

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

# weekly worker



**The other general election:  
France goes to polls again  
on June 11 and June 18**

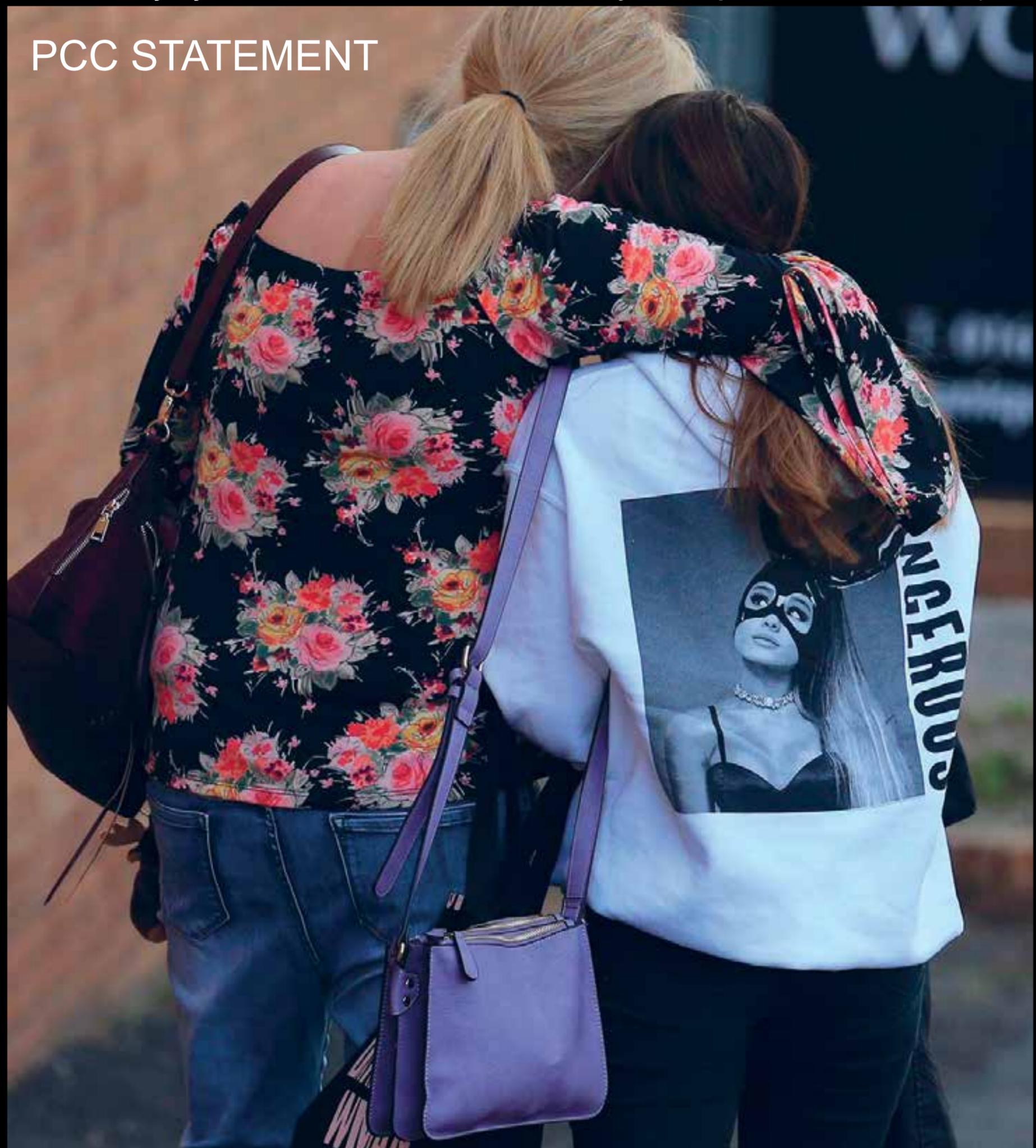
- Letters and debate
- PCS conference
- CPGB: dual membership
- Shostakovich and Barnes

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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## PCC STATEMENT



# LETTERS



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

## All must go

How can Marxists fight for socialism during and after the present UK elections?

As Jack Conrad remarks correctly, the leadership of the Labour Party is “neither reformist nor sub-reformist” (“What happens after June 8?”, May 11). Bourgeois politics rejects all notions of reforms with socialism as the goal. The ruling class will only tolerate ‘socialism’ if it refers to a means of establishing bureaucratic conditions for the continued accumulation of capital. Thus nationalisation, a welfare state, social security, social housing, the cooption of trade unions and full employment have all been accepted as partial means to an end. This is the management of the reproduction of labour-power required for the extraction of surplus value. Despite policies that reinforce the operation of commodity fetishism and the industrial reserve army of labour, bureaucratic measures of control have proven to be necessary aspects of a declining capitalism.

Thus the leadership of the Labour Party believe that taxing businesses and the rich will be a popular reform if it makes the management of capitalism more efficient. State support for small businesses, expenditure on the infrastructure and raising the minimum wage are means of stimulating demand during a depression. These stimuli will, it is argued, lead to growth. All parties are agreed that reforms are needed to create stable conditions for a recovery from the crisis. The previous gains to capital of austerity will not be lost if continued measures are halted and reversed.

A surprise Labour victory, however unlikely, is not inconceivable. The Tories are well aware of this. Thus Tory propaganda emphasises the chaotic nature of a Labour or coalition victory. Labour could win if the party turns this argument around. Labour could emphasise the political and economic chaos caused by the Tories and the previous coalition. Brexit is, of course, a good example of this. Brexit jeopardises the interests of British and European finance capital, threatens to destabilise the global operation of the industrial reserve army of labour and accelerates the disintegration of Britain. Austerity is another example of Tory chaos. Tory barbarism, stupidity and ignorance are responsible for this. By presenting itself as the party of stability, growth and rationality during a national and global crisis, Labour could win over an influential section of the ruling class and its attendant intelligentsia.

In these circumstances, the fight for socialism cannot wait until after the election. It involves posing a clear distinction between the top-down managerial goals of bourgeois political parties and the emancipatory goals of the overthrow of capitalism from below. Marxists aim for nothing less in the present than the establishment of a classless society worldwide, democratic planning and free individuality. Whether active inside or outside bourgeois political parties, Marxists can differentiate themselves from, and continue to expose the influence of, Stalinists, nationalists and Labourists. They can do this through their education and propaganda.

In Scotland, the pressures on Marxists to hide behind Keynesian policies informing both nationalism and Labourism are best countered through education programmes

targeted at class-conscious workers. For some time now, Marxists in Scotland have organised meetings to discuss the nature of capitalism, crises, socialism, imperialism, reform or revolution, Stalinism and the nature of proletarian power. Marxists can follow the same path in England and other parts of the UK.

It is, of course, just as important to challenge the nationalist consciousness of Labourism on the working class of England as it is on the working class in Scotland, Ireland and Wales. The commitments to nuclear weapons and to controls over immigration are proof of the continued imperialist nature of the Labour Party in Britain as a whole - not only in England, but in Scotland, where some members argue for an electoral alliance with the Tories against the Scottish National Party.

The period leading up to a national election is a fruitful time for Marxists. As well as engaging politically with their comrades, friends and allies, they can ask electoral candidates their thinking on capitalism and its socialist alternative. Do candidates think that capitalism is an exploitative system? Do they recognise socialism as a non-utopian alternative? Do they think socialism is possible? If candidates give positive answers, Marxists can ask them how they think socialism can be achieved. For example, do candidates support demands for full employment; a shorter working week; free social housing, public transport, education, health and social care? Do they support workers’ election and instant recall of managers? Do they support the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords? Are they opposed to immigration controls?

If they answer these questions in the negative, can Marxists justify voting for them? Jack Conrad argues that there is no contradiction between voting for rightwing candidates if there is the chance of deselecting them after the election. He takes the example of the British Labour Party. However, the idea could also be applied to Marxists who believe the SNP can be moved further to the left. The optimistic assumption is that, after the election and regardless of its outcome, the left will be in a stronger position than the right. It assumes a consensus that electoral defeat is the responsibility of the right (and a victory that of the left). This may be true. However, it ignores the possibility that leaders can blame disunity and disloyalty of both left and right for defeat. In which case calls for deselection could be characterised as divisive and disruptive.

To avoid demoralisation, isolation and exclusion, Marxists might then be drawn to developing class-consciousness amongst workers, with no illusions in bourgeois political parties. At the last UK election in 2015, 34% of those eligible (approximately 16 million people) refused to vote. Many people already think that the choice between bourgeois political parties is comparable to a choice between measles, mumps or chickenpox - in other words, no choice at all. As a means of creating the conditions for a movement for proletarian collectivity and democracy, the left may consider adopting the slogans, ‘Bourgeois political parties - they all must go!’ and ‘For Marxist political parties now!’

**Paul B Smith**  
email

## More Zen

Along the lines of that classic joke about a horse going into a pub and ordering a drink, with the bartender then enquiring: “So, buddy, why the

long face?”, I’m tempted to direct the same question to James Marshall (‘Aim to be a party of extreme opposition’, May 18).

A horse is a horse and, needless to say, cannot do anything either to alter or negate that simple but fundamental fact. Equivalently, an ideologically pure and pristine - aka a ‘correct’ - Marxist perspective is also just that. What I’m trying to convey is as follows.

Corbynist Labour is proving itself to be a cascade of sordid reformist compromise bordering upon tragic bullshit. So what? We expected suchlike stuff - nothing less. But why not take advantage of this rare opportunity for clear-cut and certainly accessible, practical and ‘real world’ experience of class conflict - as is being generated for working people by both the specific activities and very existence of Corbynism - with the full-scale engagement and support it warrants? That support and engagement being on an unbendingly super-critical basis, quite obviously.

How else can Marxists develop the consciousness of our working class co-citizens; how will our central principles be introduced into this so-called democratic ‘conversation’? How otherwise can our vital insights, experience, comprehensions and our Marxist-Leninist revolutionary, rather than reformist, purposes be conveyed?

Surely now is not the time for the *Weekly Worker*/CPGB to present to the world that long and arguably dreary to the point of downright dispiriting face - even if, in distinction, that socio-political demeanour is intended to convey a message of ‘frowning but empathetic’ wisdom.

No, surely now is the time to provide some vibrant and dynamic positivity, in essence some encouragement; even more to the point, it’s time to update and upgrade many of the relevant Marxist-Leninist/Trotskyist core theories of ours. However, modify and adapt - aka modernise - them strictly in Darwinian terms; in other words, so as to take advantage of all new circumstances and fresh realities within our world as it stands.

That being an all-pervasively monetised and über-glossily branded world - of course a capitalist/imperialist world, with seemingly endless and deceptively ‘consequence-free’ baubles and bangles and trinkets enticingly on display. A world where remorseless psychological and even subliminal ‘messaging’ is pumped out to its populations, resulting in nothing short of supersaturation of cynical manipulation. Oh, yes indeed, this world and their system of relentless to the point of demonic propagandistic control, as peddled by a hypocritical, duplicitous, compliant and disgustingly co-conspiratorial mass media - including the so-called ‘entertainment’ industry!

So, in summary, here are my two main points. Firstly, it is on this carefully limited and closely targeted basis (as outlined above) that I will be voting Labour on June 8. Secondly, it’s only with these specific provisos put in place that many comrades will be able to maintain trust and retain faith in the ‘official’ positioning and policies and analyses of the *Weekly Worker*/CPGB.

Putting things quite a different way, all communists need to get a damned sight more Zen with the massive tasks in hand; we need to get a bit more ‘jiggy’ with the extremely severe challenges we face! As in judo and ju-jitsu, we should learn

to utilise or harness the momentum/ the committed or chosen direction of travel of the body mass of our enemies, rather than simply bash or bludgeon away. After all, as any surfer or beach lifeguard will tell us, it’s far more sensible to swim through a raging wave rather than bare your chest to its superior power.

**Bruno Kretzschmar**  
email

## For real?

So the Socialist Party in England and Wales says that Labour is a capitalist party, but that people should vote for it? And that this is connected to “socialist policies”? Are they for real?

Will the Committee for a Workers’ International sections in Australia and Canada now be saying their Labour parties have mysteriously ceased being capitalist parties and become supportable?

**Philip Ferguson**  
Christchurch, New Zealand

## Pay off

‘A year off without pay’ is not much of an offer. But put together Theresa May’s proposals on workers’ rights and her proposals on housing, and then try and imagine the reaction if Jeremy Corbyn were saying exactly the same thing. As, of course, he has been for years.

Similarly, if May had proposed substantially the leaked Labour manifesto, much of which could indeed have featured in one of her set-piece speeches, then the media outlets that scream hysterically at Corbyn about Venezuela and what have you would have reacted in an entirely different manner. It is possible that May is onto something. Being the other side, while screeching abuse at it, worked for long enough for Tony Blair.

While the most prominent party that does not accept the 2% military spending target as the price of the 0.7% overseas aid target goes into this election with one seat, and is going to come out of it with at least that one, the party that does not accept the 0.7% overseas aid target as the price of the 2% military spending target goes into this election with no seats, and is going to come out of it with no seats.

It is not only because of the different electoral system that the party that wants to go back to Erich Honecker does better in the old East Germany than the party that wants to go back to Margaret Thatcher does in Britain. Indeed, look at how all policies, even those of the UK Independence Party, are now judged by how well they play to ‘traditional Labour voters in the north of England’, who are unquestioningly deemed to be the pure soul and radiant conscience of British politics.

Leaving aside the existence of other traditional Labour supporters, and of other people in the north of England, that exaltation of the moral authority of the people who voted Labour throughout the Thatcher and Major years amounts to defining the debate in terms of the wrongness of the results in 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1992. As much as anything else, that entirely cuts the ground from under the foundations of New Labour. Among very much else besides.

**David Lindsay**  
Lanchester

## No Muslim, bruv

I was planning to comment on last week’s paper, but we have been overtaken by the terrible tragedy in Manchester. It is a city I love, having lived there for four years. So I want to record my condolences for all the families and friends who

are suffering, all who died or are in hospital, and solidarity with all the people of Manchester.

It is important to make a sharp distinction between Muslims and terrorists. Muslims aren’t terrorists and terrorists aren’t Muslims. Of course, terrorists might dress up as Muslims and even pray five times a day. It isn’t fooling me. Neither am I fooled when fascists fire-bomb a mosque and call themselves ‘Christians’. As a young man shouted out during a terror knife attack in London, “You ain’t no Muslim, bruv”.

So we have to be in solidarity with Manchester and with all Muslims, whilst condemning this and all terror attacks on people. It is important to say that these terrorists are like fish that need water to swim in. If we can drain all the water, they are left flapping about on the bottom of the lake. Calling terrorists “Muslims” is like filling up the lake with fresh water.

These terrorists are not Muslims and they aren’t going to heaven. For this reason we need to be in solidarity with all Muslims, who the fascists and the rightwing Tory press are going to target. I would add that Muslims don’t need to start apologising any more than anybody else.

But we cannot duck the question as to why this stupid moron was so filled with hatred as to commit such an inhumane, anti-Muslim act. We all know the answer, even if nobody likes to mention it. It is not an excuse, just a fact of life. The UK has been waging war in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria since 2003. Fourteen years later the UK remains in a state of permanent warfare. The UK is dropping massive bombs on Syria and Iraq right now. Some will say that Britain drops bombs humanely, only killing terrorists and not innocent children. If you believe that you will fall for anything.

More tragedies like Manchester are not going to stop until there is peace in the Middle East. At the top of the list are the Palestinians, who are often forgotten. The British bombing of Syria and Iraq is part of the problem, not the solution. So don’t just blame the last Labour and Tory governments, but Labour MPs like ‘bomber Benn’, who made one of the finest speeches on the need for massive bombing in the Middle East that the House of Commons has ever cheered.

**Steve Freeman**  
Left Unity and Rise

## Hilarious

I found veteran Trotskyite Gerry Downing’s recent letters to the *Weekly Worker* on Lenin’s April theses absolutely hilarious.

Downing’s bottom-line arguments are: (1) Lenin and Trotsky were completely opposed to each other for most of the decades before 1917. Yes, that is correct. (2) Trotsky was fundamentally opposed to Bolshevism for much of that period. Yes, that is correct. (3) In April 2017, Lenin abandoned Bolshevism and became a Trotskyite and disciple of Trotsky. Complete and utter bollocks, I’m afraid.

Lenin’s April theses is an extremely concise and cogent set of arguments and analyses on the situation in Russia immediately following the February revolution, and the next tasks of the revolutionary party and the revolutionary proletariat and peasantry. It is very easy to read and to understand, and will not take any new reader long to do so.

Lenin quotes Mephistopheles in *Faust*: “Theory, my friend, is grey,

# ACTION

but green is the eternal tree of life.” This reminds me of Mario Cuomo saying, “We campaign in poetry, but govern in prose.”

Lenin was analysing the actual, complex, contradictory nature of the class situation, which produced and was thrown up by the February revolution. Given the development of capitalism in Russia and its position within the imperialist world, the February revolution had, on the one hand, failed to completely carry out all of the ‘classic’ tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, but at the same time had gone beyond those limits with the emergence of organs of united proletarian and peasant power.

Lenin described this highly unusual and unstable position as “dual power”. A government (or dictatorship) of the bourgeoisie and landowners, which had failed and would continue to fail to carry out the full bourgeois democratic revolution, leaving many aspects of the monarchy and feudalism intact, on one side. On the other, the emergence of soviet power in some of the industrial heartlands, which Lenin described “as moving close towards a revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry”.

So Lenin was completely consistent in his continued advocacy of a revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry as a means for both leading the bourgeois-democratic revolution and then progressing towards the proletarian revolution. The April theses simply argued the revolutionaries needed to understand the reality that the bourgeois-democratic revolution had to date only been partially completed, alongside a situation where the establishment of proletarian power had already commenced.

Under conditions of imperialism, “the highest phase of capitalism”, which had started to emerge around the turn of the 20th century, where capitalism had started to decay and become decadent, in retrospect, it seems obvious that the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution and the socialist proletarian revolution become incredibly intermeshed and interdependent.

The formulation of the April theses provided the programmatic expression of the tasks needed to both complete the tasks of the bourgeois revolution, but under the leadership of the proletariat and peasantry, and to systematically progress towards socialism.

To simplistically go back to the ‘proletariat and peasantry’ formulation would have failed to recognise that significant elements of this had now been established. To have gone to a ‘pure’ proletarian revolution would have failed to understand (1) the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution had still to be completed and (2) the peasantry constituted the great majority of the population.

Communist programmes of the 21st century combine the fight for the fullest and deepest extension of democracy (the *Weekly Worker* group uses the term ‘extreme democracy’) with the struggle for socialism, the expropriation of the expropriators. The tasks are not the same, and should neither be falsely separated into stages, nor collapsed into a simplistic advocacy of ‘Socialism is the answer to all our problems’.

**Andrew Northall**  
Kettering

## History boys

After glancing at a few of Gerry Downing’s recent missives on the subject of Lars T Lih’s reading of Lenin and the Bolsheviks (‘All

power to the soviets’, May 4), could I just check that Downing actually knows it’s 2017, not 1937, and that he is debating Lars T Lih and not Vyshinsky? And that Downing knows he is - ahem - debating a historian with a different take on things to himself and not conducting his defence in a show trial?

It’s best to clear these things up, otherwise people might get the wrong idea. Or perhaps this is one of those special historical re-enactment projects where, rather than prancing around in fields dressed as Nazis or Roundheads and so on, we all pile into the letters page of the *Weekly Worker* and pretend to be acting in scenes from the past? If that is the case, I don’t think much of Downing’s Trotsky, although Steve ‘Fluff’ Freeman’s fortnightly re-enactment of the Battle of Flodden on his keyboard is an absolute triumph.

**Lawrence Parker**  
London

## Our EU?

As a firm believer in the Marxist-Leninist cause, I think that one of the key factors to international communism’s success is unity of the world’s populous, indiscriminate of background, race or nationality.

For this reason, when looking

into joining the Communist Party of Great Britain I was rather put out as to the beliefs of the party concerning European Union membership. While the EU is clearly not as beneficial to the worker as it could be and by no means a communist organisation, it still implements crucial funding and infrastructural support to its member-states, which are beneficial to all.

Instead of bailing out of the metaphorical sinking ship of the EU, we should have been focused on saving our nation’s membership and turning the EU into something more reflective of our values.

Furthermore, if possible could you explain in further detail the standpoint of the party on this issue, as I found the website entry a little unclear.

**Will Brown**  
London

## Italia

I’m off to Italy this summer, so I would really like to get started reading on the history of communism in Italy, particularly its success in the Bologna region after World War II.

Can any of your readers recommend any decent literature to prepare before my trip?

**Fraser Mullen**  
frasermullen@hotmail.co.uk

## STATEMENT

### Manchester bombing

Monday night’s bomb attack on the Manchester Arena is both shocking and revolting. So far 22 people have lost their lives and 59 were badly injured. Police have named British-born Salman Abedi as the suspected suicide bomber. We do not yet know his motives, but Islamic State has reportedly claimed that Abedi was one of theirs.

Thousands of young people, many of them children, had gone to the Ariana Grande concert. They had one aim - to enjoy themselves. Their night out ended in horror.

Theresa May says the Manchester attack was an act of “sickening cowardice”. Sickening, of course. But it is clear that Salman Abedi was no coward. To strap on a suicide vest and then explode it is hardly an act of cowardice. Salman Abedi was doubtless a man who had found a cause ... a perverted, dehumanised and thoroughly reactionary cause: Islamic State is not an anti-imperialist force - it is a Frankenstein monster.

Mainstream media and politicians have stressed the need for unity. If by that is meant not demonising the Muslim population then we can only but agree.

Certainly the response of Manchester’s population to the May 22 bombing is admirable. Parents waiting to pick up their children tended to the injured, helped those in wheelchairs and provided comfort. Off-duty medics rushed forward to give help. Taxi drivers gave free lifts. Restaurant and shop owners delivered food for hospital staff, who worked round the clock to treat the injured. People came forward with offers of blood.

All of that shows a humanity and sense of solidarity.

However - and here’s the rub - Theresa May’s Tories, Britain’s chief inspectors, the securocrats will use the Manchester bomb outrage as another excuse to bang the national-chauvinist drum and up the general level

of surveillance, repression, militarisation, etc.

It is also worth stressing that what Manchester experienced on Monday night, people in Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq experience on a daily basis ... not least as a result of US and UK drones, missiles and aircraft. US and UK bombs kill innocent men, women and children.

No matter what the country, no matter what the language, all human life is unique, all human life is valuable. The death of a child in Manchester is no different from the death of a child in Kandahar, Mosul or Raqqa.

And, of course, it is the US and UK that sponsored Mujahedeen terrorism in Afghanistan and then subsequently invaded the country, occupied and wrecked Iraq, brought about regime change in Libya and today arms, pays for and politically backs a range of vile reactionary and jihadi groups in Syria.

The human cost has been appalling. Tens of thousands - maybe hundreds of thousands - have died. Hence, when it comes to terrorism, IS is nothing compared with US-UK imperialism.

Another point. Historically the main sponsors of IS have come from the ruling elite in Saudi Arabia. However, where once Donald Trump denounced Saudi Arabia as “extremist” and behind 9/11, now he embraces Saudi Arabia as an ally against Iran and boasts about selling the kingdom arms worth \$110 billions. And, of course, Turkey - a US-UK Nato ally - has for years aided and abetted IS.

So condemning the Manchester bomb, and expressing our outrage at the loss of young lives, cannot mean suspending political activity and issuing pledges of unity with the hypocritical ruling class, their reactionary allies and their murderous pawns.

**CPGB Provisional Central Committee**

## London Communist Forum

**Sunday May 28, 5pm:** Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Followed by open discussion and reading group: study of August Nimitz’s *Lenin’s electoral strategy from Marx and Engels through the revolution of 1905*. This meeting: chapter 1, ‘What Marx and Engels bequeathed’ (continued).

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

## Radical Anthropology Group

**Tuesday May 30, 6.45pm:** Series of talks on language, art, music and culture, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1.

This meeting: ‘Early human kinship was matrilineal’.

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

## Candidates against war?

**Thursday May 25, 7.30pm:** Panel Q+A with candidates from all political parties, Friends Meeting House, York Street, Bath BA1.

Organised by Bath Stop the War: [www.bathstopwar.org.uk](http://www.bathstopwar.org.uk).

## Social histories of the Russian Revolution

**Thursday May 25, 6.30pm:** Discussion meeting, Birkbeck, University of London, 26 Russell Square, London WC1. ‘Alexander Shlyapnikov and the Russian metalworkers in 1917’.

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

## Art for peace sake!

**Friday May 26, 7.30pm:** An evening of anti-war poetry, song and music, CB2 Cafe Basement, Norfolk Street, Cambridge CB1.

Organised by Cambridge Stop the War Coalition:  
[www.facebook.com/Cambridge-Stop-The-War-Coalition-301007410088989](http://www.facebook.com/Cambridge-Stop-The-War-Coalition-301007410088989).

## 2008 financial crisis

**Tuesday May 30, 7pm:** Marxist political economy discussion, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Last of four classes on ‘Labour, value and exploitation: an introduction to Marx’s economics’ with Simon Renton. Entry £5.

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

## Red banner, green rosette

Launch of David Douglass’s new book

**Tuesday May 30, 7.30pm:** Iona Club, Hebburn, Newcastle NE31. Followed by concert - music from Ireland and the Tyneside coalfield.

**Friday June 2, 6.30pm:** Tyneside Irish Centre, 43 Gallowgate, Newcastle NE1. Followed by music.

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

## Artists for Spain

**Thursdays June 8, 7pm:** Historical talk and exhibition, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Speaker: art historian Christine Lindey on the Artists International Association and the Spanish Civil War.

Organised by Marx Memorial Library: [www.marxlibrary.org.uk](http://www.marxlibrary.org.uk).

## Impact of the Russian Revolution

**Thursdays June 15, 2pm:** Lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. With professor Mary Davis and Tommy Hodgson. £5 waged, £3 unwaged.

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

## Reimagining Rochdale

**Saturday June 17, 10am to 2pm:** ‘Pop-up’, Rochdale town centre - exact location tbc. Rochdale today and its history in the cooperative movement.

Organised by Manchester Metropolitan University Cooperative Network, Rochdale Pioneers Museum:

[www.uk.coop/uniting-co-ops/events-calendar/cooperative-city-reimagining-rochdale](http://www.uk.coop/uniting-co-ops/events-calendar/cooperative-city-reimagining-rochdale).

## Renewables are here

**Saturday June 17, 10.15am to 5pm:** Conference, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London, WC1R 4RL. Anti-nuclear, pro-renewable event with high-profile speakers.

Organised by CND: [www.cnduk.org](http://www.cnduk.org).

## No to war

**Sunday June 18, 6.30pm:** Peace festival, All Saints Parish Church, Victoria Terrace, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire.

Organised by Leamington Peace Festival: <http://peacefestival.org.uk>.

## Peace pagoda

**Sunday June 18, 10.30am:** Cross-cultural peace ceremony, Brickhill Street, Willen, Milton Keynes MK15.

Organised by Peace Pagoda: <http://stopwar.org.uk/index.php/events/other-anti-war-events/2549-18-june-milton-keynes-peace-pagoda>.

## Tension, Trump and the two Koreas

**Wednesday June 21, 7.30pm:** Public meeting, committee rooms 3 and 4, Council House, Birmingham B1. Speaker: Billy Hayes.

Organised by Birmingham Stop the War Coalition:  
[www.facebook.com/BStWC](http://www.facebook.com/BStWC).

## Living on the edge

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

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

## 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.

**TORIES****Pensioners sidelined by atrocity**

The Tory manifesto's attacks on the elderly is no longer in the headlines - but Paul Demarty wonders why such risks were taken

**F**irst things first - joy at the discomfort of one's enemies is one of the few palliatives available in this age of defeats and inhumanity. So we must concede that we have enjoyed the spectacle of the 'dementia tax' as much as the next fellow.

The Conservative manifesto launch was supposed to project power and clarity, and - yes - strength and stability, but ended up in a storm of controversy over Theresa May's plans for the elderly, removing the 2.5% minimum rise in the state pension with which George Osborne bribed pensioners (only to be rewarded with the Brexit vote and his subsequent defenestration from number 11), means-testing the winter fuel allowance, and - most controversially - extending the number of people required to pay for social care in their declining years.

The latter measure got the tag, 'dementia tax', on the basis that it would hit most directly people in need of non-residential care in their own homes, and thus affect those with diseases like dementia, as opposed to those that become a patient in hospital or hospice, thanks to ailments like cancer. It is a bit of a stretch, and in reality the controversy is not so much about the parents as the children. For, under the proposal as it stood, the 'assets' against which free care entitlements were means-tested would, for the first time, include the patient's home, if they owned it; it was thus a highly selective, random inheritance tax levied exactly against the one asset to which the English petty bourgeoisie and its shrill tribunes in the middlebrow papers are absolutely devoted - real estate. Under a relentless barrage of criticism, the plans were ameliorated, with a ceiling put on the fees that could be charged - a pretty embarrassing climbdown, although in reality a minor one (the substance of the proposals remain, and so does the fuel allowance change and the breaking of the 'triple lock' safeguard for the level of pensions).

Jeremy Corbyn's front bench wasted no time in putting the boot in, although not with more means than the usual cheap point-scoring. The whole thing reached a nadir with a rather undignified dispute over digital advertising - the Tories came up with the wizard idea that they could buy advertising on Google searches for 'dementia tax', pointing to a Conservative website explaining "the facts" - to which a Labour response was to be rapidly crowdfunded (such things are bought by auction). The latter proved to be a waste of everyone's money when May capitulated, although - who knows? - perhaps it made all the difference.

Indeed, we are reminded, by the turgid Labour response to all this, that there appears to be an inviolable contract, by which contemporary parties of official opposition are bound. The terms of this contract state that opposition must be limited to permanently asserting that the government is shambolic, in disarray, etc, and must be got rid of, in order to be replaced by sensible and competent custodians of the kingdom. Every so often, of course, the government will indeed be caught with its trousers down, and its ministers at sixes and sevens as to how to respond. There can be no doubt that the Tories made far more of a cock-up of all this than was necessary - first of all by announcing their U-turn, and then by apparently failing to ensure that everyone was on message. In the context of the official Tory 'narrative' - whereby all and sundry repeat the phrase, "strong



**Theresa May and Manchester chief constable Ian Hopkins: soldiers and armed police**

and stable", like a Buddhist mantra - the whole thing is more than a little embarrassing.

What the Labour response has lacked is anything of *substance* - we are merely expected to take for granted that, as the builders of the welfare state and the 'nice' party full of 'nice' people, they would not rob shivering pensioners of their home equity. This may very well be true, but it leaves too much unexplained. To wit: why is it the *Mail* and the *Telegraph* leading the charge against May and Jeremy Hunt on this question?

### Patronage

The answer is, in the end, a matter of electoral strategy.

What is the Conservative Party? Perhaps due to its venerable age compared to other European political parties, the Tories are peculiar - presenting, on the one hand, a similar aspect to the Christian Democrats of Germany and (formerly) Italy, the Republicans and the longer-standing Gaullist tradition in France, and so on - default parties of government, parties of the establishment, of the godly (or the *officially* godly - not even very much of Catholics or, conversely, in the Latin countries, of Protestants). No such party can govern purely on the votes of bankers, bishops and judges: it is necessary to gather some section of the popular masses under one's banner. The petty bourgeoisie is typically coopted, and invited to view its interests as those of property (like the bankers), tradition (bishops) and order (judges).

In this aspect, the parties of the 'mainstream' European right must compete not only with the left, but also

forces further to their right - Poujadists, ethnocentric populists and the like. The Tories stand out as partially encompassing such forces: rank-and-file Conservative associations have historically engaged in strike-breaking and other forms of direct confrontation with the working class (to say nothing of Tory *governments*), and even now its European parliamentary group is shared with the likes of Poland's Law and Justice party, after nice guy David ('call me Dave') Cameron found the official centre-right European People's Party too leftwing.

If you have an electoral base, it is a good idea to try and make it larger; thus one of Maggie Thatcher's key strategic aims was to build a "property-owning democracy" - "property" meaning its peculiarly British euphemistic sense - real estate. In real terms, owner occupancy rose, although it has levelled off since the crash of 2008, and now is slightly shrinking, whereas private renting is growing rapidly.

On the bishops-and-judges front, there is a Tory dependency on the conservative skew of the elderly. This is, of course, a stereotype: but not one without statistical basis. Church attendance grows as we climb up the age distribution; acquiescence in modern 'liberal' social attitudes falls; and so on. This attitude is encouraged by what amounts to bribery. Such was George Osborne's 'strategic genius' - it was his idea to triple-lock pensions, he who refused to countenance any attacks on the winter fuel allowance, eviscerating municipal budgets and starving the NHS instead. The favouritism of Cameron and Osborne to their core constituencies was nauseating in its obviousness.

There is, needless to say, a considerable overlap between the two aforementioned Tory constituencies. The Office for National Statistics has an interesting breakdown of home ownership by age group - for the three lowest groups (taken together, 16-44 year-olds), home ownership has fallen since 1981. Only for the over 65s has it risen continuously, decade on decade. It is a great time, in this property-owning oligarchy, to be old - since you had half a chance to buy your house when they were remotely affordable.<sup>1</sup>

### A risk

On the face of it, then, the Tories' decision to bring in the dementia tax is bizarre. It is a frontal assault on their core vote. So hostile is it to the 'ideal type' of the *Daily Mail* reader that May might as well have sent Kenneth Clarke over to defecate on Paul Dacre's desk. So why?

There is first the Tony Blair factor. Blair and his cronies realised that his core vote, at that time, had nowhere else to go - having suffered under near two decades of Tory rule, during which time many Labour heartlands and working class swing constituencies alike had been devastated by deindustrialisation and attacks on basic forms of social solidarity, they were hardly likely to vote for John Major, or William Hague, or Michael Howard ... The challenge, according to the polling wonks, was to win over the 'middle class', and Blair went right to it, cutting a deal with Rupert Murdoch and execrating his core support.

Likewise: who are the owner-occupying petty bourgeoisie (let alone landlords!) going to vote for to protect their inheritance from the revenue office? *Jeremy Corbyn*? Not bloody

likely. Who is the 'average pensioner' - Brexit voting, somewhat more religious than the average - going to vote for to protect British decency? A red-flag-waving socialist who wants to go back to the 1970s? Really now.

Of course, no pensioner is the 'average pensioner'; nor do homeowners think only of inheritance tax. The polls did nudge in Labour's direction, by a couple of percentage points. But not enough to matter. This is the second major issue. Osborne's bribes are a millstone, so far as the treasury is concerned. The Tories are prepared to drag it around if it is the cost of doing business.

But *now*, with a double-digit lead in the polls with no realistic prospect of reversal, with a media strategy apparently calculated only to convince people it is worth voting *at all*? What is the point of committing yourself to throwing good money after bad at people who (even if they do not say so, they at least *think* in guilty silence) may not even have another election in them? What an opportunity to lance a throbbing boil - and if the cost is that the Tory majority is 80 rather than 120, who is really counting? The combination of loudly-complaining Tory MPs and candidates and a media firestorm seems to have broken the will of May and her advisors, 'red Tory' Nick Timothy foremost among them. With my armchair general's cap on, I reckon it would have been a better idea to press on regardless. Again, what are Tory MPs and candidates going to *do about it* - defect to Labour?

### Old news

In the event, of course, the thing is already old news. It did not take the vigorous exertions of the Tory press office to squash this story, but Salman Abedi and his terrorist atrocity in Manchester. Instantly, we were in national mourning mode, and all political leaders were required to issue the usual platitudes.

Yet all political leaders, in the face of terrorism, are not created equal. This is a gift, in the end, to the Tories. It is May, with her 'strong and stable' shtick parroted anew by the press, who will benefit - not Corbyn, with his history of sympathy with Irish republicanism and a million other things he can neither continue to aver nor plausibly renounce. To pin your hopes on your opponents' embarrassment is not to exploit the news agenda, but to become its slave.

Excluded from all this, as a final result, is the actual question at hand, or indeed questions. If the matter is in the end one of Tory 'competence', then it is not a matter of there being a clear political and moral obligation to provide social care on the basis of need, which May's advisors and the authors of various green papers seek to bury under the usual landslide of spurious invocations of 'fairness' ('everyone else has to suffer like dogs, why not the elderly?'); nor is it a matter of the property-owning democracy having been a *disaster* from the point of view of people actually having somewhere to live without it costing them half their income and the taxpayer a great treasure in subsidy. On the last point in particular, Labour's manifesto is criminally inadequate and unambitious.

So May's little wobble is an embarrassment - but it will not lose her any elections in the near future ●

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### Notes

1. <http://visual.ons.gov.uk/uk-perspectives-housing-and-home-ownership-in-the-uk>

# PCS CONFERENCE



Mark Serwotka: next year

# Fudging the Labour Party

Carla Roberts and William Sarsfield of Labour Party Marxists spoke to Hudson Leigh, a leftwing delegate to the 2017 annual conference of the Public and Commercial Services union in Brighton

**With just two weeks to go before the general election, what was the mood at conference?**

Delegates weren't exactly buoyant, I have to say. I think that is a reflection of the savage cuts that the Tories have inflicted on the civil service. Tens of thousands of jobs have been cut, which means that branches are much smaller and are entitled to fewer delegates. To make matters worse, delegates now have to take annual leave to attend. Consequently, conference is getting smaller and smaller. And more boring.

**With the exception of the debate on the Labour Party?**

Well, yes, that hour on Wednesday afternoon was the most interesting 60 minutes at this year's event.

**Talk us through the three main motions dealing with the general election.**

Motion 304 was moved by PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka - it was the NEC's position. It states: "Conference believes that the worst possible outcome of this election ... is another Tory government." It stops short of recommending a vote for Labour Party candidates, but notes that "this election is very different" and that "for the first time in many years the leadership of the main party of opposition in Westminster, the Labour Party, is committed to ending austerity." It asks conference to "step up campaigning" and to "use the final days of the election to urge members to get involved in PCS campaigns". In effect, that is what the PCS has always done; so nothing new there.

Motion 305 was seconded by a supporter of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and Independent Left, and was also supported by the NEC at conference. This commits the leadership to "issue correspondence

to members highlighting how they would benefit from Labour's manifesto commitment". In effect, a general overview of the party's policy positions and where they coincide with PCS policy.

Motion 328 was a different kettle of fish. It explicitly called on "members to vote Labour in England and Wales, and encourage members to get involved in their localities, where possible, to support such an outcome". Motions from Sheffield and East London, which I supported, did not have that reference to England and Wales, which I think made huge concessions to nationalism in Scotland. But these motions were incorporated into 328 by the standing orders committee.

**How did the debate and voting go?**

First, I should say that there was some manipulative chairing of this session (or perhaps, if I'm less charitable, something worse). We had an hour to discuss this pivotal issue, but president Janice Godrich - who is a prominent member of the Socialist Party - made no attempt to draw out the arguments properly. She let the discussion on motion 304 drag on interminably. And that despite the fact that it did no more than restate long-standing PCS policy. As such - and given its deliberately vague formulations - it would have made no difference at all whether it had been voted through or not.

Motion 328, however, was dependent on motion 305 *not* getting majority support. It would have been fairer, in my view, to have a proper debate on the issue, which would have entailed all three different perspectives being properly moved and debated. But, with time running out, it became clear we would not get to hear motion 328 at all. As the realisation of this dawned on many delegates, it appears that a lot of them just settled for a vote in favour of

305, which pushes existing PCS policy a little further forward.

I'm not saying that motion 328 and blanket support for Labour Party candidates would necessarily have won - the NEC and Mark Serwotka carry a lot of weight - but now we'll never know. We really should have been able to have that debate - no matter which individuals or political groups in the conference hall would have been made to feel uncomfortable.

**The Socialist Party in England and Wales, which is highly influential in the union, is clearly disoriented. In the PCS they vote against supporting Labour outright. But the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, which SPEW effectively runs, has just decided to support Labour Party candidates everywhere.**

Unfortunately, Socialist Party members don't identify their political affiliation and - what is even more frustrating - they don't argue their politics openly: you have to read between the lines.

It seems to me pretty clear that it was the RMT's decision to offer blanket support to Labour that by default decided the issue for the SP. The RMT is the only the serious union affiliate that Tusc has and in reality they call the shots in the organisation.

At January's Tusc conference, the RMT were still insisting on only case-by-case support to Labour candidates and, as a result, the SP withdrew its suggestion to suspend Tusc's electoral campaigning. They were even prepared to see the Socialist Workers Party walk out of Tusc over the issue in March. But, now the RMT has changed its view, the SP loyally follows suit.

This, presumably, is the model of what their 'new workers' party' to replace Labour would be like - a lash-up where the trade union bureaucrats have

the last word on everything! What's the point of that?

**But wouldn't they call that tactical flexibility?**

They can call it what they want. I call it a lack of principle.

**What about the role of Mark Serwotka? He moved a successful motion last year, which instructed the NEC to review its relations with the Labour Party, "including the issue of affiliation". He told the 2016 conference: "The debate about affiliation is one we should have next year. But we can't be on the sidelines. It is in members' direct interests -**

**their jobs, pay and pensions - to support [Corbyn] against the attacks from the right wing of the Labour Party."**

Given the lack of transparency in the union, it's hard to know what happened on the NEC. Why was this important issue quietly dropped? I don't know. We can speculate about deals with, and pressure from, the Socialist Party members on the NEC, who are still against affiliation to Labour. But, given the fact that the SP has a lack of confidence in openness much of the time, it has to remain speculation for the time being.

Of course, it also has to be said that no branch moved a motion for affiliation. It just shows how painfully weak the left is ●

## Fighting fund

### Best on the left

The big donors to our fighting fund this week are comrades AC and RG, who contributed £100 and £70 respectively. AC used that speedy (and free!) method - a transfer made directly from his bank account - while RG used the more old-fashioned (but still completely acceptable!) method of sending us a cheque.

However we get it, it's more than welcome and, as a result of these and a batch of standing orders, we are now very much within reach of our £1,750 target for May. Those SOs included regular donations from SK, PM, TB and RK, amounting to £430, while comrade TY was the sole online reader (out of 2,826 last week) to click on our PayPal button,

donating a tenner.

All that takes us to £1,631 with still a week to go. The very least we should aim for now is an extra £145 to make up for April's £145 deficit - just another £264 needed in seven days! We can definitely do it, especially with the likes of TY on our side. She writes: "This will hopefully be the first of many donations - for the best paper on the left!"

If you agree with her, why not follow her lead - and feel free to donate more than a tenner! ●

Robbie Rix

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

**OUR HISTORY****Sectarianism and secession**

Programmatically weak politics only helped reinforce the CPGB's ultimate sectarianism after its re-entry into the Labour Party in the late 1930s, writes Lawrence Parker

The first part of this article<sup>1</sup> used the example of the Communist Party of Great Britain's mass entry into the Labour Party in the late 1930s to suggest there was no change in substance in the nature of communist politics in the popular front era.

The CPGB had a mode of organisation - bureaucratic centralism, dressed up as 'democratic centralism' - that meant it consistently veered between opportunism and sectarianism when working in the broader movement. This was clearly present in the 1930s and was commented upon by the CPGB itself. Furthermore, the CPGB's influence inside the Labour Party was not just the outcome of a wholly organic drift of the rank and file towards the communists; rather it was also a result of the CPGB organising itself inside and alongside Labour. Working inside the Labour League of Youth, the Labour Party's youth organisation, the CPGB and the Young Communist League had some conspicuous success through their militant defiance of Labour's national executive committee and by 1937 young communists were in control of the LLOY.

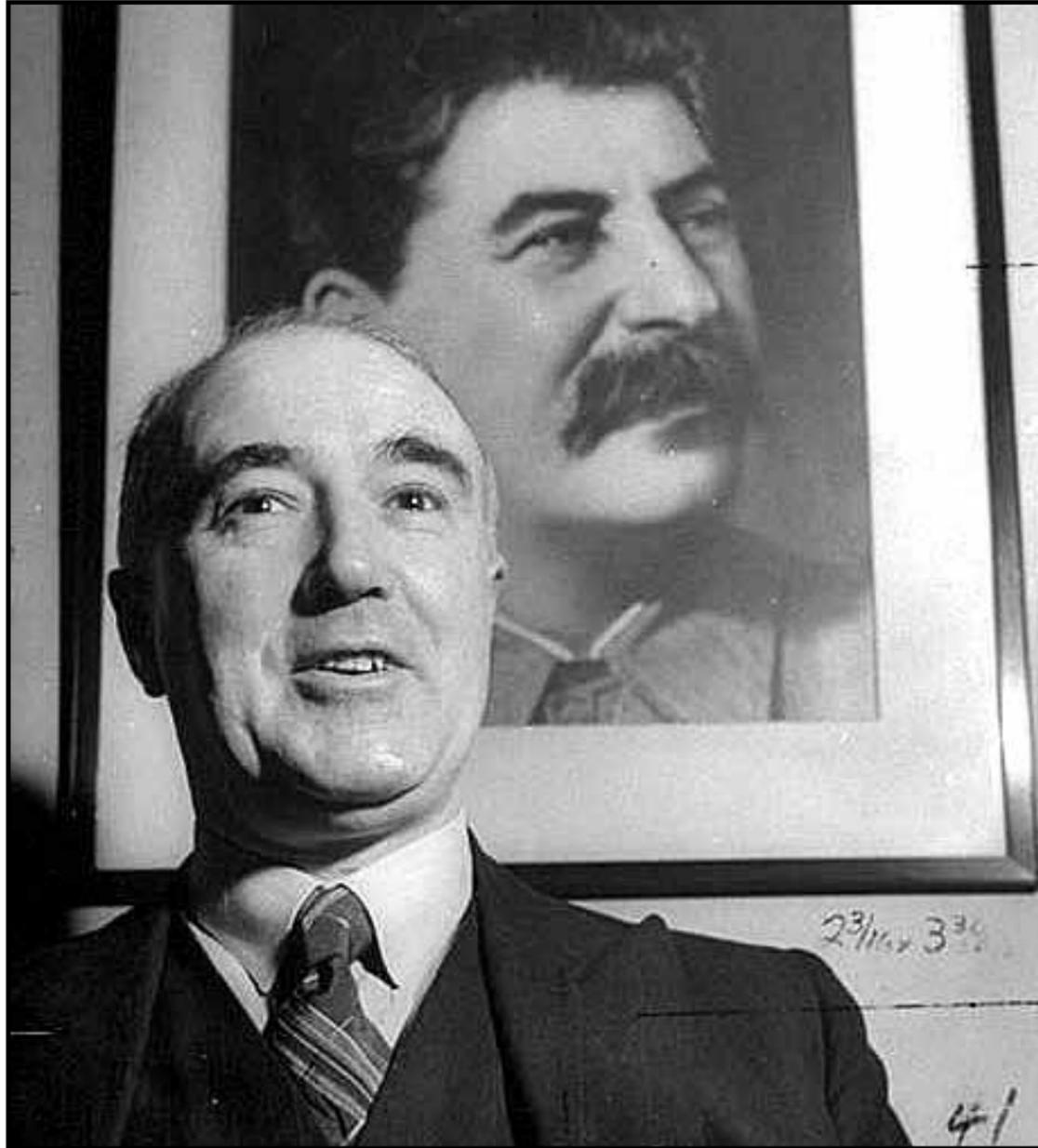
Despite the pugnacious stance of the leading CPGB/YCL faction in the LLOY in refusing to be bound by the NEC, the politics it espoused were notably weak. For example, in what was hailed as a "historic move" in August 1936, the 'unofficial' national committee of the LLOY proposed a new charter for the league.<sup>2</sup> This vague document contained the following recommended priorities:

- The fight to maintain peace
- The fight for trade unionism
- The fight to build a strong British Workers' Sports Association
- The fight for youth rights and demands
- The fight for local youth demands, as they vary from area to area
- The fight for a strong socialist youth international
- To recruit to the LLOY "and put forward the complete socialist ideal"<sup>3</sup>

Over a year later, an article in *Advance* was, again, guilty of over-hyping the - slightly fuller - youth charter of the British Youth Peace Assembly (a CPGB front) as "youth's Magna Carta". This called for:

- A 40-hour working week
- A wage-for-age scale in all industry and land work
- A fair and regulated ratio of youth to adult labour
- Vocational training
- Safety classes and adequate supervision of machine work for young workers
- A fortnight's holiday with pay
- Abolition of the Unemployment Assistance Board - adequate benefits for unemployed youth
- Raising of the school age to 16 with adequate maintenance grants
- Equal educational opportunity
- Full medical and dental services for all
- More playing fields and gymnasiums
- Increased social amenities in the country to raise the level to that of towns<sup>4</sup>

Such immediate programmes, bounded by the overall popular front strategy of adaptation to all kinds of social forces, did not represent any kind of break with the mainstream of the labour movement and it is difficult to see such collections of demands being offensive to anyone in the Labour Party. So what was qualitatively different about the YCL's leadership of the LLOY, apart from its defiance of the Labour NEC and determined activism around organisations such as the Spanish Youth Foodship Committee? The answer to this question probably only lies in the sectarianism that the



**General secretary Harry Pollitt**

YCL faction displayed in the LLOY when more fundamental issues of communist identity were at stake.

When *Advance* writers turned their attention to the Soviet Union, enthusiasm knew no bounds. One article on the subject of young people in the Soviet Union was headlined: 'The happiest youth in the world,'<sup>5</sup> while it is difficult to gauge the precise excitement of *Advance* readers when they were told things such as: "There is hardly a youth in the USSR who has not jumped with a parachute."<sup>6</sup> Alexander Baron, a member of the YCL faction in the LLOY, who was assistant editor and then editor of *Advance* in the late 1930s, offered up a very jaundiced fictional account of these happenings in *The in-between time* (1971).<sup>7</sup> However, judging by what appeared in *Advance*, some of Baron's fictional account rings true. The protagonist of Baron's novel visits a London communist hall, where he finds a group of LLOY members attending a study circle on the 1936 Soviet constitution:

... the other members of the circle listened with rapt faces, as if bathed in some religious light; and their eager answers to the lecturer's questions had the innocent, sycophantic sound in them that small children make when they are vying with their answers in class out of eagerness to please teacher.<sup>8</sup>

Baron also shows this culture's darker side, when he writes of communist members of the LLOY moving against

a wounded Spanish Civil War veteran who has been classed as a 'deserter' after leaving the International Brigades and having political disagreements with the CPGB.<sup>9</sup> Again, this is not at all far-fetched, as the LLOY became infected with some of the atmosphere of purges and heresy hunting. The article shown above talking of the happiness of Soviet youth also contained the following: "Traacherous wreckers and fascist foes try to rob [Soviet youth] of their happy life, but we are with them in their fight to preserve it."<sup>10</sup>

Such an atmosphere became worse when the YCL faction of the LLOY turned its attention to a tiny Trotskyist group working in its ranks around the *Youth Militant* paper.<sup>11</sup> Ted Willis, leader of the faction and national chair of the LLOY, put the Trotskyist 'wrecking' activities (which do not seem to have been much more sinister than submitting resolutions and publishing a newspaper) in the specific context of the Moscow trials:

Like all other Trotskyist groups they are a tiny minority, entirely divorced from the rank and file of the masses. Mainly middle class types, their record is one of disruption, cleverly taking advantage of the weakness of the [Labour] League [of Youth] to insinuate themselves into its organisation.<sup>12</sup>

By the 1937 national conference of the LLOY on May 8-9, the atmosphere deteriorated further when the Trotskyist group put up a resolution that approved

the uprising against the republican government then taking place in Barcelona. This brought YCL leader John Gollan - closely supervising the work of Willis and others - into the fray: "The *Youth Militant* supporters must be seen in their true light of splitters and disrupters, and cleared out of the youth movement."<sup>13</sup> Willis took a similar tack: "In the self-governing League of Youth that we're fighting for there'll be no room for people who've exposed themselves as traitors to the working class."<sup>14</sup>

This double-talk of self-government/heresy by Willis and Gollan points to the absurd ideological position the YCL was in. Self-government was effectively a demand for the Labour NEC to recognise diversity in the movement and a youth wing that might wish to take a different political tack from the adult party. In practice and in the context of the LLOY in 1937, it meant the Labour leadership ceding control of its youth organisation to the YCL, and thus the CPGB. However, diversity was not something that the YCL could possibly concede to its opponents on the left, who might disagree with some of its fundamental beliefs on the nature of the Soviet Union and its activities in curtailing other revolutionary trends in Spain. Neither could the LLOY's leading YCL faction countenance any real diversity in programmatic terms or in its day-to-day activity - it existed on a diet of a vague left reformism and loyalty to CPGB-favoured campaigns, such as those around Spain. In such a context, the whole idea of self-government of

the LLOY becomes chimerical.

**World War II**

To return to our main theme, the YCL/CPGB's work in the LLOY was an attempt to practise popular front politics that very obviously was not a break with the past. In fact, it was a classic rerun of organisational and ideological dynamics first established in the 1920s. Internal rigidity on the part of the communists merely led to external rigidity in the form of the opportunism/sectarianism couplet.

What happened to the CPGB and YCL members working in the Labour Party, as World War II approached? Noreen Branson has an answer of sorts. She says that such a practice continued until after the outbreak of the war in 1939.<sup>15</sup> This is correct in the sense that people such as Charlotte Haldane, who classed herself as a "crypto-communist"<sup>16</sup> (ie, not an open member of the CPGB), were still, as Labour members and councillors, under CPGB discipline by 1940, with Haldane working as a councillor within a strong communist fraction in the South-West St Pancras Labour Party in north London.<sup>17</sup> However, Branson is also factually incorrect in the sense that the CPGB started yanking its members out of the Labour Party as early as July 1939 (ie, just before the outbreak of World War II).

Branson, by now branching off into the realms of make-believe, says:

Though no public statement was made on the matter [dual membership of the CPGB and Labour Party], it was evidently concluded that to continue with such a practice would be a mistake. It laid the [CPGB] open to charges of 'conspiracy' and 'subversion' ... There was also the danger that it would undermine the campaign for the affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party ...<sup>18</sup>

If the CPGB was really concerned with its reputation with the Labour Party, then why did it very publicly yank out activists who held dual membership in what seems to have been two concerted campaigns in July-August 1939 and May 1940? As we shall see, the CPGB said that Labour members who agreed with its policy should leave Labour for the CPGB - a fairly pristine sectarianism. (Given that such campaigns were simply a matter of public record in the *Daily Worker*, it is highly inconceivable that Branson would have been unaware of these events both as a party member of the time and a historian looking back.)

Of course, for those who have followed the argument of this article closely, these actions will not come as any kind of surprise, as the CPGB merely reverted to type - unable to countenance any notion of 'unity of diversity', since it became obvious the Labour leadership was not going to follow the tactical advice of the communists in 1939-40, the CPGB and YCL flipped over from relative adaptation to sectarianism.

Also worth bearing in mind in relation to Branson's argument is her implication that the CPGB was concerned in 1939 with respectability in the bourgeois sense of the word, in terms of accepting the proprietorial 'rights' that the Labour leadership expected over what it saw as its terrain. In fact, while the CPGB was affected by eddies and swirls of respectability in its popular front politics, it cannot be thought of in this period as 'respectable' *per se*. An

organisation overly concerned with being 'respectable' would simply not have contested the battleground of the Labour Party by sending in its members. Also, whatever its rapid tactical shift at the start of World War II - from supporting a 'popular' war against fascism to a formal policy of opposing the imperialist war - was, it certainly was not the product of an organisation overly concerned with the niceties of being 'respectable'. The CPGB's rather dramatic two fingers to the Labour Party in 1939-40 only serves to seal the argument. Branson is very obviously emoting CPGB sentiment, as it had evolved up to 1985, and not that of the party in 1939-40.

Thompson is also caught in this trap, when discussing the defection of Willis and other LLOY members to the YCL. He says the "CP leadership did everything in its power" to persuade these comrades to remain inside Labour.<sup>19</sup> Thompson simply takes this as good coin from an interview with Bob Horne, listed as a member of an unspecified "League of Youth committee".<sup>20</sup> Thompson very clearly has not read the primary sources relating to this episode, stating that it happened in "early 1939",<sup>21</sup> when Willis and others actually left in July 1939.<sup>22</sup> As we shall see in detail below, the primary sources simply show the LLOY cohort leaving alongside communists in the adult party in what was obviously a concerted and sectarian campaign. There is no sense of a disapproving CPGB or of these actions being kept under wraps - precisely the opposite: activists such as Willis were positively publicised for their actions. However, for a Eurocommunist such as Thompson, such actions do not fit his soft, 'non-sectarian' template of the popular front and so they have to be explained away in a manner that does not match with the historical record.

In July 1939, Stafford Cripps noted in the pages of *Tribune* that "hundreds of members" of the LLOY and "a considerable number of adult members" had left the Labour Party since its Southport conference in May-June 1939 (which had decisively rejected the CPGB policy of a broad, cross-class popular front against the then government) to either drop out of politics or else join "some other working class organisation".<sup>23</sup> In fact, the vast majority of these activists had left to join the CPGB and, in all probability, were 'hidden' members, who had become communists a considerable time before. This can be the only conclusion from the way that the *Daily Worker* reported these departures, which also shows how these comrades were being withdrawn as part of a concerted campaign to try and create the impression that there was some kind of 'natural' exodus of Labour members to the CPGB and, presumably, to encourage others to follow the same path.

AE Gower - who was on the executive of Manchester Labour, its prospective parliamentary candidate for Stretford and "actively associated with the campaign for a people's front since [its] inception" - recorded that he had applied to join the CPGB. He said:

... I am firmly convinced that, unless the British working class builds a revolutionary party strong enough to create working class unity and the broader people's front, then there is every danger that the present pro-Chamberlain leadership of the labour movement will lead us to the same disasters that befell the German labour movement.<sup>24</sup>

These activists were not being presented as confused as to their future course or direction (as one might expect in any genuine mass exodus). Rather they were offered up as clones parroting communist dogma. Thus Gower said:

I have been profoundly impressed by

reading the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, which so clearly shows that only the leadership of the Communist Party made possible the winning of power by the working class and the building of the socialist, classless society.<sup>25</sup>

Others spoke in a similar vein. For example, another report said that RJ Lawrence, chairman of Watford divisional Labour Party, had taken the step of leaving Labour because "he entirely agreed with the policy of the Communist Party".<sup>26</sup>

As July proceeded, other departures were formally recorded in the *Daily Worker*: notably Hector Prickett, secretary of Oxford City Labour Party<sup>27</sup>; Ted Willis, national chairman of the LLOY, who had joined the YCL, along with many others, including a group from Glasgow (who voiced displeasure at a recent reduction of the LLOY age limit to 21 and another injunction to stop the LLOY collaborating with the YCL)<sup>28</sup>; and a bigger group around RJ Lawrence in the Watford Labour Party.<sup>29</sup> This wave carried on into August, with more defections being noted in Southall, Middlesex; Hackney, London; Westminster St George's (LLOY); Gloucester; Aston, Birmingham (LLOY)<sup>30</sup>; Clapham, London (LLOY)<sup>31</sup>; Putney, London<sup>32</sup>; Portsmouth (LLOY); Hollingbury, Brighton<sup>33</sup>; Reading; Benfleet<sup>34</sup>; Maidstone (LLOY)<sup>35</sup>; and Hastings (LLOY).<sup>36</sup>

These departures were dressed up in doublethink as a move towards unity and strengthening the Labour Party and, indeed, Pollitt led a renewed attempt to affiliate to the Labour Party in July 1939.<sup>37</sup> Willis tried to explain this away in a response to the *Tribune* article by Cripps referred to above, with shades of the old dogma of the 'united front from below': "In the past we have tended to have a too formal conception of unity - we have seen it too much in terms of resolutions and petitions - and not in terms of the active mass unity of the people."<sup>38</sup> A *Daily Worker* editorial noted that the departures had been described in some quarters as "desertions of the labour movement".<sup>39</sup> It went on:

It is clear ... that [those who have joined the CPGB] are not arguing that it is impossible to work for working class unity inside the Labour Party. What they have said is that they can work better for working class unity by building a strong Communist Party, with which the Labour Party could not refuse to negotiate.<sup>40</sup>

The editorial added that its 'new' ex-Labour members "are making no general appeal for workers, who are not willing to accept the full communist policy and join the Communist Party, to leave the Labour Party".<sup>41</sup> However, the implication is that a proportion of the ones who could accept communist policy were being encouraged to withdraw.

In reality, the CPGB simply could not pose both ways. It was well nigh impossible to claim the 'desertions' were an act of unity, when those communists had been embedded in local Labour parties and, in many cases, leading their work for a few years. It is unlikely that left-leaning members of the Labour rank and file not inclined to join the CPGB would have looked upon such departures as anything else than 'desertion' that caused damage to the movement. Morgan argues: "The effect of these resignations was quite disproportionate to the relatively small numbers involved, for they were drawn from the active minority whose efforts kept the Labour Party going at grassroots level."<sup>42</sup> Harold Laski, writing in 1946, maybe had these types of shenanigans in mind, when he asked if unity with communists meant "the Labour Party is to be driven by the kind of intrigue and double dealing

to which socialists have become accustomed".<sup>43</sup>

## Watershed

However, this was not the immediate end of the CPGB's work inside the Labour Party. As we have seen, certain members, such as Haldane, had been kept in place inside the CPGB after it had shifted its line towards opposition to the imperialist war and - rhetorically at least - to a version of 'Leninist' revolutionary politics, interlarded with large chunks of its previous popular front stance.<sup>44</sup>

By May 1940 and as the Labour Party was on the verge of its Whitsun conference in Bournemouth that year, the CPGB was most probably making reference to its own forces when it talked of a group of militant delegates that would "not allow the issues to be clouded over".<sup>45</sup> It added: "They will put the full demands of revolutionary socialism in such a way that will reach the hearts of Labour Party members."<sup>46</sup> There were also resolutions heard at the conference that seem extremely likely to have been pushed by CPGB members or close supporters: for example, Hodge from North Croydon Labour Party moved a resolution pledging the Labour Party to defend the Soviet Union against capitalist aggression.<sup>47</sup>

However, this only led to another wave of communist-inspired resignations from the Labour Party, formally because of Labour's pro-war policy and its decision to participate in the British war government. Again, these activists were mostly reported as joining the CPGB. And, again, the *Daily Worker* made sure they sounded like communist monotonous. For example, Tom Poulton, secretary of the Sussex Federation of Labour Parties, said: "Since last August the Labour Party has not only neglected no opportunities, it has created false opportunities, for the most venomous and unprincipled abuse of the Soviet Union."<sup>48</sup>

Some of these departures seem as if the CPGB might have been publicly setting up certain prominent individuals for expulsion. For example, Manchester city councillor John Owen was expelled - formally at least - for presiding over a *Daily Worker* rally at the Free Trade Hall<sup>49</sup>; while councillor Howard Hill from Sheffield experienced a similar fate after also taking the chair at another *Daily Worker* rally.<sup>50</sup> Other reported departures included Labour officials in Kingston<sup>51</sup>; a councillor in Bow, London<sup>52</sup>; and a councillor and local party secretary in North Kensington Labour Party.<sup>53</sup> By June 1940, the CPGB's general secretary, Rajani Palme Dutt, was arguing that CPGB comrades in the Labour Party should come out into the open to fight for the party's policy.<sup>54</sup>

However, sectarian in inspiration as these further withdrawals in 1940 were, they were also probably lodged in a degree of pragmatism, as the Labour Party machine began to rust over due to wartime dislocation<sup>55</sup> and the political truce the leadership had called - meaning that local parties would not be involved in their electoral *raison d'être* for a few years. This was remarked upon by a number of contributors to the *Daily Worker*. Tom Poulton, lately the secretary of the Sussex Federation of Labour Parties, argued in May 1940: "these purely electioneering bodies [in the Labour Party] find themselves with hardly any justification for their existence".<sup>56</sup> By July 1940, recently expelled Manchester councillor Jack Owen complained of Labour: "Political activity has ceased in our party."<sup>57</sup>

Our enthusiasts for the popular front-era CPGB may object that the events of 1940 were part of the sectarian turn of the party after it had decided to oppose the inter-imperialist World War II; however, as will be readily appreciated, the events of May 1940 unfolded in exactly the same manner as those of July-August 1939, even down to the rhetoric used. This expresses a key

theme of this discussion. Communist politics were being structured by something much more profound than the particular tactics or 'line' (united front, third period, popular front and so on) being employed at any one point. The Comintern codification of 'democratic centralism' and the CPGB's constant renewal of this continually pulled its practice away from 'unity in diversity' towards either opportunist adaptation or sectarianism.

The planned campaigns of resignation were not the end of the CPGB's attempts to relate to the Labour rank and file in the early part of the war. The communists still had the issue of relating to those who did not want to join the CPGB. In February 1940, Dutt was already talking of the need for a Socialist Labour Alliance to relate to sincere socialists in the Labour Party prepared to oppose the Labour leadership.<sup>58</sup> This was the first inkling of the People's Convention, which took place in April 1941. Indeed, prominent figures in the movement, such as MP DN Pritt (expelled from the Labour Party in 1940 over his support for the Soviet invasion of Finland), were keen to stress that the People's Convention was "not intended to take the place of, or in any way weaken, the existing industrial, cooperative or political organisations of the working class".<sup>59</sup> Space precludes a detailed discussion of the politics of the convention, but it seems fairly clear that the CPGB was moving back into a cycle of adaptation to the Labour left and others, with the convention's vague, cross-class, pacifist rhetoric of defending 'the people's' living standards, a 'people's' peace and suchlike.<sup>60</sup>

The end of World War II was a watershed of sorts for the tactic of holding dual membership in the CPGB and the Labour Party, in that these endeavours never again seemed to have been seriously considered or attempted. In some senses, this is rather surprising, in that, post-war, the necessity of relating to and leading the Labour left, in the cause of bringing to power leftward-moving Labour governments, was to become firmly enshrined in the CPGB's strategy.

By the 1960s and 1970s this had become a problem of respectability - the CPGB's leadership was desperately concerned not to upset the rightwing gatekeepers of the Labour Party and frothed impotently at Trotskyist entrant organisations of that era. We have recently seen the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain issue instructions to its membership not to do anything to embarrass the Corbyn leadership, let alone embark on dual membership.

As we have seen, one thing the CPGB understood well in the 1930s was that it was simply impossible to persuade reformists to accept communists on the basis that the communists were harmless. Despite the CPGB's manifold and grievous flaws in the 1930s, we can at least conclude that it was made of much sterner stuff than its deluded 'heirs' ●

## Notes

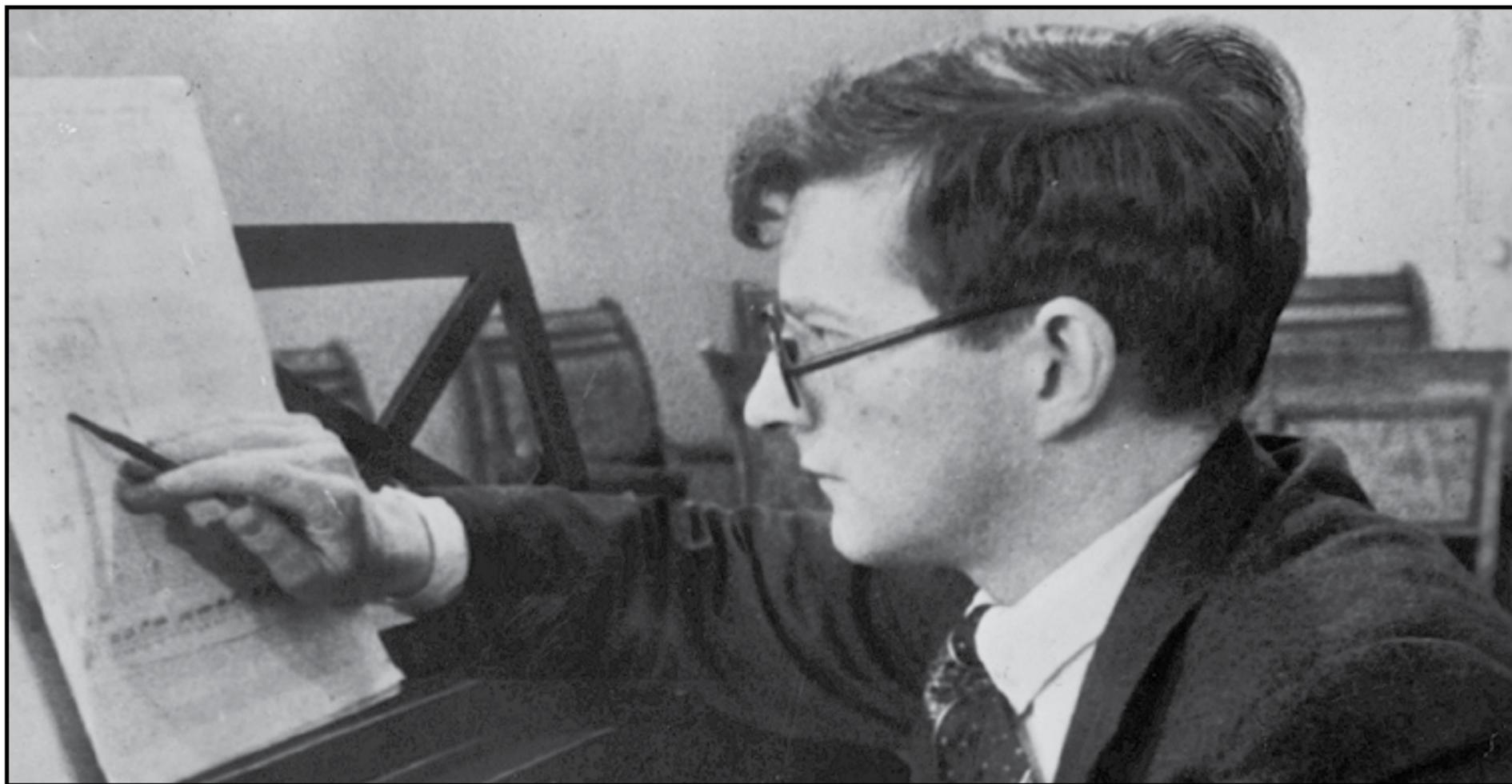
1. 'Up close and personal' *Weekly Worker* May 18.
2. 'Historic move by national committee: a new charter for the league' *Advance* August 1936.
3. *Ibid*.
4. 'Here is youth's Magna Charta' *Advance* October 1937.
5. R Ellis, 'The happiest youth in the world' *Advance* March 1937.
6. 'Laddie', 'I look on' *Advance* November 1936.
7. Baron suggested sexual manipulation on the part of the CPGB towards its young female members - a theme also present in *Rosie Hogarth* (1951). Gollan, whom Baron would have known in the 1930s, is apparently satirised in *Seeing life* (1958).
8. A Baron *The in-between time* London 1974, p94.
9. *Ibid* pp111-12.
10. R Ellis, 'The happiest youth in the world' *op cit*.
11. Charlie Van Gelderen and others formed the Youth Militant Group, the publisher of the paper, in 1936. The East Islington branch of the LLOY had a strong Trotskyist presence.
12. T Willis, 'We have our wreckers too!' *Advance* March 1937. See T Willis, 'Clear them out!' *Advance* April 1937 for more of the same.
13. J Gollan, 'What next for youth unity?' *Advance*

June 1937. For the Trotskyist view of Spanish events in the LLOY, see C Van Gelderen, 'Spain - a Trotskyist view' *Advance* August 1937; this article was contextualised by a statement from the *Advance* editors.

14. 'Frank Budd looks back at the national conference' *Advance* June 1937.
15. N Branson *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1927-1941* London 1985, p157.
16. C Haldane *Truth will out* London 1949, p182. Haldane said that, as a Labour councillor under CPGB discipline, she had supported the Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939, p268.
17. *Ibid* p183.
18. N Branson *op cit* p157.
19. W Thompson *The good old cause: British communism 1920-1991* London 1992, p57.
20. *Ibid* p227.
21. *Ibid* p57.
22. 'Ted Willis joins Young Communists' *Daily Worker* July 14 1939.
23. S Cripps, 'Labour Party "desertions"' *Tribune* July 21 1939. Willis later said that, despite all these LLOY departures to the YCL, "... the extraordinary thing is that the YCL did not show any appreciable growth. It was a mystery, rather like Pharaoh's dream of the seven thin cows who ate the seven fat cows and grew no fatter" - see T Willis *Whatever happened to Tom Mix?* London 1970, p170. However, it was reported that the YCL's membership "increased dramatically to new heights" in 1937-38, which coincided with the YCL becoming the leading force in the LLOY after organising the rebellion against the Labour NEC; in other words, those who subsequently defected in 1939 had already perhaps become communists at an earlier stage - A Thorpe, 'The membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-1945' *The Historical Journal* Vol 43, No 3, 2000, p783.
24. 'Labour candidate applies to join Communist Party' *Daily Worker* July 7 1939.
25. *Ibid*.
26. *Daily Worker* July 20 1939.
27. 'Oxford Labour leader joins Communist Party: step to make Labour stronger' *Daily Worker* July 13 1939.
28. 'Ted Willis joins Young Communists' *Daily Worker* July 14 1939; and 'Glasgow youth leaders join communists' *Daily Worker* July 29 1939.
29. *Daily Worker* July 20 1939.
30. 'Youth branches join up' *Daily Worker* August 2 1939.
31. *Daily Worker* August 3 1939.
32. 'To work for unity' *Daily Worker* August 4 1939.
33. '52 join up with Young Communists' *Daily Worker* August 7 1939.
34. 'Labour leaders move for unity' *Daily Worker* August 11 1939.
35. 'Labour youth form YCL' *Daily Worker* August 16 1939.
36. *Daily Worker* August 24 1939.
37. 'We can fight side by side - and win' *Daily Worker* July 15 1939.
38. 'No desertion, but move for unity' *Daily Worker* July 25 1939.
39. 'Why they came to communism' *Daily Worker* July 27 1939.
40. *Ibid*. This, or course, became the dogma of the CPGB in the post-war decades: build 'unity' by abstaining from the struggle inside the Labour Party.
41. *Ibid*.
42. K Morgan *Against fascism and war: ruptures and continuities in British communist politics 1935-41* Manchester 1989, p198.
43. H Laski *The secret battalion: an examination of the communist attitude to the Labour Party* London 1946, p27.
44. See K Morgan *op cit* pp85-253 for a detailed analysis of CPGB politics in the early part of the war.
45. 'Labour feeling against war grows' *Daily Worker* May 7 1940.
46. *Ibid*. Also see 'Labour Party conference manoeuvres' *Daily Worker* May 8 1940.
47. 'Booing greets Blum at Labour Party conference' *Daily Worker* May 16 1940.
48. 'Disgusted by Labour action' *Daily Worker* May 24 1940.
49. 'Labour councillor expelled' *Daily Worker* May 17 1940.
50. 'Councillor resigns from the Labour Party' *Daily Worker* May 30 1940.
51. 'Officials quit Labour over war issue' *Daily Worker* May 22 1940.
52. 'Labour councillor signs nomination paper for communist' *Daily Worker* June 1 1940.
53. 'Two leave Labour' *Daily Worker* June 3 1940.
54. K Morgan *op cit* p198.
55. In the context of Coventry, James Hinton argues: "The enormous movement of men and women around the country, caused by conscription, evacuation and transfer of labour, disrupted the local networks on which Labour Party organisation was based." See J Hinton, 'Coventry communism: a study of factory politics in the Second World War' *History Workshop Journal* Vol 10, No 1, 1980.
56. 'Electoral or political truce' *Daily Worker* May 6 1940.
57. 'A plain talk to Labour Party members' *Daily Worker* July 1 1940.
58. K Morgan *op cit* p202.
59. DN Pritt *Forward to a people's government* London 1941, p16.
60. Morgan's attempt to picture the People's Convention as a kind of successor to the National Left Wing Movement of the mid-1920s is completely erroneous for the reasons sketched out in the first part of this article: ie, the qualitative difference between the revolutionary programme the CPGB used in the NLWM to attempt to mould the Labour left and its later reliance on programmatic demands, designed to simply adapt to the consciousness of the Labour left. The People's Convention is very obviously an example of the latter. See K Morgan *op cit* p201.

## REVIEW

# The music inside ourselves

Julian Barnes *The noise of time* Vintage, 2016, pp192, £7.99

**A**s Marxists, we are the first to defend artistic freedom. But I am also interested in the distinction which must always be made between artists and their work. In the end it is the quality of the work which is the most important, not whether the artist is a socialist or not (just as well, because today there are so few!). Nevertheless I am fascinated by the artist's ideological position and how this affects his or her work.

Take the novelist, Julian Barnes, on Brexit or anti-Semitism: apropos the former, he says, like a good cosmopolitan liberal, "I voted 'remain'", adding: "Ours [ie, the British] has been an entirely pragmatic membership [of the European Union], never an idealistic one. We never bought into Europe as a *grand project*, or even an expression of fraternity." As for the other debate, he says: "Anti-Zionism may often disguise anti-Semitism".<sup>1</sup> He fails to see the converse: that Zionism has colluded with anti-Semitism in its own interests - just as he fails to put forward a socialist perspective on Brexit. So it is not surprising that he sees Stalinism as the inevitable outcome of Bolshevism.

Yet I greatly admire *The noise of time*, a fictional biography of Dimitri Shostakovich, because, like all Barnes's novels, it is written with great humility and empathy for his character; in precise, beautiful prose (his hallmark). Irony just runs off the page. (So one is justified in quoting a bit more than usual! I can also reveal the facts, since this is the story of a life which most of us know about.) He begins his story thus:

He had been standing by the lift for three hours. He was on his fifth cigarette, and his mind was skittering ... They always came for you in the middle of the night ... Rather than be dragged from his apartment in his pyjamas. He could not sleep and neither could his wife, Nita. He also feared that the NKVD would take his daughter away and put her

in an orphanage (pp7-15).

Dimitri and Nita? Despite his big ears and spectacles, Shostakovich had relationships with many women, including three marriages. As a young man he subscribed to the notion of free love: Apropos sex,

Now that the old ways were gone for ever ... someone had come up with the 'glass of water' theory ... when you were thirsty, you drank, and when you felt desire you had sex ... though it did depend on woman being freely desirous as they were desired ... But the analogy only took you so far. A glass of water did not engage the heart (p14).

Still, he remained faithful to Nita until death. She, however, took him at his word, having taken a lover. She was away with A when she died! When he visited her grave, it was covered in red roses; but they were not his! Dimitri then married a much younger woman. Yet it was Nita who was with him during his ordeal in 1936.

## 'Enemy of the people'

Why was Shostakovich standing by the lift waiting to be arrested? It started with one performance of his opera, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, on January 26 1936. On this occasion it was attended by comrade Stalin, along with comrades Molotov, Mikoyan and Zhdanov:

They took their places in the government box. Which had the misfortune to be situated immediately above

**Dimitri Shostakovich:  
confronted by 'the Power.'  
Julian Barnes: full of  
understanding for the  
brilliant Russian composer**

the percussion and brass ... In the entr'acte before Katerina's wedding, the woodwind and brass suddenly took it upon themselves to play more loudly than he had scored. And then it was like a virus spreading through each section ... Comrades Mikoyan and Zhdanov would shudder theatrically, turn to the figure behind the curtain and make some mocking remark. When the audience looked up at the box at the start of the fourth act, they saw that it had been vacated (p19).

In the Soviet Union, composers had a duty to write music for the people. They were "engineers of human souls", employed by the state, and it was the state's duty, "if they offended, to intervene and draw them back

to greater harmony with their audience ..." The leftist students at the conservatoire were "determined to break the bourgeois stranglehold of the arts". For these reasons, even "Tchaikovsky was decadent, and the slightest experimentation condemned as 'formalism'" (p25).

*Pravda* knew that the opera had only succeeded outside of the Soviet Union because

it was 'non-political' and confusing, and because it "tickled the perverted taste of the bourgeois with its fidgety, neurotic music" ... derived from jazz; how it replaced singing with 'shrieking' ... As for the libretto, it deliberately concentrated on the most sordid parts of Leskov's tale: the result was "coarse, primitive and vulgar" ... (This was "muddle instead of music") (p27).

But how was the state being built? The answer is not 'for the people's benefit'. The White Sea Canal is a good example: Built in the early 30s by means of convict labour,

the convicts were not just helping the nation advance, but 'reforging themselves'. Well there had been 100,000 labourers [but] a quarter of them ... died and those clearly had not been reforged. They were just chips that had flown while the wood was being chopped (p37).

It was unfortunate that, when Stalin came to see a performance of *Lady Macbeth* on that January night in 1936, the circumstances were not conducive to his enjoyment. For Stalin also considered himself an expert on music; therefore, irrespective of the official line, approved by himself; if he had enjoyed the opera, then Shostakovich would have been all right. But he did not enjoy it at all. So now the composer would have to be condemned as a dangerous bourgeois 'formalist'. Unlike music *per se*, opera was a dangerous mix of music, literature and theatre: a means to criticise and satirise society. By contrast - and this



was another irony - Dimitri was inspired with revolutionary idealism (certainly in his youth). He merely wanted to have the freedom to "help his fellow souls to develop and flourish".

Suddenly *Pravda*, which had praised the opera for the previous two years, found it a threat - it was too formalist and cosmopolitan. *Pravda* attacked Shostakovich as "an enemy of the people". After humiliating him 'Power' took away his livelihood. In the spring of 1937 he was ordered to report to the 'Big House' in Leningrad (the equivalent of the Lubyanka in Moscow). 'Power' wanted a face-to-face with him, in the form of his interrogator, comrade Zakrevsky. But being a formalist was not enough. Zakrevsky knows that Marshall Tukhachevsky is his friend and patron. The 'Red Napoleon' is a threat to Power and must be eliminated. He is accused of treachery (what else!). So Zakrevsky gives Shostakovich 48 hours to think about it: "On Monday ... you without fail will remember everything ... regarding [Tukhachevsky's] plot against comrade Stalin, of which you are the chief witness ..." The truth is they both enjoyed chasing pretty women. Dimitri told Nita everything - "and he saw beneath her reassurances that she agreed he was a dead man ..." (p46-47). Now for a bit of black farce:

On the Saturday night, and again on the Sunday night, he drank himself to sleep. It was not a complicated matter ... On the Monday morning he kissed Nita, held Glaya one last time, and caught the bus to [the Big House. There] he presented himself to the guard at reception. The soldier looked through the roster but could not find the name ... "What is your business? Who have you come to see?" "Interrogator Zakrevsky." The soldier looked up and said, "Well, you can go home. You are not on the list. Zakrevsky is not coming in today, so there is nobody to receive you."

Thus ended the First Conversation with Power ... Between the Saturday and the Monday, Zakrevsky himself had fallen under suspicion. His interrogator interrogated ... Three weeks after the Marshall's arrest he was shot, together with the elite of the Red Army. The general's plot to assassinate comrade Stalin had been discovered just in the nick of time [!] (pp49-50).

Tukhachevsky was the first of the old Bolshevik heroes to be to be executed, which marked the beginning of the great purge of 1937-38.

"[Shostakovich] waited for Power to resume its conversation with him. But he never heard from the Big House again." If he was to continue living, then he had to work. But what and how should he compose? Thus there began a battle with his conscience in the face of Power. He would show signs of cowardice by his willingness to conform; to produce the prescribed music at the party's behest; even become an ambassador for Soviet music abroad. Cowardice? Surely we are not entitled to judge him. What would we have done if we were Dimitri?

His Fifth Symphony marks a turning point. First premiered in late 1937, it is conventional in form; yet it is brilliant for all that: it has great emotional power; it is heroic (a symbol of what the revolution might have been). Irony follows upon irony:

A journalist described it as "a Soviet artist's creative reply to just criticism". Shostakovich never repudiated the phrase ... These words turned out to be the most famous he ever wrote - or, rather, never wrote. He allowed them to stand because they protected his music. Let Power have the words, because words cannot stain music. Music escapes from words; that is its purpose and its majesty (pp57-58).

But Shostakovich was to have trouble again in the future. His Eighth Symphony, written to commemorate the war, was again castigated for its formalist overtones. It was imbued with tragedy and individual pessimism. Whereas war, according to the musical bureaucrats, is to be celebrated as something "glorious and triumphant".

Then:

... after a year of yet more disgrace, he had his Second Conversation with Power. "The thunderclap comes from the heavens, not from a pile of dung", as the poet puts it. He was sitting at home with Nita ... on March 16 1949 when the telephone rang ... Stalin is about to come onto the line ...

"Dimitri Dmitrievich", the voice of Power began, "how are you?" "Thank you, Iosif Vissarionovich, everything is just fine. Only I am suffering from stomach ache." "I am sorry to hear that. We will find a doctor for you." And so it went on. Comrade Stalin could not have been more accommodating, anxious to satisfy the 'arch reactionary's' every need. Why? His music was famous abroad. Therefore Shostakovich was required to attend the forthcoming Cultural and Scientific Congress for World Peace in New York [accompanied by a Soviet orchestra].

"Over there, [my music] is often played, whereas here it is not played. They might ask me about it. So how am I to behave in such a situation?" "What do you mean ...?" "It is forbidden ... in the Union of Composers." "Forbidden? ... by whom?" "By the State Commission of repertoire ... I am in effect blacklisted ..." "No," the voice of Power replied. "We didn't give that order. It is a mistake. The mistake will be corrected. None of your works has been forbidden. They can be freely played ... There will have to be an official reprimand."

When it came a few days later, the official correction was signed, "Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, I Stalin." And so he went to New York. (pp79-81).

## 'Humanitarians'

Barnes is spot on when it comes to Shostakovich's relations with "famous western humanitarians":

The singer [Paul] Robeson, loud in his applause for political killing. Roman Rolland and Bernard Shaw, who disgusted him more [because] they had the temerity to admire his music, while ignoring how Power treated him and all other artists ... Shaw was the worse of the two: "Hunger in Russia? ... Nonsense, I've been fed as well as anywhere in the world ... You frighten me with the word 'dictator'."

And the credulous fool hobnobbed with Stalin and saw nothing ... How many martyrs would it take to prove the regime's wickedness?

Not long after his return to Moscow, Shostakovich read an article in the Soviet magazine *New World*:

... he read of the congress's huge success, and of the state department's furious decision to cut short the Soviet delegation's stay ... "Yes [he thought], the rulers of Washington fear our music, our speeches on music - fear them because truth in any form hinders them from organising diversions against peace" (pp107-11).

Spot on again, Mr Barnes - although the tragic divisions of the cold war, for the world working class, would continue for a quite a few decades more (the Korean war was just around the corner). Stalinism's poisonous legacy needed a bit more time to finally sink in.

Despite his meeting with Shaw and his reflections about that, Shostakovich continued to compose rubbish as well

as great music. After New York, he composed an oratorio called *The song of the forests*, based on a text about the regeneration of the steppes,

and how Stalin, true Leader, Teacher, the Friend of Children, the Great Helmsman, the Father of the Nation, and Great Railway Engineer, was now also the Great Gardener. "Let us clothe the Motherland in Forests!"

... The work's thunderous banality had ensured its immediate success. It helped him win his fourth Stalin Prize: 100,000 roubles, and a dacha. He had paid Caesar and Caesar had not been ungrateful in return. He also received the order of Lenin at ... regular intervals. Yet he kept beside his bedside always a postcard of Titian's *The tribute money* (p117).

Fear and cowardice as a means to stay alive has its price - deep personal guilt (cf the *Kapos* who kept the Nazi gas chambers working day and night).

A decade or so has passed. It is the Khrushchev era. Under his rule, as Akhmatova said, "Power had become vegetarian"! Shostakovich kept on asking himself:

Why had he survived being named enemy of the people by the newspapers? Why had Zakrevsky disappeared between a Saturday and a Monday? Why had he been spared, when so many around him had been arrested, exiled, murdered or had disappeared ... One answer would fit all these questions: "Stalin says he is not to be touched."

But fate could always turn against him. Meanwhile, he had his little victories. As poacher turned game-keeper or as a fellow examiner at the Conservatoire, he came across a young student, who, like himself, was terrified of saying the wrong thing, so she was unable to complete her orals. His colleague called for a break to calm her down. While he was out of the room Shostakovich decided to get the most difficult aspect out of the way:

"Let's put all those official questions to one side. Instead I'll ask you this: what is revisionism?" ... The girl reflected for a while, and then answered confidently, "Revisionism is the highest stage in the development of Marxism-Leninism." Whereupon he smiled, and gave her the best mark possible (p124).

Well, Mr Barnes, you would say that, wouldn't you? A Marxist would substitute 'the Stalinist school of falsification' for 'Marxism-Leninism'.

Shostakovich and Stravinsky? Compare and contrast artist and man.

(I refuse to add Prokofiev: he wrote music which was different; but he was just as great a composer as Shostakovich. At least he came back to the Soviet Union and was confronted with the same threats and dilemmas as his rival. But here is another tragic irony: poor Sergei died aged 50, just a few hours before Stalin; therefore he would never know that the tyrant was gone for ever. His family then had the misfortune of waiting most of the day for the Chief's funeral procession to pass, before they could lay their beloved Prokofiev to rest. Shostakovich did not attend.)

Back to Stravinsky:

When the thaw came, [his] music was played again, and Khrushchev, who knew as much about music as a pig knows about oranges, was persuaded to invite the famous exile to return for a visit ... But Stravinsky had some fun. For decades he had been denounced by the Soviet authorities as a lackey of capitalism. So when a musical bureaucrat came towards him with a fake smile and an extended hand, Stravinsky, instead of offering his own hand, gave the official the head of his walking stick to shake

... who's the lackey now?

[But for Dimitri] it was one thing to humiliate a Soviet bureaucrat once Power had grown vegetarian; another to protest when Power was carnivorous. And Stravinsky had spent decades sitting on top of his American Mount Olympus - aloof, egocentric, unconcerned [about Soviet barbarism. But] did he utter a single public word of protest while breathing the air of freedom? (pp132-33).

## Hero or coward?

Still, and quite rightly, Shostakovich "revered Stravinsky the composer [as much] as he despised Stravinsky the thinker".

For Dimitri, being a hero was easier than being a coward: "To be a hero, you only had to be brave for a moment - when you took out the gun, threw the bomb", etc.

But, to be a coward, you had to embark on a career that lasted a lifetime. You could never relax. You had to anticipate the next occasion when you would have to make excuses for yourself, ... and the state of your own fallen, abject character. Being a coward required pertinacity, persistence, a refusal to change - which made it a kind of courage ... The pleasures of irony (p158).

So did it matter when he finally joined the Communist Party of the Soviet Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (another fiction)? Did he join out of fear or opportunism?

The theme of personal cowardice as an alternative to premature and violent death haunts this novel. It is what makes it so human and great (whither ourselves?) - although we are in the age of 'vegetarian' Power. Now he is a party member, Shostakovich is free to relax and be a bit more daring ... Well, there were limits. After *The nose*, he toyed with the idea of setting Gogol's *The portrait* to words and music too. But that was as far as it got.

The thing was, it haunted him:

It was the tale of a talented young painter called Chartkov, who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for gold roubles: a Faustian pact which brings success and fashionability ... In *The portrait* there is a clear, two-way choice: integrity or corruption. Integrity is like virginity: once lost, never recoverable. But in the real world, especially the extreme version of it he had lived through, things were not like this. There was a third choice: integrity and corruption.

You could be like Chartkov or Galileo.

As a counterbalance to cowardice, Shostakovich played the secret joker. According to Barnes, the final movement of his Fifth Symphony is "the equivalent of painting a clown's grin on a corpse". Would the Power be wise to it? The same year that he joined the party, he completed his Eighth Quartet, which he said in private was "dedicated to the memory of a composer". If the musical authorities had known this, they would have condemned it as "unacceptably egotistical and pessimistic". But the dedication on the published score reads: "To the victims of fascism and war." Maybe you can take irony too far: ie, when "irony curdles into sarcasm".

Then again, it is only western commentators who insist that such works are primarily protests against the regime. Might they also be an expression of the failure of the socialist dream, upheld by the young Shostakovich - except that under the Stalinist regime the dream could not be made reality? The utopian attempt to build socialism in one country could only lead to the barbarism of the gulag, the enforced starvation of

millions of people, culminating in that excrescence, the great purge of the old Bolshevik leaders.

As for his defence of art, I think that Barnes gets it slightly wrong:

Render unto art that which is art's. Such was the creed for art's sake, of formalism, egocentric pessimism, revisionism, and all the other 'isms' thrown at [Shostakovich] down the years. And Power's reply would always be the same: "Repeat after me." it would say, "*Art belongs to the people - VI Lenin. Art belongs to the people - VI Lenin.*"

Well, no! we cannot leave it at that. We have to say that Lenin was wrong about this; it was his own - misguided - view of art, but this did *not* mean that he had a *prescriptive* view of art. (As an earlier article in this paper says about the Russian avant garde, Lenin defended the right of artists to experiment with form and content, even at the height of the civil war.)

We are now getting glimpses of how Barnes himself views the Russian Revolution and communism in general. It is simplistic and erroneous:

[Shostakovich] had also written that, however much you scrubbed a Russian, he would remain a Russian. That was what Karlo-Marlo and his descendants had never understood. They wanted to be engineers of human souls; but the Russians, despite their faults, were not machines. To be Russian was to be pessimistic; to be Soviet was to be optimistic. [The regime and its musical bureaucrats, via newspaper editorials, kept telling everyone] that what they wanted was an "optimistic Shostakovich". Another contradiction in terms (pp70-71).

Barnes is also cynical. Communism is a great idea, but will it ever work in practice? During the New York episode, he introduces an imaginary, sardonic conversation between a Soviet musician and Power on the Russian Revolution itself:

Citizen Second Oboe: "Yes it's a wonderful revolution ... But I just wonder, from time to time ... I might be completely wrong, of course, but was it absolutely necessary to shoot all those engineers, generals, scientists, musicologists? To send millions to the camps, to use slave labour and work it to death, to make everyone terrified, to extort false confessions in the name of the Revolution?"

Power: "Yes, yes, I see your point. I'm sure you're right. But let's leave it for now. We'll make that change next time round" (p83).

Nevertheless, Barnes deserves to have the last word. About two thirds of the way through, he gets to the heart of the matter - which also explains the book's title: What was it that made Shostakovich one of the greatest composers of the 20th century:

If music is tragic, those with asses' ears accuse it of being cynical. But when a composer is bitter, or in despair, or pessimistic, that means that he believes in something. What could he put up against the noise of time? Only that music which is inside ourselves - the music of our being, which is transformed by some into real music. Which, over the decades, if it is strong and true and pure enough to drown out the noise of time, is transformed into the whisper of history. This was what he held to (p125).

*The noise of time* should have won the Mann-Booker Prize in 2016 ●

Max Grierson

## Notes

1. 'Diary' *London Review of Books* p42, April 20 2017.

## USA

# Wait until 2018

It seems quite possible that Donald Trump will not survive his full term, writes **Peter Manson**. But don't expect any formal moves towards impeachment just yet



**Donald Trump: \$110 billion in weapons**

The possibility that Donald Trump will eventually be impeached has greatly increased over the last couple of weeks - not least since the president fired the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, James Comey, on May 5.

The reason why this caused such a furore, of course, was that the FBI under Comey had been investigating whether Trump's aides had been colluding with Moscow in the run-up to his election - a US intelligence assessment had expressed "high confidence" that Russian president Vladimir Putin had personally ordered an "influence campaign" to harm Hillary Clinton's electoral chances, using disinformation, data theft and leaks. A Senate inquiry is also currently underway into whether the Trump campaign was linked to this Russian 'meddling' in the election and, in fact, Comey had been due to testify before it. Just before his dismissal he had been seeking more funds specifically for the FBI investigation into the Trump-Russia link.

The idea that a sitting president should act in a way calculated to hamper an official investigation into his own alleged misdemeanours has been likened to the behaviour of Richard Nixon, who dismissed the special prosecutor investigating the Watergate scandal in 1973 - Nixon, of course, jumped before he was pushed by resigning the following year.

The initial excuse given by the White House for Comey's sacking was that he had mishandled an earlier FBI investigation - into the alleged leaking of official emails, some containing classified information, by Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton to her husband's laptop when she was secretary of state. Deputy attorney general Rod Rosenstein issued a document listing Comey's alleged shortcomings - most notably over his handling of the revelation concerning the Clinton investigation just before the presidential election.

The obvious response to that excuse is: 'Why did it take so long for Trump to act?' In fact the Republican candidate had praised Comey for his "guts" in reopening the investigation into the leaked emails back in October 2016. Trump had said, "I respect that very much", and added: "What he did - he brought back his reputation".

With accusations flying thick and fast, it is claimed that prior to Comey's sacking Trump's team had called on the attorney general to "come up with reasons" to give him the boot. But most of that team were apparently kept in the dark before the announcement of the dismissal, leaving them scrambling around for a persuasive explanation for the president's action.

Trump and Comey had been at loggerheads for the past couple of months - particularly after the president accused Barack Obama of wiretapping Trump Tower in March - a claim publicly refuted by the FBI director. Then earlier this month, in giving evidence to the Senate judiciary committee, Comey said the thought that he may have influenced the outcome of the presidential election by announcing the fresh Clinton investigation made him feel "mildly nauseous". Not that Trump took this personally, of course!

Trump himself is still fixated with something else which he said influenced the election result - something that allegedly gave Clinton almost three million votes more than he got (even though he won as a result of the electoral college system). Trump has claimed that between three and five million immigrants voted illegally in November: "They all voted for Hillary ... I don't believe I got one [of their votes]," he said earlier this year. So now he has set up a commission on "election integrity" to investigate voter fraud by "illegals"!

It was only the second time in over a century that an FBI director has been fired - obviously there must be a very serious misdemeanour

for that to happen. But the sacking of Comey followed the dismissal by Trump of his national security advisor, Michael Flynn, in February. Flynn had failed to disclose what he had been discussing with Russian ambassador Sergei Kislyak - another Russian connection! But it seems that previously Trump had asked Comey to drop the FBI investigation into Flynn. Apparently Flynn and Kislyak had discussed setting up a communications "back channel" between Trump and Putin that would bypass official security surveillance - no wonder the 'intelligence community' was outraged! And then, after firing Comey, the president allegedly told the Russians that the sacked FBI director had been "crazy - a real nut job".

And, if that was not enough, Trump was then accused of sharing "highly sensitive intelligence" with Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov when they met in the White House earlier this month. Apparently the president described details of Islamic State threats relating to the use of laptops on passenger aircraft - "more information ... than we have shared with our own allies", according to unnamed US officials. Ironically the president's indiscretion was revealed just days before his visit to Israel - the alleged source of the information about the possibility of explosions being triggered by laptops.

After days of pressure from the Democrats, another former FBI director, Robert Mueller, was appointed special prosecutor to investigate the alleged ties of Trump aides with Russian officials - Democrats are making hay by claiming that Comey's dismissal is "part of a cover-up" and is evidence of the White House "brazenly interfering" in the Senate probe. Of course, the same Democrats had themselves called for Comey's head when he announced a fresh probe into the leaked emails allegation in the run-up to the election. Meanwhile, Comey himself is due to testify before the Senate Intelligence

Committee on May 28.

## Biding their time

Of course, Trump complains that he is being treated "worse than any politician" has ever been (a slight exaggeration, one feels), being the victim of "the greatest witch-hunt in American history". But his actions have caused widespread disquiet - including in the FBI itself, where, according to one official, Trump has "essentially declared war on a lot of people", which means that there will now be "a concerted effort to respond" from within the establishment.

Clinton herself has been eager to position herself as the head of the campaign to oust the president, setting up a new grouping called Onward Together to "advance progressive values". And anti-Trump campaigners are also focussing on the president's personal deficiencies - such as his inability to keep his own staff and aides onside - it is claimed he cannot fill hundreds of vacancies in policymaking positions as a result.

However, right now it is very unlikely there will be any move to impeach the president - there is the small matter of the mid-term elections in November 2018. Republicans know that Trump's current loss of support - down to 38%, according to a recent poll - is likely to impact adversely on their own re-election chances, so very few of them are openly criticising his actions (a bit like the attitude of rightwing Labour MPs in relation to Jeremy Corbyn in the run-up to the UK general election). The likes of republican senator John McCain - who says that the whole business has "reached a point where it's of Watergate size and scale" - are in a minority. But many more could side with an enlarged Democrat opposition after 2018.

According to *The Daily Telegraph* defence editor Con Coughlin, there is now great concern over

sends to the outside world - particularly those countries like Britain that look to the occupant of the White House to provide the western alliance with strong and effective leadership. In recent weeks Trump had started to fill the role: the bombing of Syria had dissuaded the Assad regime from carrying out further chemical weapon attacks, and his robust response to North Korea's nuclear weapons programme may yet pay dividends.

Instead the White House looks weak and disorganised ... (May 11).

As for Charles Krauthammer of the *Washington Post*, he wrote of the dismissal of Comey:

If Trump thought this would kill the inquiry and the story, or perhaps even just derail it somewhat, he's made the blunder of the decade. Whacking Comey has brought more critical attention to the Russia story than anything imaginable. It won't stop the FBI investigation. And the confirmation hearings for a successor will become a nationally televised forum for collusion allegations, which up till now have remained a scandal in search of a crime (May 11).

No doubt Trump was very relieved to get away from it all, as he embarked upon his first foreign tour, beginning in Saudi Arabia and then Israel.

The speech delivered by Trump to the gathering of Muslim heads of state in Riyadh was, it seems, written by none other than Stephen Miller - the architect of Trump's notorious Muslim ban! In his election campaign he insisted that Muslims were so dangerous that they had to be denied permission to enter the US. But in Saudi Arabia he declared that Islam was "one of the world's great religions".

He urged everyone, including the "magnificent" Saudis, to stand up for our 'common values' and work to defeat IS - let us not dwell on the fact that the main source of IS and other jihadi sponsorship has been precisely Saudi royals and businessmen.

But what clinches it for the likes of King Salman is that there is one policy area that Trump is sticking to since the election campaign - the continued stigmatisation of Iran, the Saudis' main regional rival. All "nations of conscience" (like the US and Saudi Arabia) must "work together to isolate" Iran, urged Trump - a message he repeated on the next leg of his tour, in Israel. And Trump has made much of the financial benefits to the US - in the shape of a \$110 billion arms deal, under which Riyadh will buy US-produced helicopters, warships and missile systems.

Well, at least his continued hostility to Tehran was welcomed by the rightwing press: "The new US president's administration has appeared worryingly chaotic in some areas," complained the *Telegraph* editorial. "Happily not in this" (May 23).

Unfortunately for him, however, it does not look very likely that such policy areas will be enough to save his skin in the long term. His disdain for political correctness, his impetuous behaviour and his total unreliability have together reinforced the notion that the president the establishment never wanted will eventually be shown the red card ●

... the signal Mr Trump's brutal dispatch

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## FRANCE

# Will Macron have a majority?

In June there will be a general election in France as well as the UK. René Gimpel looks at the main contenders



Emmanuel Macron: ministers from the right

France's presidential election provided the drama of two quasi-outsiders, Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen, facing off - both having defeated candidates from mainstream political parties. Though Macron held a ministerial post (economy) under president François Hollande, neither he nor Le Pen had ever been elected.

As is customary, presidential elections are followed by general elections (*les législatives*) to parliament (*assemblée nationale*), which will take place in two rounds, on June 11 and 18.<sup>1</sup> The national assembly is made up of the representatives of 577 constituencies - 27 of which are overseas regions or territories, such as Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guiana - while 11 seats are reserved for French citizens living abroad. For instance, here in the UK, assembly candidates will vie for election in order to represent the several hundred thousand French nationals living here and in 10 other European countries - hence the constituency title, 'Assembly Member for Northern Europe'.

Since 1958, no president has failed to secure a parliamentary majority for his party in the subsequent general election. However, though Emmanuel Macron has a new party, République En Marche (REM - 'Forward, the Republic'), the party has no deputies in the outgoing national assembly. Macron is attempting to secure his majority by adopting a particular strategy. True to his own positioning as a centrist candidate, he has nominated ministers from the right, notably prime minister Edouard Philippe from the Republicans - François Fillon's party - and from slightly left-of-centre parties. Macron has not required appointees to abandon their current political affiliation, but perhaps the question should be, will those other

parties accept the defection of their members to REM?

Macron stated that he wanted to balance his choice of ministerial posts between men and women - which he has, but with a caveat: only one important post, defence, has gone to a woman. She is Sylvie Goulard, who, like Macron, is a graduate of the elite Ecole Nationale d'Administration, one of the *grandes écoles*.<sup>3</sup> After lengthy negotiations, REM gained the support of a previous centrist party, the Mouvement Démocratique (MoDem), with its high-profile leader, François Bayrou, now appointed minister of justice, despite having to appear in court in January 2019 to face defamation charges.

Originally REM was to field candidates in all 577 constituencies, but this has been scaled back to 526. The uncontested constituencies are those Macron believes will return assembly members sympathetic to REM and hence likely to align themselves with his programme. REM will have a balanced gender candidacy and Macron has stated that he wants half the candidates to be drawn from "civil society" rather than the "political classes". In France, it is not necessary to hold any elected position to be appointed secretary of state or minister and some of REM's ministers are drawn from this "civil society", as it is called. Nevertheless, in the forthcoming general election, those ministers who must stand for election or re-election have been informed that if they fail to gain a seat in the national assembly their portfolio will be withdrawn.

Current opinion polls suggest that REM will have the largest number of seats in the new assembly - possibly an overall majority. But there are risks. As mentioned, existing political parties who have seen their members accept

ministerial posts from Macron may mount a rival candidate against them in their constituency. Another problem for REM concerns the distribution of public funds to political parties, which is based on the results obtained. If a candidate from another party wins and that candidate has endorsed REM, do the funds go to the latter, or to the party of the candidate's official affiliation? On top of this, there is the usual horse-trading among parties, each one proposing to withdraw a candidate in one constituency if the second party withdraws in another.

The biggest unknown is what will happen to REM if it becomes the governing party. If the electorate votes for the 'moderates' of REM in order to exclude far left and right, this does not mean that stability is assured. REM's make-up is of people with quite differing views, whether they are in ministerial positions or not, so key questions - like keeping or scrapping the 35-hour week and the tax on wealth - will quickly antagonise one side or the other.

The Front National currently has only two deputies in the assembly, but is likely to increase this, though not by as much as was expected before Le Pen's defeat. The far left, as represented by Mélançon's La France Insoumise (FI - 'France Unbowed') and the Parti Communiste Français, are likely to see a modest increase in their number of seats. They might have expected more if they had made an electoral pact to support each other's candidates in their respective strongholds. The PCF backed Mélançon in the first round of the presidential election, but this solidarity seems to have disappeared and both parties will contest the same seats.

The Parti Socialiste did badly in the presidential elections, with its

candidate, Benoît Hamon, obtaining only 6% of the vote - and this despite the fact that Hamon represented the left wing of the party (supporting the 35-hour week, together with the legalisation of cannabis and euthanasia, as well as making the right pro-ecology noises). The PS is preparing to fight back in the general election - it is entirely dissatisfied with the current ministerial composition. In the first place, it fell to Edouard Philippe, having been appointed prime minister, to recommend ministerial posts, not Emmanuel Macron, because this is the prime minister's prerogative. Philippe will have acted in concert with Macron though, and the choice of ministers is revealing of Macron's move to the right. No member of the Parti Socialiste has been chosen, because new ministers have either resigned from the party or have been expelled from it. The party's first secretary, Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, held a press conference on May 18, in which he criticised Philippe's "vertical column" of rightwing appointees, with too many ministers drawn from the *grandes écoles* rather than civil society.

Cambadélis went on to list the reactionary social and fiscal attitudes of those flocking around REM and made the obvious point that there was nothing "socialist" in any aspect of Macron's programme ●

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## Notes

1. As in the presidential elections, France uses a two-round, first-past-the-post system: if no candidate obtains an absolute majority in the first round, the two candidates with the highest number of votes go through for the decider.
2. Before his victory, Emmanuel Macron's party was called *En marche!*
3. The *grandes écoles* ('great schools') refers to those institutions which mould the technocratic and political elites in France.

## What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# weekly WORKER

**Trump puts together Saudi-Israel alliance against Iran**

## Still an imperialist target

Yassamine Mather analyses the significance of Hassan Rouhani's re-election

**B**y all accounts it has been a bizarre week in the Middle East. The Iranian people - nervous about the possibility of war and further sanctions - went to the polls in their millions to re-elect a man they think of as a 'moderate' reformist: Hassan Rouhani. Last week it was clear that, with the last-minute withdrawal of both Mohammed Baqer Qalibaf and Es'haq Jahangiri, the presidential election would be decided in the first round.

Most Iranians are not exactly keen on their current president, who has failed to improve the economic situation, despite the lifting of some sanctions. They are well aware of the corruption of his government and his failure to deliver political reform. However, they are grateful for small mercies - the lifting of some sanctions means that at least they can buy medicine at reasonable prices, hospitals can import life-saving equipment and the threat of an imminent US or Israeli attack has receded. They are also glad they do not live in other Middle Eastern countries - Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, etc - where US-style regime change has cost the lives of so many, and led to the destruction of the economy and whole areas of society. And most Iranians did not believe the promises of Rouhani's main challenger - rightwing conservative cleric Ebrahim Raisi - who claimed to be a defender of the underprivileged and a man who would bring back "dignity" to Iran's Islamic Republic.

Meanwhile, just a day after the May 19 election Donald Trump arrived in Riyadh to consolidate an anti-Iranian alliance that will include Saudi Arabia, the Emirates of the Persian Gulf, Egypt and Israel! Even though a military confrontation is unlikely in the short term, Trump's continued anti-Iran statements and actions are the only consistent part of his foreign policy, but, contrary to what he and his 'regime change from above' Iranian allies believe, this will only have one effect - consolidating the rule of the clerics. Nevertheless, this week in Riyadh and Tel Aviv, the theme was familiar: as far as terrorism is concerned, Iran is the main culprit!

I have spent most of my life opposing Iran's Islamic Republic, but a lie is a lie and should be exposed: the Iranian government has been very careful not to get involved in acts of terrorism against western civilians. No-one can deny that it has repeatedly terrorised its own citizens, but this is not what Trump is referring to. Even more ironic is the fact that Trump's statements were made in the capital of Saudi Arabia, a country with a clear connection to Salafi/jihadi terror; and Tel Aviv, where the state is accused of many atrocities against Palestinians. In fact the declared aim (some say *raison d'être*) of Islamic State is to destroy Shia Iran. Those who doubt the IS-Saudi connection should read this from Alastair Crooke:

It appears - even now - that Saudi Arabia's ruling elite is divided. Some applaud that Isis is fighting Iranian



Supreme leader Ali Khamenei casting the first vote

Shiite 'fire' with Sunni 'fire'; that a new Sunni state is taking shape at the very heart of what they regard as a historical Sunni patrimony; and they are drawn by Da'esh's strict Salafist ideology ...

One dominant strand to the Saudi identity pertains directly to Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (the founder of Wahhabism), and the use to which his radical, exclusionist puritanism was put by Ibn Saud. (The latter was then no more than a minor leader - amongst many - of continually sparring and raiding Bedouin tribes in the baking and desperately poor deserts of the Nejd.)

The second strand to this perplexing duality relates precisely to King Abd-al Aziz's subsequent shift towards statehood in the 1920s: his curbing of Ikhwan violence (in order to have diplomatic standing as a nation-state with Britain and America); his institutionalisation of the original Wahhabist impulse - and the subsequent seizing of the opportunely surging petrodollar spigot in the 1970s, to channel the volatile Ikhwan current away from home towards export - by diffusing a cultural revolution, rather than violent revolution, throughout the Muslim world.<sup>1</sup>

The threat of the new US-led Saudi-Israeli alliance against Iran is not limited to a war of words. The United States and Saudi Arabia have just concluded a \$110 billion arms deal (\$350 billion over the coming decade), as well as the announcement of \$40 billion of Saudi investments in US infrastructure projects.<sup>2</sup>

Going back to the Iranian election, the scale of Rouhani's victory - with 57 % of the vote, as opposed to 38% for Raisi (the remainder going to

the two minor candidates still on the ballot) - came as a blow to conservative hard-liners. It was thought that with the backing of senior commanders of the Revolutionary Guards, the judiciary and the conservative clergy, not to mention Raisi's promise to fight corruption, treble subsidies, etc, he would do better.

No doubt the media frenzy about the possibility of a Raisi win encouraged Iranians inside and outside the country to vote in large numbers - the turnout was 73%. Many polling stations had to stay open until 10 or 11pm. In this respect the main victor is no doubt supreme leader Ali Khamenei, who had emphasised throughout the campaign that the main issue as far as he was concerned was the participation of Iranians in the election.

Clearly no-one takes Khamenei's rhetoric on the 'resistance economy' seriously - Iran is entirely merged with global capital. This is also true of those sections owned by the Revolutionary Guards, their commanders and their relatives. During the campaign, it became clear that the 'isolationist' leaders of the Revolutionary Guards had even managed to co-invest with Trump's own enterprises in the Republic of Azerbaijan. In 2012, the Trump Organization and local developers signed a contract to convert an existing building to a luxury hotel.

According to *The New Yorker*, the Trump Organization signed off on the deal with the powerful Mammadov family who, aside from regularly getting called out for exploiting political power to increase their personal wealth, has reported ties with a dealer who was said to be a go-between with the Revolutionary Guards: "Ziya Mammadov had in the past been accused of conspiring with an agent of the Revolutionary Guards

to make overpriced deals that would enrich them both, while allowing them to flout prohibitions against money laundering."<sup>3</sup>

The supporters of further sanctions against Iran include a plethora of left and right opposition groups, ranging from royalists to those on the left whose survival in exile depends on funds associated with regime change from above. These die-hard advocates of western 'humanitarian intervention' have already seen a reduction in funds coming from North American and European governments for their women's organisations, satellite TV channels and even 'workers' solidarity fronts'. However, in both words and action they are with Trump and the Saudi-Israeli alliance.

While I myself would certainly not have voted, their reaction to the election was to insult those who did so - ie, a large majority of Iranians - with little or no understanding of the reasons behind this. Clearly those living in Iran have few illusions in the current regime, and the majority of those who voted for Rouhani do not believe his promises about improving the economic situation, dealing with corruption, etc. But, faced with a choice between bad and worse - at a time when the threat of war against Iran has not been removed and when the Trump administration has put Iran back in the "axis of evil" category - they chose the lesser of many evils.

Of course, for all of Trump's flowery statements on the Iran nuclear deal, at this stage he is unlikely to walk away from it. No doubt the re-election of the 'moderate' Rouhani means outside Riyadh and Tel Aviv he will find little support for military operations against Iran. Several European leaders

congratulated Rouhani on his re-election, with UK foreign secretary Boris Johnson amongst the first to contact Tehran.

During the election campaign Rouhani claimed that only he would be able to ensure that the remaining sanctions - those imposed by the US over 35 years ago and not related to the nuclear deal - would be lifted. Clearly, it is unlikely that this will happen, at least under the current administration in Washington. However, the narrative about this is another example of false truth being conveyed as fact.

The US and western media keep talking of Iran's support for Hezbollah in Lebanon, as if this is simply part of the Islamic Republic's expansionist 'terrorist' policies. But the truth is more complicated. Iranian support for Hezbollah and Syria started more than three decades ago as part of the policy to expand the influence of Shia Islam in the region, and some in the ranks of the Revolutionary Guards might still harbour such ambitions. But recently it has been Iran which needs Hezbollah, not the other way round. Had it not been for the group's military capability, Israel and the US might have been tempted to bomb Iran's nuclear facilities.

In conclusion, the vote shows:

- The politics of fear worked in ensuring a high turnout.
- The fact that the supreme leader has willingly accepted the election result demonstrates that he was not opposed to a Rouhani victory, as some had suggested. I would go so far as to say that rumours of his support for Raisi were exaggerated - maybe this was a clever ruse to ensure a high turnout, or perhaps he supported Rouhani all along. After all, for Khamenei the main issue has always been the stability and survival of the Shia republic and currently Rouhani is a safe pair of hands.
- The 'regime change from above' opposition, financed by US/Israeli/Saudi funds, is in a sad state. The so-called left amongst them should be thoroughly ashamed of themselves - whether they like it or not, their collapse into little more than pro-imperialist propaganda agents has actually helped the survival of the Islamic Republic ●

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### Notes

1. www.huffingtonpost.com/alastair-crooke/isis-wahhabism-saudi-arabia\_b\_5717157.html.
2. See www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/05/trump-russia-middle-east-saudi-arabia-visit-israel-iran.html#ixzz4hqc18du.
3. www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/03/13/donald-trumps-worst-deal.

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