is justified ... I have fought strenuously to obtain equal rights and responsibilities for them ... But I wouldn't be sincere if I asserted I'd been influenced by a single one of them. Nobody can influence me, nobody at all. And a woman still less. In a man's life, women count only if they're beautiful and graceful and know how to stay feminine ... This 'women's lib' business, for instance - what do these feminists want? What do you want? Equality, you say? Indeed! I don't want to seem rude, but ... You may be equal in the eyes of the law, but not, I beg your pardon for saying so, in ability.

Fallaci replies: "Aren't we?" And the shah replies:

No. You've never produced a Michelangelo or a Bach. You've never even produced a great cook. And don't talk of opportunities. Are you joking? Have you lacked the



What we fight for

opportunity to give history a great cook? You have produced nothing great, nothing! Tell me, how many women capable of governing have you met in the course of interviews such as this?¹

Another channel has produced films on the shah era's cultural developments, featuring an entire hour on the setting up of a concert hall in Tehran. The film-makers do not tell the audience that the so-called cultural centre hosted events by European artists and theatre groups alien to 99% of the Iranian population. For *La Comédie Française*, playing Molière, the audience was almost entirely French-speaking, together with selected pupils from the two private French schools in Tehran. The price of a single ticket would have fed half a dozen families in south Tehran.

What can we say about the intervention of rightwing Iranian groups? In the absence of an organised working class it is no surprise that dubious, often reactionary, groups say they initiated these protests. There is a diversity of groups from conflicting backgrounds claiming to be behind recent events, but the fact is, none of them has emerged as the main organiser - evidence that all of them are at the very least exaggerating their influence. No doubt adverts on social media - paid for courtesy of Saudi and Israeli funds - were encouraging mindless violence, but very few Iranians took their recommendations seriously. For all the claims of exiled groups in the extended publicity they receive from sections of the media, including BBC Persian radio (but, interestingly, not BBC Persian TV), these protests have nothing to do with royalists or the Mujahidin.

It is apparent from social media that pro-shah slogans have only appeared in very isolated cases, such as in the religious city of Qom. On one occasion, in Rasht, some in the crowd shouted slogans in favour of the shah, prompting others to respond by calling for an Iranian republic (as opposed to an Islamic Republic). Indeed, protestors are countering possible royalist influence by shouting "*Na mir na rahbar, na shah, na rahbar*" ('No kings, no shahs, no supreme leaders'). On many occasions crowds have shouted down pro-shah slogans.

The fact that the protest in Mashhad coincided with a call on television made by one of the pretenders to the throne, Reza Pahlavi, should not be taken seriously. He issues such calls on a daily basis and these are very rarely heeded. No, the catalyst for the demonstrations was the hunger and suffering experienced by Iranians, leading several protestors to claim that dying is better than continuing to live as they are now.

No future in the past

However, for those Iranians who think that there was no poverty or hunger under the shah, it might be worth reminding them of a quote by empress Farah Diba. When informed by her advisors that ordinary people were complaining they could not afford to buy meat, she responded in true Marie-Antoinette style by telling the nation that it would benefit from vegetarianism.

As for corruption, it is true that the shah's mistrust of everyone, including former ministers, meant that only a limited circle of individuals close to the shah and the court benefited from rampant state fraud. But the multiplicity of factions in the Islamic regime means that a far larger group of individuals and their families are beneficiaries of global capital's riches for the wealthy in the third world. Moreover, the so-called 'targeted sanctions' imposed by the west between 2007 and 2015 allowed sections of the Islamic Republic with access to both foreign currency and internal black markets to amass

astronomic fortunes. As such, the Islamic Republic is in many ways even more corrupt than the shah's Iran. But we live in different times.

And corruption is certainly not unique to Iran or even just to developing countries. However, in many such states, those wanting to reject corrupt leaders have a chance to elect political rivals. And, although it takes a relatively short time before the new rulers surpass their predecessors' corruption, the whole process at least provides the illusion that the population has some control and can again test new leaders. But after 39 years of being in power, all factions of the Islamic Republic are steeped in corruption - even when they are in opposition.

As for democracy under the shah, he merged what he called the 'Yes' and the 'Of Course' party into one: Hezb Rastakhiz. Iran had only two daily papers, *Keyhan* and *Etelaat*. Both were pro-shah, and the lack of oppositional factions within the regime ensured that there were no exposés of dodgy dealings by the shah's opponents.

When it comes to repression, let us remember that the shah's security force, Savak, shot opponents of his rule. Amongst many, my friend, Catherine Adl, the paralysed daughter of his own physician, was shot by the shah's security services while she was sitting in a wheelchair. Although she was born in an elite family, she opposed inequality and injustice in Iran. You can guess what he did to opponents with whom he was not acquainted. However, Catherine's death politicised so many of us who were pupils in her former school and we remain determined to expose the shah's regime.

In the last few days millions of Iranians have used social media to express their disgust at the extreme wealth and opulence shown by a family who almost four decades after losing power not only continue to live in extreme luxury, but can also afford to pay for unlimited publicity in social media and on satellite TVs, no doubt thanks to foreign funds. In fact in this respect the ex-royals are losing the support of some of their closest former allies, such as Ardeshir Zahedi (the shah's son-in-law, ambassador to the United States, then foreign secretary, and son of general Fazlollah Zahedi, the man who organised the coup that allowed the shah to come back to power in 1953). With unusual candour, Zahedi junior branded anyone accepting Saudi funds as no better than a thief.

Foreign interventions

Some Iranians, no doubt prompted by constant Israeli and western-sponsored media outlets, blame Iran's interventions in Syria and Yemen for the worsening economic situation. There is an element of truth in this. The government claims it has no funds to increase the salary of teachers, nurses and other public servants or to pay for overtime, yet there seems to be no limit to its military spending in Syria, Yemen and elsewhere in the Middle East. This has led to nationalist slogans, such as 'No to Gaza, no to Yemen'. However, the students and youth of Tehran responded to these slogans with their own: "*Ham Iran, ham ghazeh zahmtkesh taht setame*" ('The poor are oppressed both in Gaza and Iran').

One thing is very clear: only the royalists and the Mujahidin have welcomed the support of Trump and Netanyahu for the protests. No-one inside the country wants Iran to become Syria. No-one in their right mind wants 'regime change from above'. The threat of war is real and any intervention by the United States, Saudi Arabia or Israel will strengthen the Islamic Republic government, as every outside intervention has done. As I have said before, Iranians prefer to live in the prison that is the Islamic Republic, as opposed to the hell created by imperialism in the region. The question

remains: how long can the regime suppress the growing protests of the hungry and the impoverished masses?

Those who support the protests in Iran should also campaign against the threat of war and imperialist intervention against Iran.

The real reasons for Iran's current economic situation are more complicated than military expenditure in the Middle East. The promised economic boom following the nuclear deal has not materialised and now doubts about the future of the deal - particularly given Trump's outspoken opposition to it - have created despair, especially amongst young Iranians.

In responding to the riots, Rouhani claims that poverty, unemployment and inflation are not unique to Iran. This is certainly true, but what he fails to mention is that, for all its anti-western rhetoric, the Islamic Republic is an ardent follower of the neoliberal economic agenda. Rouhani's government of technocrats is rightly blamed for dutifully adhering to the 'restructuring' programmes of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank - part of the explanation for the growing gap between rich and poor. This gap is a reflection of a government that constantly strives to keep up with global capital's demands for the abolition of state subsidies (food subsidies have been slashed) and for privatisation. The official rate of unemployment (12%) is a joke - the real figure is much higher, even if we take into account low-paid, precarious employment. No-one has job security, unless, of course, they are associated with a faction of the regime or the security forces.

2017 might go down as the year when neoliberalism faced serious challenges in advanced capitalist countries. But in Iran it was a year in which neoliberalism was going well - Rouhani's government was praised for its economic performance by the World Bank and IMF. There can be no doubt, then, that this wave of opposition took the government completely by surprise. The ministry of information's pathetic demand that those wishing to come out on the streets request 'permits to organise protests' seems to have been ignored, for nobody believes that the state will allow them officially.

And it will certainly not allow the working class to begin to assert itself: there are calls for strikes by teachers, sugar-cane and steel workers, but the reality is that the 'capitalist mullahs' (as people are calling them in the streets of Tehran) have managed to decimate the organised working class. Steel and oil workers are no longer employed by single, state-owned industries. Large industrial complexes are subcontracting every aspect of work to smaller contractors. As a result, organising industry-wide strikes, let alone nationwide strike action (a significant factor in the overthrow of the shah's regime) is far harder.

As things stand, therefore, the protestors' demands are quite diffuse and there is no single organising and coordinating force which can set out an alternative for the struggle. As events unfold, such a force will become all the more necessary.

Signs of fracture

On the face of it both factions of the regime are singing from the same hymn sheet: accepting there is dissatisfaction, while blaming 'unrest' on foreign powers. However, the slogans directed against the 'reformists' - against both 'bad and worse' - have shaken them so soon after

Rouhani's re-election as president.

More damaging for the conservative factions and the supreme leader is the fact that in the last few weeks a video has emerged of a closed-door session of the Assembly of Experts, meeting in an emergency session after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989. After some deliberation, the meeting chose a mid-ranking cleric, Ali Khamenei, as *Vali Faghih* (Guardian Jurist). What we did not know, however, is that:

1. Khamenei insisted that he should not become *Vali Faghih*, even as a caretaker. This is what he says in the recording:

It is technically and fundamentally undoable and against the law. I have already categorically told his eminence, ayatollah [Akbar] Hashemi [Rafsanjani, who was chairing the session], I will not accept such an offer.

Ironically it was Rafsanjani (the hero of the reformist movement) who convinced Khamenei to take on the post.

2. It is very clear from this clip that Khamenei was nominated as a 'temporary' caretaker replacement for Khomeini - the decision taken was that he would be replaced in one year.

In his own words, Khamenei says:

Regardless of the fact that I do not truly deserve to occupy such a position, installing me as the caretaker has technical problems. [My] leadership would be formal [and only on paper], not a real one. Well, based on the constitution, I am not qualified for the job and from a religious point of view many of you [all clergy members of the Assembly of Experts] will not accept my words as those of a leader. What sort of leadership will this be?

When the debates finishes, Rafsanjani calls on members of the assembly to stand up if they approve Khamenei as a temporary leader until a permanent leadership is elected through a "referendum"! Hashemi Rafsanjani is then the first to stand up and the majority of the clerics follow him.

The release of the video is important at this time, as it undermines further the position of the '*Vali Faghih*'. It was clearly leaked by someone close to the corridors of power and it makes the supreme leader's position even more untenable - at a time when the crowds are shouting "Death to the dictator".

Support

There are three main things that we can do in order to support the protests in Iran:

- Show solidarity with those arrested, support the relatives of those killed by the security forces and draw attention to the government's repressive measures.
- Remind anyone with illusions in the previous regime that it was no better than this one and provide clear examples rather than just repeating slogans or insulting those who entertain illusions in the past.
- Expose the true nature of the Islamic Republic of Iran, while reminding everyone that Iran, far from being a 'regional power', is, like any other third-world capitalist country, at the mercy of the dictates of the IMF and World Bank. Its leadership is unpopular and weak, and the only reason it remains in power is the fear of going from bad to worse ●

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Notes

1. <https://newrepublic.com/article/92745/shah-iran-mohammad-reza-pahlavi-oriana-fallaci>.

Solidarity with the oppressed in Iran

Public meeting

Tuesday January 16, 6pm

Room 4.3 (4th floor), Public and Commercial Services union headquarters, 160 Falcon Road, Clapham, London SW11.

Speakers: Yassamine Mather (Hands Off the People of Iran) and Austin Harney (PCS)

Organised by Hopi: <http://hopi.org>.

■ 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

**Break
with ANC
popular
front**

At a crossroads

Peter Manson looks at the situation following the election of Cyril Ramaphosa

Readers will know that president Jacob Zuma was replaced by Cyril Ramaphosa as leader of the African National Congress at the ANC's elective conference in December.

Zuma will remain South African head of state, however, until a new president is elected by the national assembly following the 2019 general election - unless, of course, action is taken by the ANC and parliament to remove him earlier, which is a distinct possibility.

Just before the elective conference, commentator Peter Bruce pleaded to ANC delegates:

The fact is that policy uncertainty is crippling foreign investment ... And try not to think of foreign investors as fat, white capitalists smoking cigars in a club somewhere and deciding which ideological friends to finance ... They're investing the savings and pensions of people like you ... They need a return on those people's money, just like you need a return on yours.¹

Such commentators wanted Zuma out - and were equally opposed to his replacement as ANC president by his former wife, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, who was seen as a mere continuation of the current corrupt regime. Zuma not only stands accused of using state funds to upgrade his private residence, and of allowing the Gupta family to exert huge influence over government appointments - so-called 'state capture' - but he still has no fewer than 783 charges of corruption, fraud and money-laundering hanging over him. These are connected to the multi-billion-dollar arms deal finalised in 1999 just after Zuma became deputy president. His financial advisor at the time, Schabir Shaik, was jailed in 2005 for facilitating those bribes and, while Zuma faced charges too, they were conveniently dropped just after he became president in 2009.

During the pre-conference campaign Ramaphosa repeatedly insisted that all those implicated in 'state capture' and corruption must be prosecuted. But that does not apply to this trade union leader-turned-capitalist billionaire himself, of course. On the very eve of the Marikana massacre in 2012, Ramaphosa - then deputy president of both the ANC and South Africa - demanded in a series of emails that "concomitant action" be taken against strikers employed by Lonmin, the mining company of which he was a major shareholder and director. The next day 34 workers were shot dead.

Despite that, his victory at the elective conference was welcomed by bourgeois commentators. Ramaphosa, according to *Business Report*, was "seen as a business-friendly candidate, compared to his predecessor, Jacob Zuma".² Following the result, the value of shares on the Johannesburg stock exchange was boosted and the rand shot up by 11% - a phenomenon that almost immediately triggered a drop in petrol prices. Financial analyst Daniel Isaacs stated in the same paper: "What is pushing the stocks is that foreign money has come in. Investors are pleased with the outcome of the ANC conference." And in the same edition of *Business Report* readers were urged to take advantage of this new "opportunity

to invest".

Ramaphosa narrowly defeated Dlamini-Zuma by 2,440 votes to 2,261 - a majority of just 179 delegates. The contest for the other 'top six' posts were just as close and the leadership ended up evenly split between supporters of the two main contenders. Two other top posts were taken up by people from Ramaphosa's slate - South African Communist Party central committee member Gwede Mantashe, who up to then had been ANC general secretary, is the new national chair, while Paul Mashatile is the treasurer. But the new ANC deputy president is a Zuma man, David Mabuza, and both the general secretary, Free State premier Ace Magashule, and his deputy, Jessie Duarte, are from the Dlamini-Zuma camp. Magashule, by the way, has been condemned by the SACP in terms just as forceful as those it directs against Zuma for his own alleged corruption and connivance in 'state capture'.

SACP member Mantashe may be the new national chair, thanks to being included on Ramaphosa's slate, but, apart from that, the elective conference did not produce good results for either the SACP or the union confederation led by its members, the Congress of South African Trade Unions - both the SACP and Cosatu have been the mainstays of the ANC-led tripartite alliance. When it came to the votes for the new national executive committee, SACP general secretary Blade Nzimande, deputy chair Thulas Nxesi and CC member Slovo Majola were all ejected - marking the first time since the 1970s that the sitting SACP leader has not been on the ANC NEC. Meanwhile Cosatu second deputy president Zingiswa Losi - also on Ramaphosa's slate - narrowly lost out to Jessie Duarte in the battle for the ANC deputy secretary-general post.

Reconfigured

So what sparked the loss of support for the SACP amongst ANC delegates? Well, over the last couple of years the party has been prominent amongst those calling for Zuma to resign, particularly over 'state capture', and in November 2017 the SACP decided to stand a full slate of candidates against the ANC in a municipal by-election in the town of Metsimaholo. Three SACP councillors were successful and one of them, Lindiwe Shongwe, was elected as mayor by the new council at the end of December. There is now a coalition running Metsimaholo, consisting of the ANC, SACP and two tiny parties.

But this did not go down well with the Zuma camp. Both the SACP and Cosatu were denied the usual practice extended to alliance partners of expressing their



A demand from above and below

solidarity from the conference platform. Zuma supporters claimed that they would use the occasion to attack the president and try to influence delegates.

What is more, in his speech to conference Zuma himself complained:

In an unprecedented move, in the past few months we saw our alliance partners marching side by side with rightwing forces who are historical opponents of our democratic revolution, calling on the president of the ANC to step down.

SACP deputy general secretary Solly Mapaila called these remarks "pathetic and dishonest", while general secretary Nzimande explained more recently that contesting elections under the SACP name is "completely different from working against the ANC".³ The party merely wants a "reconfigured alliance". Now, says, Nzimande, "there must be democratic, consensus-seeking consultation on all major legislative policy", as well as on ministerial appointments, between the ANC, SACP and Cosatu. The question of ministerial appointments is a sore point for Nzimande, who was removed by Zuma as minister for higher education last year.

However, the party now seems to be genuinely uncertain as to its next move. When it came to official statements, it was strangely silent for more than a week after the conference. Its first official comment came in its "end of year statement", which was dated December 27, but only posted on December 30. The statement failed to analyse the new situation following the elective conference (Ramaphosa's name was not mentioned, let alone the prospects under his leadership discussed) and said nothing about what the party hoped would happen within the ANC.

Two centres

In the build-up to the conference, Zuma tried to win over delegates for his preferred candidate by suddenly announcing the

immediate abolition of tuition fees for all "poor" and "working class" students.

This threw university administrations into a panic, as they were just about to start a new academic year and were not informed as to how the new arrangement was supposed to be implemented. They announced that the year's intake had already been agreed and it was impossible to make room for students who had previously not been accepted because they could not afford the fees. The left-populist Economic Freedom Fighters announced they would picket university premises in support of 'walk-in' students, but the establishment was not happy. For example, Owen Skae, director of Rhodes University Business School, condemned "Zuma's stunning announcement" that will "deliver free education for about 90% of South African students". He said in an interview:

He announced this populist move against advice that it will place enormous pressure on the fiscus ... If allowed to go through, the negative consequences will be felt for years to come. Ramaphosa must find a way to stop this financially reckless decision.⁴

Skae is of the view that "Ramaphosa needs to push for Zuma to be recalled by the ANC as soon as possible and then fire all conflicted ministers".

He is slightly worried, however, by the "question of trust", given that Ramaphosa "started life as a trade unionist before becoming a billionaire businessman". True, after Marikana and his 'inappropriate' emails, "He did issue an apology, but I think it was not impassioned enough."

At the conference itself, Zuma supported another populist move - a commitment to change the constitution to allow under certain circumstances the expropriation of land without compensation: part of the president's package of so-called "radical economic transformation". That too did not go down well with mainstream commentators, while the opposition Democratic Alliance condemned it in no uncertain terms.

In reality, such moves have been par for the course for the ANC, whoever has been leader, and it is foolish to claim, as some on the left do, that somehow Zuma must be defended as 'progressive' - as opposed to the likes of Ramaphosa. The truth is that both are reactionary - which was, presumably why the SACP seemed to pull back from giving its backing to Ramaphosa, as against Zuma's ex-wife

(even though both the Young Communist League and Cosatu had already issued statements calling for Ramaphosa to be elected leader).

In 2008 the ANC recalled Thabo Mbeki as its leader and he immediately resigned as South African president (although he was not legally obliged to do so, as he had been elected to that post by the national assembly, not the ANC). Ironically it was the SACP which was the main force behind the move to replace Mbeki by Zuma.

But now there is much talk of a similar move against Zuma. After all, right now there are "two centres of power" in South Africa, with Zuma still heading the government, while the ruling party is led by someone who is said to be an opponent. In reality, there are no differences of principle between the two main ANC camps, although it is true that the Ramaphosa wing regards Zuma as a liability.

Such sentiments have been reinforced by the likelihood that some or all of the 783 charges against him will now be reinstated. Added to which, South Africa's constitutional court ruled on December 29 that the national assembly had failed "to make rules regulating the removal of a president", which it is obliged to do under section 89 of the constitution. Parliament had also failed "to determine whether the president had breached ... the constitution" and now it must allow for impeachment "without delay".

There was talk of a possible motion of no confidence being moved against Zuma at the January 10 meeting of the ANC's NEC. This would have been the third such motion he has faced at the NEC during his tenure as president, but it was claimed that this time it would very likely succeed, with members calling on Zuma to either step down or face impeachment. In the event, there was no such motion.

However, there has also been talk of a deal, whereby, in exchange for Zuma agreeing to step down, Ramaphosa would stress his predecessor's 'achievements', as he did at the ANC conference, and refuse to cooperate with legal moves against him, including in relation to the 783 counts. This now seems the most likely scenario ●

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Notes

1. *Sunday Times* December 17.
2. *Business Report* December 20.
3. *Morning Star* January 8.
4. *Business Report* December 22.

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