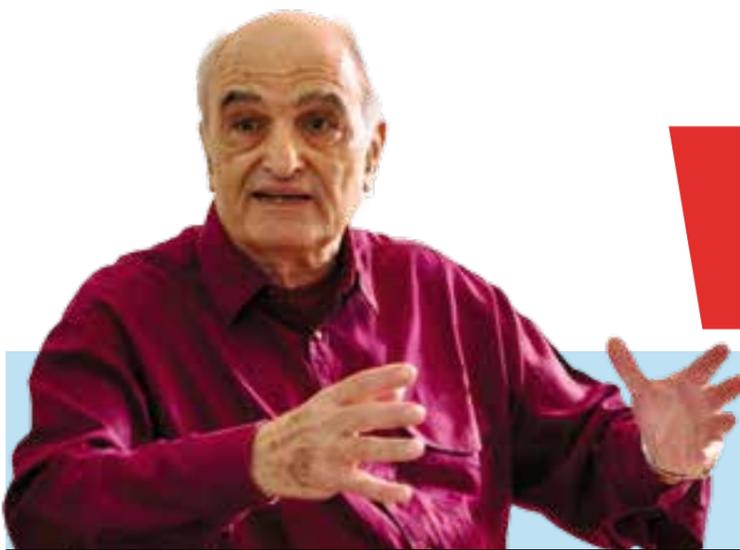


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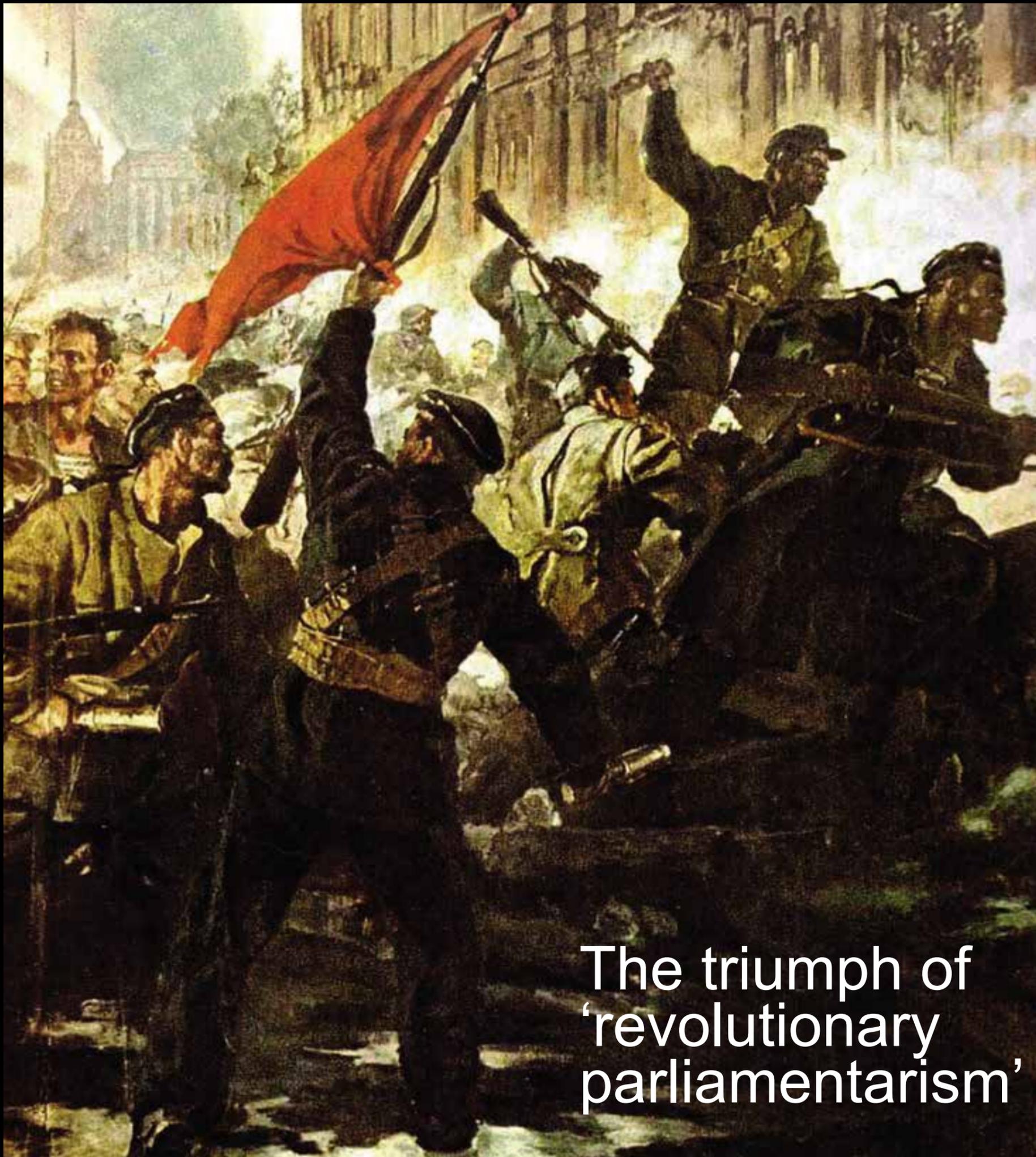
**Labour's 'flexible'  
rules: the strange case  
of Moshé Machover**

- Letters and debate
- CPGB aggregate
- LPM's 13 points
- Ireland: abortion

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# LETTERS



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

## Confession

I would like to thank *Weekly Worker* for its extensive report on my summary expulsion from the Labour Party, and for publishing an interview, in which I was able to respond to some of the false allegations against me, made by some 'allegators' wallowing in a secret swamp ('Expelled for saying the unsayable', October 8).

But I wish to point out a couple of delicious ironies in this affair. One of the accusations against me was being "associated" (whatever that may mean) with Labour Party Marxists. This was quoted as one of the reasons for my expulsion. Now I see that comrade Stan Keable of LPM has likewise been expelled summarily from the party. The accusation against him? Why, it is that LPM published an article by me! As a logician, I cherish such logical circularities.

An additional irony is that another one of the reasons cited for my expulsion is "association" with the CPGB and your paper. This is alleged to be "a political organisation with incompatible aims to the Labour Party". Now, this phrase suffers not only from atrocious syntax, but also from being simply untrue.

In this connection I have a confession to make. When I first came across the CPGB and your paper, I liked some of your political positions: for example, your internationalist position on Europe. But I disagreed or was very sceptical about some other ideas you advocated. (These disagreements never stopped you from publishing my articles without censorship, even when they disagreed with you - for which I am extremely grateful.)

Foremost among your positions of which I was very sceptical was your attitude to the Labour Party. Even in those bleak Blairite times of betrayal you insisted - against the view prevailing in much of the radical left - that one should not give up on the Labour Party; that, for better or worse, it was still *the* party of the British working class, and fighting for its soul was a worthwhile aim. You dismissed and disparaged initiatives to form parties that would compete with the Labour Party from a position somewhat to the left of it - a sort of "Labour Party mark two". You, and LPM, insisted that the Labour Party itself should become the real united front of the working class, within which the various radical left groups and organisations would find their place - not as secret entryists, but as open and official affiliates.

Now I must confess: the recent surge of the left in the party seems to vindicate your long-standing view and allay my old doubts. Of course, the fight is not finished and the party bureaucrats will not easily give up. We shall see how it all ends up.

**Moshé Machover**  
London

## Big mistake

The expulsion of Dr Moshé Machover from the Labour Party is a big mistake. Accusing this distinguished Israeli-born writer and speaker of being anti-Semitic is a hysteria too far, which is probably why it won't get much debate in the mainstream media.

In the 1990s, the alliance with globalising capital of social liberals like Blair and the Clintons, and the shock and resentment many voters had at the recent recession, brought forth the conservative backlash which gave us Trump and Brexit - the 'elitists' ambushed by the 'populists'. Everywhere we see a turning to themes of nation, family values and western predominance. This trend to reaction may yet allow the limiting of women's reproductive rights, LGBT equality and any criticism of Israeli expansionism in the settlements of the West Bank.

And capitalism was supposed to be neutral. Keep challenging it all.

**Mike Belbin**  
email

## Ridiculous

The charge against Moshé Machover is ridiculous. What about all the top Labour

politicians and trade union officials who have regularly written in the *Morning Star* and attended Communist Party of Britain/*Morning Star*-arranged events?

For 10 years up to 2015, Jeremy Corbyn was writing a weekly column in the *Morning Star*, whilst the CPB was standing candidates against the Labour Party. He has written columns since then and allowed himself to be interviewed by the paper in full-page articles. He is regularly photographed carrying a copy of the paper. Diane Abbott writes a column in the *Morning Star* every two weeks. The leader of the TUC, Frances O'Grady, wrote an article in the *Morning Star* in the week of the TUC annual conference, along with just about every individual union leader. The *Morning Star* has a much higher profile than *Weekly Worker*. The CPB have a much higher profile than Labour Party Marxists and the CPGB.

So, if Moshé Machover can be suspended for his association with LPM/CPGB, then surely the bulk of the current Labour and TUC leadership should also be suspended.

Either that or reinstate Moshé Machover as a member of the Labour Party!

**Elijah Traven**  
Hull

## Stitch-up

Just when I thought Momentum nationally had become a mere online presence (which tells its 30,000 members and vast number of supporters how to vote at conference and at election time, and constantly asks for money), I received an email asking me if I would "like to be considered to be a candidate" for one of the new additional posts created on Labour's national executive committee.

The email dropped in my inbox on October 2 at 2.38pm, giving a deadline of "Wednesday October 4 at 12pm". Not that I was seriously considering throwing my hat in the ring, but less than two days was clearly not a lot of time. But how interesting that Jon Lansman, who took away all decision-making powers from Momentum members in a coup in January this year, should engage in such a quasi-democratic exercise, I thought.

It was via the *Huffington Post* on October 9 that Momentum members were eventually informed of its outcome: Yes, Jon Lansman had been chosen by Momentum as an NEC candidate. A day later "Team Momentum" managed to inform some (but not all) of its members how this decision was - apparently - made: a total of 48 applications were received, which were examined by "a panel of [national coordinating group] officers", who then "interviewed seven candidates", before settling on four that are now being sent "for recommendation to the Centre Left Grassroots Alliance (CLGA)". All within four days.

The well-informed *Huffington Post* writes: "Momentum issued an email to members recently asking for nominations for its NEC 'slate' and it is understood that Lansman was the popular choice among many." Was he now? And how exactly did that work? Popular among whom? The 48 who nominated themselves? Clearly not. There was no other way for Momentum members to make any nominations other than self-nominations or express any opinions on the matter. Maybe they mean 'popular among the people working in Momentum's office, being on Jon Lansman's payroll and all that ...'

Some Momentum members might have actually believed that Lansman was serious about introducing 'one member, one vote' digital decision-making when he abolished all democratic structures and imposed his own constitution on the organisation back in January. And maybe he does occasionally feel the pressure to make it look as if Momentum is a democratic, members-led organisation. But, in reality, all this has only served to remind many on the left what an undemocratic shell of an organisation it really is.

As if to stress the point, Team Momentum sent out another email on October 10, this time to Derbyshire Momentum: the steering committee is informed that they are no

longer allowed to use the Momentum name, because they were "no longer a verified group" (though members there have emails showing how they were in fact "recognised" a few months ago).

After the January coup, Lansman loyalists in Derby - unhappy with the critical positions adopted by what was until this week 'Momentum Derbyshire' - set up a second group in the area. But why this move now? To understand that, you need to look at the other three Momentum names being put forward to the CLGA: they include "Cecile Wright, vice chair of Momentum, a co-founder of the Labour Black Network and a professor of Sociology at Nottingham". And, as it happens, a member of the Momentum group in Derby.

Cecile Wright was very happy to quickly step into the post of Momentum vice-chair after Lansman demoted Jackie Walker when she was suspended from the Labour Party on false charges of anti-Semitism. Cecile (with Christine Shawcroft) also took up posts as directors of the Momentum Campaign (Services) Ltd company on the day of the coup, January 10 2017. Of course, Lansman remains firmly in control of the most precious possession of Momentum: its vast database of over 300,000 Corbyn supporters.

This will make him almost a shoo-in for the NEC post. The CLGA list has never been chosen democratically and everything has undoubtedly been fixed a very long time ago - I predict that both Lansman and Wright will be on it!

Needless to say, as a Marxist in the Labour Party, I am less than happy with this process - not to mention the selection of Lansman himself. Not only has he made his disdain for any kind of democratic decision-making absolutely clear. But, worse, in the current civil war in the Labour Party, he has chosen to side with all those who maliciously label any criticism of Israel 'anti-Semitic'.

He has thrown Jackie Walker under the bus, has called on Ken Livingstone to resign and is one of the main people behind the party's new poisonous 'compromise' formulation on anti-Semitism. Lansman might be a close ally of Jeremy Corbyn (for now). But he is a very poor choice for the NEC indeed.

**Jan Barry**  
email

## Continuity?

The concept of continuity is *dialectical* and cannot be separated from its *historical context*: ie, it is *contradictory in character*, because it is part of the ongoing struggle between revolutionary Marxism and reformism. So we end up going down one road or the other.

The struggle for the continuity of the revolutionary tradition, as espoused by Marx and Engels - then by Lenin and Trotsky - became more difficult with the rise of imperialism. As Lenin says in the preface to his pamphlet on *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism* (1916), Kautskyism was "the international ideological trend represented in all the countries of the world by the 'most prominent theoreticians' and leaders of the Second International ...". It led to "disintegration and decay" in the guise of opportunism and social patriotism, culminating in the betrayal of 1914. This was a catastrophe for the international proletariat and mankind as a whole. 1905 was a dress rehearsal for the next revolution.

But after 1914 Russia had become the stimulus for the world revolution, not Germany. This required a new strategy and tactics. Enter Lenin and his April theses, which 'rearmed the party' intellectually, despite the opposition of Kamenev and co. The latter failed to understand that the 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry' was "already accomplished in reality" in the soviets. Therefore "a new and different task now faces us: to effect a split within this dictatorship between the proletarian elements ... and the small proprietor or petty-bourgeois elements" (First letter to the party: 'Assessment of the present situation').

The April theses are an example of the struggle for the continuity of revolutionary

Marxism versus reformism at a key moment in history. This is confirmed by August Nimtz in the first of his talks at this year's Communist University ('Bringing Marx and Engels into the picture' *Weekly Worker* September 21).

Further to my characterisation of the concept of continuity, history only repeats itself twice - 'the first time as tragedy, the second as farce'. Today, in line with the decline of capital itself, as Nimtz points out, social democracy has failed the masses yet again, because it "has not taken on board the advice of Marx and Engels" - to say the least!

Thus on the basis of the history of the last 100 years or so, I would argue that it is not possible to transform the Labour Party into a united front of the left. This will only reinforce existing illusions in social democracy, which is already moribund. Rather we have to win the newly radicalised layers to the idea of building a new Marxist party, before it is too late.

**Rex Dunn**  
email

## Not as bad

Mike Macnair's attack on comrade Ian Donovan, and by extension *Socialist Fight*, illustrates the elements of the CPGB's politics that are capitulations to pro-Zionist social pressure in this society - pressure that not even Macnair can deny exists, since he spends a lot of his otherwise cogent article analysing the capitulations to it of Jeremy Corbyn and some of his close colleagues ('Poisoned fudge', September 28).

Now the CPGB's supporters and political friends are being targeted by the mendacious 'anti-Semitism' label, which seeks to associate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. Moshé Machover's disgraceful expulsion from Labour is a case in point. So, in this situation, they have to put up some real resistance and, insofar as they are doing so, they are doing a reasonable job.

But there is a gap and a political contradiction here: the CPGB has as a key part of its make-up the notion of the 'third camp' between imperialism and what it calls its 'reactionary' opponents, particularly in the Arab and Muslim world, where it refuses to take sides in conflicts involving bourgeois nationalist despotisms and movements - whether secular, such as that of Assad and Saddam Hussein, or Islamist, such as Iran, Lebanon's Hezbollah or the Palestinian Hamas - opposing imperialism and Zionism.

The CPGB was neutral in the Iraq war. It refused to defend Hussein's regime against imperialism, and was hostile to those who supported Iraqi resistance after the conquest. It was neutral when Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas, with Israeli support, overthrew the elected government of Hamas in the occupied territories in 2007, leaving the election winners only in control of Gaza. It is neutral over imperialist attacks on Syria. It will be neutral in the event of an imperialist attack on Iran, which the US with Israel is preparing for by decertifying Obama's nuclear deal.

Mike Macnair recites, against the lie that refusing to support Israel is anti-Semitic, the song: "Leon Trotsky, was a fascist, oh I know it for a fact ...". It is deeply contradictory, and typical of the hypocrisy of centrism, for him to evoke that, given the implicit attempt of the CPGB to associate our positions on Israel and the Middle East with Nazi anti-Semitism.

The CPGB has to protect its left flank against criticism from more consistent opponents of Zionism and imperialism, and at the same time to indicate to those elements on the Labour left that capitulate to Zionism that it is not as bad as all that, so it still defends some sort of Israeli 'self-determination' at the expense of the Palestinians, and it too endorses a variant of the 'two states' position, along with the Jewish Labour Movement.

Macnair's sophistry and denial of reality is clear when he writes: "There is, nevertheless, an anti-Semitic anti-Zionism. It is found where, instead of blaming the *political Zionist movement*, and the policies of the great powers, for the creation of the

state of Israel and its ongoing colonial oppression and dispossession of the local inhabitants, an attempt is made to find some way of blaming these events on *the Jews as such*, or on 'Jewish' capital."

Macnair is having a laugh at the Palestinians' expense with this denial of reality. They will have noticed that the aircraft that drop white phosphorus on Gaza schools have Jewish symbols on them, and represent a state that calls itself 'the Jewish state', that extends citizenship rights to all who fit its criteria of being born Jewish anywhere in the world, even when neither they nor their ancestors have ever set foot in the Levant.

Apparently, the 'political Zionist movement', which created the state of Israel, had nothing specifically Jewish about it. This is self-evidently drivel. Israel took control of Palestine, a former British colonial protectorate, and transformed it by expelling two-thirds of its Arab population to create a Jewish state. But, for Mike Macnair, it is 'anti-Semitic' to say that that there is anything Jewish about political Zionism or the Jewish state.

By the same logic, you could argue that it is 'anti-British' to argue that Ukip is driven by reactionary British nationalism, or 'anti-German' to say that Hitler's movement was driven by genocidal German nationalist fanaticism. The reason why Macnair does not extend this logic to these other racist movements, denying their specific national character, is that those 'national' trends are not the beneficiaries of the liberal guilt of soft leftists.

Macnair claims that comrade Donovan, now speaking for *Socialist Fight* and in 2014 a semi-ally of the CPGB, argued that "the United States backs the state of Israel because of the large number and influence of specifically Jewish capitalists in the US". This is Macnair's rendering, not a quote from anything written by the comrade. It is a demagogic vulgarisation of our position. The United States has many allies and client states around the world, from the UK to South Korea, to Colombia, to Saudi Arabia. In none of these cases is the ethnic composition of the ruling class relevant to the conduct of the alliance the US carries out.

But anyone can see there is a difference between the relationship of the USA with these states and with Israel. If a British prime minister had tried to march into the US senate and strong-arm the US into toeing the British line over Ireland, this would have incited a nationalist backlash against 'Limeys coming over here to dictate our foreign policy'. But Netanyahu was able to demand three years ago that the US toe the Israeli line over Obama's Iran deal. He was able to compel attendance of virtually all of the senate. Though Obama in his last, election-free session, defied him, Netanyahu now appears about to get his way over the Iran deal. There was no American chauvinist backlash against any of this, and no real possibility of one. Why not?

Because part of the US ruling class, a powerful part, regards Israel, in addition to the USA, as its own state. The ruling class of Israel overlaps with that of the USA precisely because of the dual citizenship rights that exist because of the Israeli law of return. Jewish bourgeois are massively overrepresented in the US ruling class compared to the Jewish population in general, which is only 2%. And political Zionism is the ideology of the bulk of this part of the bourgeoisie, though there are the odd one or two with more ambiguous views. Political Zionism is far more dominant among such Jewish bourgeois than among the Jewish population generally: a class phenomenon.

This 'two-states' phenomenon is a materialist explanation for the servile nature of the US-Israeli relationship. This phenomenon also exists in several European countries and by a simple, linear logic it explains what the bourgeoisie - both British and Israeli - and direct agents of the Israeli state, such as the JLM, are trying to do to the Labour Party.

It is the third-campism of the CPGB that means it flinches from addressing the most difficult questions posed by imperialism

and its specific configurations, and conflicts with semi-colonial and oppressed peoples. It rejects Trotskyism and permanent revolution as a strategy, and its refusal to address the material roots of the concrete, very specific, servile relationship of the 'older' imperialist powers with Israel is yet another flinch.

Ultimately, it's the expression of its adoption as its political mentors not Trotsky and the political tradition he represents, but Max Shachtman and Hal Draper. The CPGB is carrying out an anti-Trotsky campaign of denigration through its promotion of Lars Lih's rehabilitation of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin despite their conduct in 1917, which is also an attack on permanent revolution. But these strands of anti-Trotskyism and capitulation to imperialism coalesce over the Israel question: Stalin armed the *Haganah* in 1947-48, while Shachtman and Draper, for all their rampant Stalinophobia, also took the Israeli side and thereby, critically in Draper's case, supported the *naqba*.

Denial of reality in the service of anti-imperialism is what drives the CPGB's attack on Socialist Fight. 'We are not as bad as those people,' they say. That is what Macnair's polemic really signifies.

**Gerry Downing and Ian Donovan**  
Socialist Fight

## Opportunist

The only thing I definitely agree with Jack Conrad about is that our exchange of letters has been frustrating. Despite his self-delusion that I have come around to his idiosyncratic view of the history of Bolshevism, the truth is somewhat different. So to the three points of his last letter (October 8).

Firstly, Conrad asks: "So where does that leave the idea that the CPGB's democratic centralism is a 'shibboleth'?" The answer is quite simple. The CPGB make their peculiar understanding of this organisational question one of the main, if not the central, defining characteristic of their group. It is their unique 'truth' and selling point.

I am not going to comment in depth on the rest of Conrad's ahistorical justification for the CPGB's use of "freedom of criticism and unity in action" as a guide to organisational functioning for Bolshevik-type organisations in 2017. That phrase may well have been relevant for a Bolshevik faction operating in an organisation like the RSDLP in 1906. But it is clearly not so for any Bolshevik-type organisation that has understood the political lessons of the historic betrayal of August 1914 and the consequent need for separate organisations, with different internal norms, of revolutionaries and reformists in the socialist movement.

Conrad would do better to study the organisational norms within the Bolshevik faction in the RSDLP in 1906, but even that was still prior to the lessons learnt after August 1914, so would not be a direct model. Even post-1914 is it really sensible to try to draw direct analogies about organisational forms from a quite different historical situation and through a very muddy glass of incomplete information and not always accurate translations?

I hold to my interpretation of the term 'democratic centralism' not as a political principle or primarily because of my understanding of the historical record, but because of its tactical efficacy for a Bolshevik-type organisation operating in today's world.

Secondly, Conrad says: "Yes, I plead guilty to trimming Lenin's remarks to a mere three-word phrase (I am, after all, writing a letter, not a full-length article)." Fair enough - if the extra 10 words added nothing to the meaning. But those extra words are worth repeating, because they actually change the meaning Conrad has tried to give the whole sentence - "because by agreeing with us he [Kamenev] has *changed his position*" (my emphasis).

Conrad used the "not very great" quote to conflate the situation before, and the time after, Lenin says Kamenev changed his position. Conrad did so in his attempts to 'disappear' Lenin's description of the "clamour of protest" that had been led by Kamenev against the April theses in favour of Conrad's alternative reality, where the disagreement was one "of shade, even temperament". This is a cheap debating trick.

Thirdly, Conrad's reply to the evidence

I gave of the CPGB's capitulation to the popular frontism involved in the Respect project was that there were "CPGB members operating in, reporting on, exposing and throwing conference bombs in Respect". It appears that Conrad thinks readers of the *Weekly Worker* have very short-term memories. I will repeat the actual evidence I provided for my assertion (which he did not see the need to comment on - perhaps because he cannot defend it?):

"Given that Conrad used the example of the SWP and Respect, it should be noted that the CPGB gave political support to SWP members standing as Respect candidates in the general election at the time. To head off the clamour of outrage by CPGBers reading this letter, I do realise that this was critical political support. But the comrades should take the time to think about why the critical part of that support did not include a call to break with popular frontism in general or even just the bourgeois components of this particular popular front. And they might further consider whether this failure was therefore implicit political support to popular frontism.

"Perhaps they will fall back on the 'programme is the litmus test' argument. But even here the CPGB failed to carry out the perspective they claim motivates them. The CPGB had members and supporters inside Respect who put forward amendments to the programme at the yearly conferences. Were these amendments to implement the CPGB's 'full minimum programme'? No - instead they were limited to more radical versions of some reformist demands."

Conrad claims never to have read the International Bolshevik Tendency's pamphlet, *Bolshevism vs CPGBism*. I do find it interesting to note that my link to the online version of the pamphlet was the only one which was not published in my last letter. Maybe the *Weekly Worker* editors hope their readers are too lazy to cut and paste the pamphlet's title into a Google search. What are they trying to hide?

Conrad chides me for supposedly replacing a willingness to engage in political struggle with an abstract "political purity", as I, and my co-thinkers in "the league of the pure", strive at all cost to avoid "contamination". As a general comment about my political activity this is clearly absurd. I first met the CPGB when both they and the IBT, of whom I was a member at the time, were inside Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party. Indeed I was one of two main leaders of the most significant oppositional branch in London alongside then CPGB member Marcus Strom and I was the most prominent opposition figure at the 1997 SLP conference, when I stood for the position of vice-president. Just as my more recent participation in, for example, the United Left Alliance in Ireland has potential for "contamination".

Conrad might try to paint me as an abstract Marxist using "political purity" to hide from participation in the class struggle, but that has as little to do with reality as any of his other spurious claims. However, that being said, I must confess that Conrad's comment does hold a grain of truth. Unlike Conrad, I do not understand the term, 'political principle', to mean something akin to an abstract aspiration with no relationship whatsoever to day-to-day concrete political activity. The things I describe as being my political principles do provide constraints for my concrete political activity.

For instance, my understanding of the principle of working class political independence means I will never give political support to any formation I understand to be a popular front - unlike the CPGB. I therefore wear the badge of "political purity" with pride - when it comes from an unrepentant opportunist like Conrad.

**Alan Gibson**  
Co Cork, Ireland

## Catalan republic

Scotland's first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, took a cautious line on Catalan independence. She hoped that "dialogue will replace confrontation". She called for a way forward that "respects the rule of law" and also "respects democracy". She refused to say if the Scottish government would recognise the result of the disputed referendum. She told Andrew Marr: "I consider myself a friend of Spain".

Spain is nothing in this context but its ruling class exercising political power through its crowned, unionist, 'Francoist' state. Sturgeon is giving comfort to the enemies of the Catalan people in the hope they will be more favourable to the Scottish government's quest for independence under the crown. The leaders of the Scottish National Party want to keep friends with the queen of England and the king of Spain.

The parallels with the 2014 Scottish referendum are significant. The national democratic movement in Catalonia has declared in favour of a republic and this was spelt out on the ballot paper. In a Spanish context, the Catalan republic is revolutionary - not least because it goes back to the 1930s, when the Spanish republic was overthrown by Franco. In 1934, the Catalan president Lluís Companys was jailed after declaring a Catalan republic. Later he was captured by the Nazis and shot by one of Franco's firing squads in 1940.

Spain is a unionist state and constitutional monarchy like the UK. The national question is the lever for republicanism and democratic revolution. There is no right to self-determination in a unionist state like Spain. The Spanish constitution is against it. The attempt to hold a referendum was thus illegal.

Naturally, the Spanish government sent in the national police to uphold the law by closing down the polling stations and beating up those trying to vote. They could have sent in the army and tanks the stop the ballot. But they chose a more moderate option. Liberal opinion was outraged, but did nothing.

British unionism is no better. The Scottish people have no right to self-determination. They have no more legal right to referendum than the Catalan people. The British crown, acting through its prime minister, David Cameron, decided to grant a referendum because he calculated he would win it. The queen kept a low profile, whilst letting it be known what every loyal subject should do. The Spanish king was not so reticent and came openly in support of his 'Tory' government.

The democratic forces in Catalonia had to face the full weight of the Spanish state, the banks and major corporations, and the European Union. The threats of economic sabotage and expulsion from the EU followed the Scottish example. If Catalonia became a republic, hell, fire and damnation would rain down on them.

We must support the right of the Catalan people to hold a referendum on independence. The Catalans, like the Scots, are a politically oppressed nation because the union with Spain is not voluntary, as the violent intervention of the Spanish police showed. But supporting the right to hold a referendum does not mean supporting the republic.

The second issue is whether a Catalan republic would be a progressive, democratic step forward from the unionist monarchy. The answer is yes. A republic is a democratic and revolutionary break with the Francoist-monarchist state. This is why all the reactionary forces in Spain and the EU are opposed to it.

British unionists are worse than their Spanish imitators. They like to pretend that Scotland has a legal and constitutional right to self-determination. It has no such right. Neither the Scottish people nor a Scottish government can hold a legal referendum. If they hold an illegal one, they have to organise the forces necessary to defend the polling stations.

**Steve Freeman**  
Left Unity and Rise

## Naive

What hideous Tory vermin we saw scurrying about at their 2017 party conference! And what a shame that we have only pathetically naive policies as our alternative future. By which I mean those proffered by the so-called socialism of Corbyn and McDonnell.

If I'm correct in my assessment and Labour do end up dumping the Corbynistas, our UK working class not only would have full justification to be angry, but also a right to feel lost in terms of any historical direction, appropriate dignity or meaningful destiny.

**Bruno Kretschmar**  
email

# ACTION

## London Communist Forum

**Sunday October 15, 5pm:** Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group: study of August Nimtz's *Lenin's electoral strategy from Marx and Engels through the revolution of 1905*. This meeting: chapter 2, 'Revolutionary continuity' (continued). Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. 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 October 17, 6.45pm:** Series of talks on human origins, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1. This meeting: 'Sexuality in humans and other great apes'. Speaker: Kathleen Bryson. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: <http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

## The Yorkshire miners

**Saturday October 14, 1pm:** Socialist and labour history and discussion, Red Shed, Vicarage Street, Wakefield WF1. Speaker: Ken Capstick (former vice-president of Yorkshire NUM) on the "curious case of David Swallow". Organised by Wakefield Socialist history Group: [www.theredshed.org.uk/SocialHist.html](http://www.theredshed.org.uk/SocialHist.html).

## Dangerous times

**Saturday October 14, 10am to 5pm:** Anti-nuclear conference, Arlington Conference Centre, 220 Arlington Road, London NW1. Organised by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: <http://cnduk.org>.

## Newcastle for a pay rise

**Saturday October 14, 12 noon:** Anti-austerity rally, Grey's Monument, 150 Grainger Street, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1. Contact: [mlowden@tuc.org.uk](mailto:mlowden@tuc.org.uk) Organised by TUC: [www.tuc.org.uk](http://www.tuc.org.uk).

## Norwich is many

**Monday October 16, 6.30pm:** Screening of *We are many*, University of East Anglia, arts room 2.01, Norwich NR4. Charting the rise of mass global opposition to the 2003 Iraq war. Organised by Norwich Stop the War: <http://norwichstopwar.org.uk>.

## Britain deserves a pay rise

**Tuesday October 17, 5.30pm:** Demonstration. Assemble opposite Downing Street for march via department of health, treasury, department for education and home office to rally outside parliament. Organised by TUC, Unite, Unison, PCS, UCW, GMB, FBU and others: [www.tuc.org.uk/events/britain-still-needs-pay-rise-rally-fair-pay-public-servants](http://www.tuc.org.uk/events/britain-still-needs-pay-rise-rally-fair-pay-public-servants).

## Jewish dissent against Balfour

**Tuesday October 17, 7.30pm:** Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, 12 Jesus Lane, Cambridge CB5. Robert Cohen links some of the 'lost voices' of Jewish dissent against Balfour 100 years ago and opposition to Zionism today. Organised by Cambridge Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.campalsoc.org](http://www.campalsoc.org).

## Back from the brink

**Wednesday, October 18, 7pm:** Public meeting, Unison office, 84 Bell Street, Glasgow G1. 'How to stop nuclear war in the Pacific'. Organised by Glasgow Stop the War: [www.facebook.com/Glasgow-Stop-the-War-Coalition-12302285777171](http://www.facebook.com/Glasgow-Stop-the-War-Coalition-12302285777171).

## Revolution then and revolution now

**Saturday October 21, 10am to 5pm:** Conference, room 1, Central Library, William Brown Street, Liverpool L3. Speakers: David Lowes, Anne McShane, Hillel Ticktin. Entrance free, but donations welcome. Organised by Supporters of *Critique* Journal of Socialist Theory: [contactpaulinehadaway@gmail.com](mailto:contactpaulinehadaway@gmail.com).

## Stand Up To Racism

**Saturday October 21, 9.30am to 4pm:** National conference, Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London NW1. Register at [www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/confronting-the-rise-in-racism-2017-tickets-35900328850](http://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/confronting-the-rise-in-racism-2017-tickets-35900328850). Organised by Stand Up to Racism: [www.standuptoracism.org.uk](http://www.standuptoracism.org.uk)

## Imperialism then and now

**Tuesday October 24, 7pm:** Educational, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. With Simon Renton. The nature of the political and economic crisis which began in 2008. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: [www.marx-memorial-library.org/index.php](http://www.marx-memorial-library.org/index.php).

## End US-North Korea showdown

**Wednesday October 25, 7pm:** Public meeting, The Showroom, Paternoster Row, Sheffield S1. Organised by Sheffield Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

## Social histories of the Russian Revolution

**Thursday October 26, 6.30pm:** Discussion meeting, Birkbeck, University of London, 26 Russell Square, London WC1. '1917: a century on' - debate. Speakers include Simon Pirani. Organised by Social Histories of the Russian Revolution: <http://socialhistories1917.wordpress.com>.

## October revolution: 100 years on

**Wednesday November 1, 7.30pm:** Political discussion, Partick Burgh Halls, 9 Burgh Hall Street, Glasgow G11. The October Revolution, its legacy and the lessons for socialists today. Speaker: Hillel Ticktin. Organised by Labour Party Socialist Network: <http://socialistnetwork.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.

## AGGREGATE



Labour activists are open to the ideas of Marxism

# Winning the battle of ideas

Peter Manson reports on the October 8 meeting of CPGB members

Understandably last weekend's meeting of CPGB comrades and friends focused on the situation in the Labour Party and its impact on British politics.

The aggregate began with a report on the Labour conference from Marsha Thompson, who had an inside seat on the proceedings. She considered it the most leftwing Labour conference for years, featuring some very good interventions from the left. But these had been overshadowed by subsequent expulsions - most notably of Jewish Israeli socialist Moshé Machover and the secretary of Labour Party Marxists, Stan Keable.

Yet, in her view, the vast majority of delegates had not been taken in by the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' smear campaign - they pointedly rose to give standing ovations whenever the struggle of the Palestinians was mentioned, for example. They recognised it for what it was - an attack on the left by the party right.

As for the organised left, Labour Party Marxists - since identified by the bureaucracy as a group whose aims are "incompatible" with the party - undoubtedly got a very good reception. On the other hand, non-party organisations, such as the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party in England and Wales, had sellers outside the conference, but cannot be said to have made much of an impact.

When it came to the Labour left, comrade Thompson reported that in addition to LPM the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy made recommendations on how to vote on most motions and amendments. Momentum sent last-minute texts to its supporters with the same purpose.

In her view, however, conference is not the sovereign body of the party. All you can say is that nowadays it is slightly less stage-managed than it was under Tony Blair. Trade union delegations still operate according to a block vote decided, in effect, by one person, the general secretary. So, despite the fact that next year the conference arrangements committee will finally have a pro-Corbyn majority, the lesson is: win union members to get more involved and hold their leaders to

account.

William Sarsfield, who had also been in Brighton, said that the "vast majority" of conference-goers had been on the left - and applauded LPM's front page headline: "Anti-Zionism does not equal anti-Semitism". It was the young apparatchiks of the Jewish Labour Movement, who were downright antagonistic.

Mike Macnair commented that Labour conferences had always been "stitched up" long before Blair - genuine inner-party democracy had actually been against the interests of what he called the "traditional left" - ie, those aligning themselves with the left union bureaucrats. Jack Conrad added that the history of the Labour Party had been the history of the union block vote - Constituency Labour Party delegates had tended to the left, but those from the unions had been more likely to be rightwing.

Farzad Kamangar wanted to know if others shared her impression of conference - there had been nothing that could be described as "socialist" in Corbyn's speeches regarding economic or foreign policy. Comrade Sarsfield agreed.

### Prospects

Jack Conrad introduced the second session, on the prospects following the Labour conference. He noted that just a couple of years ago the Labour right had considered its control of the party "completely secure". But then along came the "morons" who nominated Corbyn for leader in 2015 - we really do have to acknowledge "the role of accident in history", he stated. Then there was the general election and now things look bad for the Tories and "brilliant" for Corbyn. Two years ago a victory for a Corbyn-led Labour government looked impossible, but now it "could happen very soon".

Now that the right has lost its total control, it has only one option - the use of disciplinary measures and false accusations against the left. But, while the balance on the ground is "massively to the left", the new national executive committee will have only a marginal pro-Corbyn majority - and the right is still in charge of the Labour machine. The outcome of the left-right struggle

for control will depend most of all on "the battle of ideas", he contended. The left is faced not only with the hard right, but those on the 'centre-right' who are playing a more subtle - and therefore more dangerous - game.

Turning next to the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' smear campaign, comrade Conrad stated that this was part and parcel of the attempt to "relegitimise" Israel following its loss of popular support over the past couple of decades. The real point in targeting Moshé Machover was because he is opposed to Zionism and Israel's continued programme of settler-colonialism. Behind that, of course, there is the US-UK alliance - Israel serves as its symbol. While at the moment there is no mileage for the right in the right attacking Corbyn directly, targeting opposition to Israel can be used as a substitute. After conference, Jon Lansman of Momentum had declared that "Labour is united", but Iain McNicol and the compliance unit had immediately proved him wrong.

Turning next to one of the most contentious issues dividing both Labour and the Tories, comrade Conrad commented on the Brexit negotiations. In his view they will probably fail - and things do not look good for a US-UK trade deal beneficial to British capital either. But the Corbyn alternative would be, in the view of the *Financial Times*, a "danger to Britain".

Comrade Conrad recalled the "rumours of a coup" against the rightwing Labour government headed by Harold Wilson in 1974. The bourgeois consensus is that "something must be done" against the "danger" of a Corbyn government. One possibility if Labour wins the next election was the formation of a 'national government', consisting of Labour rightwingers alongside the Tories and Liberal Democrats. After all, there is a risk of a "crisis of expectations" - the perception of Labour's programme amongst workers, who might be moved to take independent action in support of what they believe to be Corbyn's policies. For example, we could see the occupation of empty houses and the mass defiance of anti-union legislation. In short, the ruling class could be

heading for a "profound crisis" - yet the left is totally unprepared.

It is, of course, true that Corbyn could end up heading a 'normal Labour government', but that looks much less likely at this moment. So there are "a whole range of possibilities" before us. And our task is to be "one step ahead" of the Corbynistas, while at the same time distancing ourselves from Corbyn himself. Obviously we defend Corbyn against the right, but we believe his politics are no more than left reformist.

Our aim is to empower members and transform the Labour Party into a united front of a special kind. The democracy commission should be used for that purpose, added comrade Conrad - it provides the left with an opportunity to win "hearts and minds" in the constituencies. There should be a growing "clamour" demanding the automatic reselection of all Labour MPs.

Comrade Conrad reminded the meeting that, while the CPGB seeks cooperation and principled unity with the organised left, we are often "in battle" with them over our insistence on the centrality of Marxist organisation, as opposed to some centre-left alliance. And, of course, we need a "twin-track approach" - not even a transformed Labour Party can lead the working class to power. For that it needs a mass Communist Party.

While we are for free speech in society, he continued, each political party must ensure that its members adhere to core principles and impose limits on what is acceptable. For example, the politics of the so-called Jewish Labour Movement in support of Israel's "racist colonising project" should be considered unacceptable by Labour members. But, once again, the defeat of the JLM and its co-thinkers will depend on the outcome of the "battle of ideas".

Yet at the moment there is an anti-left witch-hunt - directed, for example, against members who have had articles published in the *Weekly Worker*. But "who hasn't had an article published in the *Morning Star*?" However, the targeting of comrade Machover could be misconceived - there are signs of an upsurge against his

expulsion amongst wide sections of the Labour membership. His reinstatement would be a "big blow" to the Labour bureaucracy and the right.

### Debate

In the debate that followed, comrade Thompson took issue with comrade Conrad over the likelihood of a move by the bourgeoisie against Corbyn. In fact the Labour leader could be viewed as the man who wants to "save Britain from Brexit" with the backing of the ruling class. For our part, we need to explain to Corbynistas the "limits of national Keynesianism".

Next, Gerry Green took up the argument in relation to the JLM - who will decide that its aims are "incompatible" with those of Labour? Labour members ought to campaign for an "official verdict" on that, he thought.

Comrade Kamangar's intervention took up a different point - the expulsion of anti-Zionists like comrade Machover. She thought that the connection between the false 'anti-Semitism' campaign and the UK-US alliance should be continually stressed as its central motive. Obviously, arguing against a particular state form, or quoting Nazi leaders to make a historical point, is not "racist". She also thought it likely that Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and co would sooner or later "sell out" - which was why the left must not go along with any "cult of personality".

Comrade Macnair, taking up one of comrade Thompson's points, thought Corbyn's strategy could be likened to "Keynesianism in one country". But he thought it was most improbable that Corbyn would head a last-ditch 'remain' campaign, backed by the ruling class. He agreed that a no-deal Brexit was the most likely.

A non-CPGB guest, Lawrence Parker, thought we should look beyond both the Corbyn personality cult and the pro-Palestine chants at conference, and focus on the Labour right. He too stressed that the prime task of the left is to win support within Labour for socialist politics.

That was the sentiment that was unanimously endorsed by all present ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.co.uk

## LABOUR

# Labour's 'flexible' rules

If being a supporter of LPM is incompatible with Labour's 'aims and principles', asks Carla Roberts, where does that leave all the other political organisations inside the party?

Of course, trouble was brewing right from the beginning of this year's Labour Party conference. For the first time in decades, there was a clear leftwing majority among conference delegates. A left wing that was proud to stick two fingers up to the attempt to smear it as 'anti-Semitic'. Palestine badges and scarves were everywhere. Delegate after delegate swapped their standard lanyard for the one given out by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign. Any time a conference speaker mentioned the word 'Palestine', they received a standing ovation.

Our *Labour Party Marxists* front-page article by Moshé Machover, 'Anti-Zionism does not equal anti-Semitism', captured the mood of conference and, no doubt, helped inspire many to speak out against the witch-hunting right. We gave out 3,000 copies, with countless delegates and visitors commenting on the relevance and quality of the article.

The right was becoming increasingly furious throughout the week. We occasionally got low-level abuse from supporters of Labour First, Progress and the Jewish Labour Movement. JLM chair Jeremy Newmark was spotted creeping around our stall a few times, snapping pictures of LPM supporters and hissing "racists" under his breath. Typically with witch-hunters, challenged to defend his remarks, he skedaddled off.

On September 26, we received an email from Lucy Fisher of *The Times*:

I wanted to ask you if you wish to comment on a call by Labour MPs and the chief executive of the Holocaust Memorial Trust for Labour to investigate the Labour Party Marxists and expel any of your supporters who are party members. They accuse the LPM of producing anti-Semitic literature.

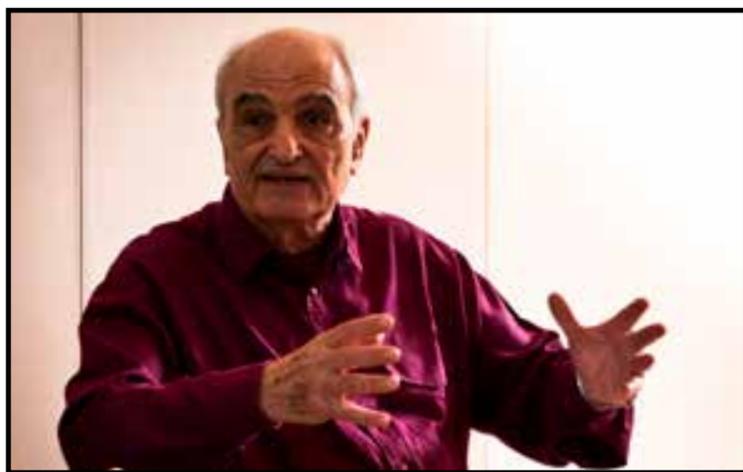
Comrade Machover dealt with these baseless accusations in an interview in last week's issue of the *Weekly Worker*. On September 27, when the call for our expulsion appeared in *The Times* (along with a large cohort of the bourgeois media generally), the right was clearly emboldened. This was a chance to vent their frustration with the fact that they had made no impact at all at conference. Encouraged by the press provocations, a few groups of mainly young, suited 'n' booted conference attendees snatched some copies of LPM from our stall and ripped them up. Others shouted abuse at us from a distance. A few half-heartedly tried to provoke physical confrontations. No takers on our side, thank you.

The net result was to actually draw more delegates and conference visitors to our stall. They were eager to show their solidarity by taking our literature - not quite the result our rightwing provocateurs were hoping for, we imagine.

They may have lost conference, but our Labour right wing still has the media and the Labour apparatus on its side, of course. Moshé Machover was informed of his expulsion on October 3, just seven days after the publication of *The Times* article. Moshé's ejection was swiftly followed by the expulsion of a handful of LPM sympathisers.

In what is possibly a first of its kind, comrade Machover actually received not one, but two, expulsion letters. The October 2 version makes it clear that he was being excluded for an

apparently anti-Semitic article published in your name by the organisation known as Labour Party Marxists



**Moshé Machover: more support with each passing day**

(LPM). The content of these articles appears to meet the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of anti-Semitism, which has been adopted by the Labour Party.

This initial letter clearly focuses on the charge of anti-Semitism - although hedged around with the qualifications of "apparently" and "appears to meet". Only in its second section does it raise as a problem the comrade's

involvement and support for both LPM and the Communist Party of Great Britain (through your participation in CPGB events and regular contributions to the CPGB's newspaper, the *Weekly Worker*) ... Membership or support for another political party, or a political organisation with incompatible aims to the Labour Party, is incompatible with Labour Party membership.

### Civil war

So, clearly, comrade Machover was reported to the compliance unit because of his "apparently anti-Semitic article". But this alone would have only led to his suspension (as with Jackie Walker, Tony Greenstein and Ken Livingstone - comrades who have all been suspended for well over a year). But then the eager-beaver bureaucrats in the compliance unit decided to add LPM and the *Weekly Worker* to their unpublished list of proscribed organisations (officially abolished in the 1970s). *Et voila!* Comrade Machover could be expelled. Naturally, this charge saved the compliance unit a great deal of bother in terms of trying actually prove that comrade Machover's article was indeed anti-Semitic.

Or so they thought.

Within days, dozens of Labour Party members, branches and organisations had sent statements and letters of protest to the NEC, Labour general secretary Iain McNicol and his letter-writer, Sam Matthews ("head of disputes"). The clearly arbitrary nature of the accusations was challenged, particularly the charge that his article was anti-Semitic. Many of these protests can be found on our website ([www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](http://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk)).

Clearly, this pressure made an impact. On October 5, comrade Machover received expulsion letter number two. "Following our letter dated October 3 2017, representations have been made to the Labour Party on your behalf," it states. No doubt slightly rattled by these "representations", McNicol and co backtracked with a 'qualification':

For the avoidance of any doubt, you are not ineligible for membership as a result of complaints received by the party that you have breached rule 2.1.8 regarding language which may be

prejudicial or grossly detrimental to the party in an allegedly anti-Semitic article published in your name. These allegations are not subject to an investigation, as you are not currently a member of the Labour Party.

Well, yes, you've just expelled him, haven't you, Iain?

Comrade Machover was told: "You have been automatically excluded under rule 2.1.4.B due to your clear support of at least one organisation which is incompatible with membership of the Labour Party, namely Labour Party Marxists, as well as the Communist Party of Great Britain." The charge of having produced anti-Semitic material will handily be kept on file and re-examined should comrade Machover chose to reapply for membership after the standard five years following an expulsion.

Comrade Machover, in reminding the labour movement of the communist witch-hunts of the McCarthy area in the US, has publicly stated: "I am not and nor have I ever been a member of LPM or the CPGB." We can fully confirm he has never been an LPM member (though we doubt the compliance unit takes much notice of our assurances).

His "clear support" consisted of writing articles for the *Weekly Worker* and attending some events organised by the CPGB. However, if the same rule were applied to the front bench of the Labour Party, there would be very few MPs left.

### Whose rules?

Clearly, this expulsion goes right to the heart of the civil war in the Labour Party. The more naive Labour members might believe the nonsense about the whole party now 'standing united behind Jeremy Corbyn'. The opposite is the case. The more branch and CLP executives go over to the left, the more pro-Corbyn councillors and MPs are selected, the more leftwing delegates are chosen to go to conference, the more desperately the right is trying to retain their hold over the bureaucracy.

The expulsion of comrade Machover, together with LPM supporters, shows how much arbitrary power the right still wields. One member was expelled for the crime of sharing six LPM posts on Facebook - the only evidence presented in his letter of expulsion.

Let's look at the main charge being levelled. The rule quoted by Matthews, is 2.1.4.B and concerns "Exclusions from party membership":

A member of the party who joins and/or supports a political organisation other than an official Labour group or other unit of the party, or supports any candidate who stands against an

official Labour candidate, or publicly declares their intent to stand against a Labour candidate, shall automatically be ineligible to be or remain a party member ...

For decades, nobody had been expelled for simply belonging to another organisation and the only criterion applied when it came to the (very rare) expulsions was the bit about supporting "any candidate who stands against an official Labour candidate". But after Corbyn's election the right started to use every method at its disposal to defeat the left. Supporters of Socialist Appeal, many of whom had been loyal and pretty harmless members of the Labour Party for decades, were now targeted. Then, thanks to Tom Watson's 'reds under the bed' dossier, it was the turn of Alliance for Workers' Liberty members.

But if members face automatic expulsion for joining or supporting any "political organisation other than an official Labour group or other unit of the party", that begs the question why members and supporters of Labour First, Progress, Jewish Labour Movement or Labour Friends of Israel are not turfed out.

McNicol was recently asked exactly this question by comrades from Weaver Vale CLP. Incredibly, he answered - at length. We quote his email of February 13 2017, because it is highly instructive when it comes to how rules are being bent and twisted in today's Labour Party:

As our head of internal governance advised you, independent groups are not required to conform with Labour Party rules on affiliations and none of the organisations you describe are affiliated to the Labour Party. However, all individual members of the Labour Party are obliged to comply with Labour Party rules. These organisations are their own legal entities with their own funds, membership and rules. *If they wish to affiliate* to the Labour Party they must demonstrate that they support Labour's aims and values and provide the party with audited accounts and their rulebook to ensure that these do not conflict with Labour's own rules and values [our emphasis].

As previously advised, the Labour Party should be the home of lively debate, of new ideas and of campaigns to change society. For a fair debate to take place, people must be able to air their views. This includes for all members and groups the right to make clear their opposition to a party's policy position or leadership, and the right to campaign for a position or direction they believe the party should follow. We are a democratic organisation and through our conference we settle our direction through the will of all sections of the party. But we do not seek to censor those who disagree.

In your correspondence ... you refer to chapter 2, clause 1, section 4.B. However, you have only quoted half of the relevant sentence. The full clause copied below specifically relates to joining or supporting a political organisation that stands or publicly declares an intention to stand a candidate against an official Labour candidate [our emphasis].

So how does all this relate to comrade Machover and Labour Party Marxists - which has never stood or declared "an

intention to stand" against Labour?

### Incompatible?

Note that McNicol stresses members' and groups' "right to make clear their opposition to a party's policy position or leadership, and the right to campaign for a position or direction they believe the party should follow". According to his email, only when a group wants to "affiliate to the party" does it have to "demonstrate that they support Labour's aims and values".

This is clearly not the case when it comes to the left of the party. In their expulsion letters, LPM supporters have been told:

This organisation's expressed aims and principles are incompatible with those of the Labour Party, as set out in clause IV of the Labour Party constitutional rules. Membership or support for another political party, or a political organisation with incompatible aims to the Labour Party, is incompatible with Labour Party membership.

Needless to say, LPM has *not* applied for affiliation. And, all of a sudden, Labour is *not* that "home of lively debate, of new ideas and of campaigns to change society".

In reality of course, it all depends on *what kind of change* your organisation wants to see. We make no secret of our belief that clause four needs to be dramatically reworded to feature a clear commitment to socialism and working class power. While we fight for the radical transformation of the Labour Party, Labour First, Progress, JLM and Labour Friends of Israel clearly want to return to the good old days of Blairite neoliberalism and collaboration with big business.

Speaking of Tony Blair, he certainly was one Labour Party member whose "expressed aims and principles" were "incompatible with those of the Labour Party", as set out in clause four. After all, he campaigned against the old clause four and managed to force through a total rewrite!

Hugh Gaitskell, another Labour leader, also showed his "incompatibility". After losing the 1959 general election, he was convinced that public opposition to nationalisation had led to the party's poor performance. He proposed to amend clause four. The left fought back, however, and defeated moves for change: symbolically, in fact, it was agreed that the clause was to be included on party membership cards.<sup>2</sup>

The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy has set up a working group to discuss how clause four should be changed. Does that make the CLPD "incompatible" with the Labour Party?

In our view, the people and organisations "incompatible" with the aims and values of the Labour Party are those who vote with the Tories on austerity, those who wage war on migrants and the poorest section of society and those who scream 'anti-Semites!' in response to criticism of the state of Israel.

While rules can protect us from the worst excesses of arbitrary abuse, they can be interpreted, bent and twisted *ad absurdum* by those in charge. It all depends on the balance of forces in the party ●

### Notes

- [1. http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk/three-clause-fours](http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk/three-clause-fours).
- [2. www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/aug/09/clause-iv-of-labour-party-constitution-what-is-all-the-fuss-about-reinstating-it](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/aug/09/clause-iv-of-labour-party-constitution-what-is-all-the-fuss-about-reinstating-it).

**LABOUR**

# No case to answer

**Stan Keable** was expelled last week from the Labour Party because of his association with Labour Party Marxists, of which he is secretary. This is his reply to Labour's head of disputes

**Dear Mr Sam Matthews**

In reply to your October 2 email, and the attached letter and "evidence", I am writing for the following purposes.

1. To reject the false and malicious allegation against Labour Party Marxists and against myself, by persons unnamed, of anti-Semitism, and to challenge the validity of the so-called "evidence" supplied, in that it in no way substantiates that allegation.

2. To reject your assertion that the "expressed aims and principles" of Labour Party Marxists, of which I am secretary, are "incompatible" with membership of the Labour Party, and to challenge the validity of the so-called "evidence" supplied, in that it in no way substantiates that assertion.

3. To demand to know who made the allegation of anti-Semitism against LPM, and the precise wording of the allegation.

4. To demand the immediate rejection of the allegation of anti-Semitism as unfounded, because (a) the "evidence" provided transparently fails to substantiate the allegation: ie, there is no case to answer; and (b) because the allegation is obviously a continuation of the malicious rightwing smear campaign, promoted by the Israeli state, which maliciously brands as anti-Semitic all criticism of the politics of Zionism and all opposition to Israel's apartheid-type laws and ongoing settler-colonisation of Palestinian land; and (c) because the ready acceptance by the governance and legal unit of such obviously malicious allegations brings the Labour Party into disrepute.

5. To demand the immediate withdrawal of your decision to end my Labour Party membership as an invalid decision, because (a) no case has been made to substantiate your bald assertion of "incompatibility" between the aims of LPM and the aims of the Labour Party; (b) contrary to natural justice, no right of appeal has been offered (only the right to "challenge the validity of the evidence"); (c) instant dismissal from membership without due process brings the Labour Party into disrepute.

The so-called "evidence" attached to your letter consists of published materials which contain not one iota of anything which can reasonably be construed as anti-Semitism, or as "incompatible" with Labour Party membership. Indeed you have not indicated any words, phrases or statements in the "evidence" which might substantiate the allegation of anti-Semitism or the claim of incompatibility with Labour Party membership. In short, there is no case to answer.

## Anti-Semitism?

As a lifelong communist and internationalist, anti-imperialist and anti-racist, I find the charge of anti-Semitism risible. As a child I was proud to hear my parents' anecdotes of how, in the 1930s, they formed part of the 'underground railroad' in east London, giving refuge in their home to illegal Jewish and socialist refugees escaping from Nazi persecution in Germany. In the 1960s I was proud of my brother's courageous role when he risked everything to carry ANC propaganda material into apartheid South Africa as one of Ronnie Kasrils' London Recruits.

The 'anti-Semitism' smear campaign, using the contrived definition concocted by the International Holocaust Memorial



Alliance, and maliciously alleging anti-Jewish racism where none exists, is designed to deflect criticism of Israel and its role as US imperialism's chief ally and collaborator in the Middle East. Its conflation of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism misuses anti-racist

**Stan Keable: we do not stand candidates against Labour, but we do want to change the party from top to bottom**

sentiment to protect the real racism of the Israeli state against Palestinian Arabs. Complicity with Israel's anti-Semitism smear campaign brings the Labour Party into disrepute.

Labour Party Marxists does not consider the existing rules of the

## Defend Moshé Machover

### Hands Off the People of Iran protests against the expulsion of one of Hopi's founding members

Throughout the last few years emeritus professor Moshé Machover has played an important role in Hopi's efforts to combat anti-Semitism in sections of the Iranian opposition and dubious groups around the Shia government in Tehran. In Persian the term 'anti-Semite' refers to those who oppose both Arabs and Jews (ie, those who are non-Persian) and some Iranian nationalists use the Shia religion's historic association with Iranian/Aryan traditions to promote a racist, anti-Arab stance.

Of course, professor Machover's in-depth knowledge of Middle Eastern history, as well as his expertise on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has played an important role in strengthening Hopi's principled positions in opposition to this type of reactionary nationalism - which is alive both within the Iranian opposition and sections of the Islamic Republic regime - at a time when our focus remains one of campaigning against the threat of war and military intervention in Iran. As an independent member of Hopi's coordinating committee (one not associated with any particular political organisation), he often plays an important role bringing together various opinions within the committee.

Moshé Machover is despised by Zionists because he has spoken on a number of occasions (including at Hopi public meetings) about Israel's nuclear capabilities and in particular

the Dimona nuclear plant. This is a very important issue, given the continuing discussions on Iran's nuclear capabilities and the threat of a new conflict in the region. We can only assume that it is such comments that have led him to face the ridiculous accusations, equating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism, levelled against him by the Labour Party head of disputes. It is as if Hopi was accused of being anti-Iranian or Islamophobic because of its opposition to the particular form of religious government that is currently in power in Iran.

The first letter professor Machover received from the Labour Party disputes committee accused him of anti-Semitism for the 'crime' of putting the record straight on historical links between some German Zionists and the Nazis. Hopi has often mentioned the historic connection between Reza Shah Pahlavi, the shah of Iran from 1925 to 1941, and Nazi Germany. This is an historical fact, which some nationalist Iranians, especially royalists, do not like being reminded of. That does not make Hopi a supporter of Nazism: recalling such historical associations does not make us anti-Iranian.

Let us be very clear: this debate is not about anti-Semitism. In fact it is not solely about anti-Zionism. The reality is that the right wing of the Labour Party wants to toe the imperialist line of the US state department and the British

foreign office. The Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn accepts Nato membership and the renewal of Trident and anyone dissenting from such policies is regarded as unwelcome by the Labour right, who will do what they can to expel such individuals.

Hopi has benefited from the support of prominent Labour MPs, as well as individual Labour Party members. These were mainly those opposed to war, those who stood up against the Blairite policy of tailing the US line in the Middle East. We had hoped that a Corbyn leadership would see increased cooperation between Constituency Labour Parties and Hopi at a time when Donald Trump seems intent on the 'de-certification' of the nuclear deal with Iran. That is why we are so disappointed by the speech made by shadow foreign secretary, Emily Thornberry, at the Labour Party conference.

Hopi is fully committed to the defence of professor Machover's anti-Zionist stance. In expressing our continued opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran, we do not forget that there is another religious-based country in the region - one that already has nuclear weapons and whose actions have been a constant threat to peace in the region: ie, the state of Israel. That is why we will not tolerate soft Zionists within our ranks, whether they are members of the Labour Party or any other organisation ●

Labour Party, including the existing version of clause four, to be written in stone. We very much welcome the establishment of the democracy commission and the opportunity to engage with others aiming to change the rules for the better. The existing 1994 Blairite version of clause four, which you baldly assert is "incompatible" with the LPM's aims and principles, is itself the product of several revisions since the adoption of the original version in 1918.

Discussion of further proposed changes does not constitute "incompatibility" with party membership. Indeed, the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy at its 2017 AGM set up a working group (of which I am a member) to draft a rule change proposal for a revised, 21st century, socialist clause four.

LPM was launched by a group of Labour Party members in 2011, following Labour's 2010 general election defeat, in response to the invitation by Peter Hain, then chair of the national policy forum, to members and party units to submit their views on his consultation paper, 'Refounding Labour - a party for the new generation'. Our submission to the consultation, 'Refound Labour as a real party of labour', was duly submitted, and published in *Labour Party Marxists* No1 (autumn 2011), which also includes our 'Aims and principles'. It is still available on the LPM website.<sup>1</sup> Peter Hain thanked us for our contribution, and, of course, no question of our 'Aims and principles' breaching the rules was raised then or since. It is unreasonable to do so now.

## Rule 2.1.4.B

Your October 2 letter quotes rule 2.1.4.B in support of your assertion of "incompatibility".

The first criterion in this rule is so arbitrary that its selective use to expel members of LPM or any individual would amount to unfair and malicious political discrimination. Your interpretation of the rule is clearly mistaken. Do you really propose to expel all members who support "a political organisation other than an official Labour group or unit of the party"? That would mean expelling, for example, all members of Progress, Labour First, Compass, Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, Labour Representation Committee and Momentum, to name just a few.

The second criterion for exclusion from membership in this rule - "supporting any candidate who stands against an official Labour candidate" - does not apply to LPM. On the contrary, LPM has a record of criticising those left groups which do so, such as the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

LPM believes that the Labour Party will be greatly strengthened not by McCarthyite red-baiting to exclude Marxists and socialists unacceptable to Labour's right wing, but by winning the allegiance of all socialists and campaigning for the affiliation to Labour of all socialist groups and all trade unions, and making the party - in the words of Keir Hardie - "a great movement for socialism" ●

**Stan Keable**  
Unison delegate to Hammersmith  
CLP

## Notes

1. [http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/lpm0001\\_nov2011.pdf](http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/lpm0001_nov2011.pdf).

**LPM**

# Transform the Labour Party

The steering committee of Labour Party Marxists has agreed this 13-point platform, which will provide the basis for its submission to the Labour Party democracy commission

**1.** Mandatory reselection is crucial, though it terrifies the right. We read that this, “even more than nuclear disarmament and membership of the European Community, became the main catalyst for the launch of the breakaway Social Democratic Party” in March 1981.<sup>1</sup> In that same treacherous spirit as the founders of the Social Democratic Party in 1981, Progress furiously denounces mandatory reselection as “a weapon of fear and intimidation”.<sup>2</sup> Yes, mandatory reselection is viewed as an affront by every rightwing wrecker, every hiring, every parliamentary careerist.

It is worth looking at the background. Interestingly, and with good foundation, we read on the Progress website that mandatory reselection carries “echoes of the Paris Commune, and of the Russian soviets, where delegates were subject to recall if they displeased their local citizenry. It rests on the idea that leaders will always be tempted to sell you out, once they get power.”<sup>3</sup> Well, surely, that is what history actually shows.

For decades, sitting Labour MPs - certainly those with safe seats - enjoyed a job for life (or as long as no better offer came along). They might deign to visit their constituency once or twice a year, deliver a speech to the AGM and write an occasional letter to the local newspaper. Meanwhile they lived a pampered, middle class life, frequented various London gentlemen’s clubs and spent their weekends in the home counties with Lord this and Lady that. Despite such evident moral corruption, they were automatically the candidate for the next election. Unless found guilty of an act of gross indecency or had the party whip withdrawn, they could do as they pleased.

With the insurgent rise of Bennism that totally unacceptable situation was called into question. The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, founded in 1973, committed itself to a range of rule changes - the mandatory reselection of MPs was finally agreed by the 1980 conference. What this saw, however, was not a Labour Party equivalent of the Paris Commune or the Russian soviets. There was no right to instantly recall. Nevertheless, once in each parliament, our MPs had to secure the endorsement of their local general management committee. Note, GMCs were made up of delegates elected by local party and trade union branches. They were sizable bodies too, typically consisting of 80, 90, 100 or even more delegates.

At the prompting of the bourgeois media, Neil Kinnock, desperately seeking acceptability, sought to extract trade unions from the voting process altogether. He failed, but accepted a compromise. A local electoral college for the selection and reselection of candidates was introduced. Ordinary members were given a direct vote for the first time, leaving GMCs with the right to nominate and shortlist only. This electoral college system gave unions and affiliated organisations up to 40% of the vote, with ordinary members having some 60% (the actual balance was different in each seat, depending on party and union membership).

Trigger ballots were a product of the 1990s. Formally honouring conference’s “desire to maintain reselection”, they made it significantly “easier for MPs to defend their positions”.<sup>4</sup> Trigger ballots allowed for a sitting MP to



**Conference should be sovereign - and fully democratic**

be subject to a full-scale ballot of the membership. But only if they lost a trigger ballot.

We say, all elected Labour representatives, whether councillors, MPs or MEPs, must, by rule, be subject to one-member, one-vote mandatory reselection. All must be brought under democratic control - from above, by the national executive committee; from below, by branches and Constituency Labour Parties.

**2.** We urgently need a sovereign conference once again. The cumbersome, undemocratic and oppressive structures, especially those put in place under the Blair supremacy, must be abolished. The joint policy committee, the national policy forums, etc, have to go.

**3.** We are against the idea of electing the general secretary through an all-member ballot. The NEC should elect all national officers. Therefore the post of Labour leader should be replaced by the post of NEC chair (they would serve as party leader for the purposes of

complying with electoral regulations). We favour annual elections with the right to recall at any time. As a matter of basic principle Marxists oppose all forms of Bonapartism.

**4.** In Scotland and Wales, their executive committees should likewise elect their own officers, including their representatives on the all-UK NEC. We are against a single individual in Scotland and Wales having the right to appoint themselves, or a trusted clone.

**5.** Scrap the hated compliance unit “and get back to the situation where people are automatically accepted for membership, unless there is a significant issue that comes up” (John McDonnell).<sup>5</sup> The compliance unit operates in the murky shadows, routinely leaks to the capitalist media and makes rulings in a completely biased manner. We want to welcome into our ranks the bulk of those who have been barred by the compliance unit. Many of them are good socialists with a proven record. There must be an amnesty for those

members expelled for having supported leftwing organisations and publications. **6.** Anyone expelled from membership ought to have the right to reapply - not after five years, but in just one year. All disciplinary procedures should be completed within three months, at which point suspensions must be automatically rescinded. Endless delay violates natural justice.

**7.** The huge swing towards Labour in the June 2017 general election happened in no small part due to the enthusiasm of young voters. Yet Young Labour is a creaking, uninviting, thoroughly bureaucratic construction. We need a one-member, one-vote organisation. That must include Young Labour’s national committee. At present, two-thirds of votes are accounted for by appointees from affiliated organisations: eg, the Fabians and Cooperative Party, and affiliated trade unions. Instead of the biennial policy and national committee elections, their must be an annual conference that can both decide on policy and elect a leadership. Young Labour has to have the right to decide on its own constitution and standing orders.

**8.** We need a rule that commits the NEC to securing the affiliation of all trade unions to the Labour Party. The FBU has already reaffiliated. Excellent. Matt Wrack at last changed his mind and took the lead in reversing the disaffiliation policy. But what about the RMT? Let us win RMT militants to finally drop their support for the thoroughly misconceived Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition project. Instead reaffiliate to the Labour Party. And what about the National Education Union? This year’s Cardiff conference saw the executive narrowly win an amendment, by 50.63% to 49.37%, which in effect ruled out considering affiliation ... at this moment. This can be changed - if we campaign to win hearts and minds.

Then there is the PCS. Thankfully, Mark Serwotka, its leftwing general secretary, has at last come round to the idea. Yes, PCS affiliation will run up against the Trades Disputes and Trade Union Act (1927), introduced by a vengeful Tory government in the aftermath of the general strike. Civil service unions were barred from affiliating to the Labour Party and the TUC. The Civil and Public Services Association - predecessor of the PCS - reaffiliated to the TUC in 1946. Now, however, surely, it is time for the PCS to reaffiliate to the Labour Party. Force another change in the law.

**9.** There has to be a shift in the party, away from the HQ, regional officers, the leader’s office, the Parliamentary Labour Party, etc. CLPs must be empowered. Towards that end there has to be proper financing. CLPs should be allocated 50% of the individual membership dues. That will help with producing publicity material, hiring rooms, paying for full-time officers, providing transport, setting up websites, etc. That way, our CLPs can be made into vibrant centres of socialist organisation, education and action.

**10.** Our goal must be a Labour Party that, in the words of Keir Hardie, can “organise the working class into a great, independent political power to fight for the coming of socialism”.<sup>6</sup> We therefore need rule changes to *once again* allow left, communist and revolutionary groups and parties to affiliate. As long as they do not stand against us in elections, this can only but strengthen Labour as a federal party. Nowadays affiliated organisations include the Fabians, Christians on the Left, the Cooperative Party and, problematically, the Jewish Labour

Movement and Labour Business. Encourage the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party in England and Wales, Communist Party of Great Britain, Left Unity, Socialist Appeal, the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain, etc, to join our ranks.

**11.** Being an MP ought to be an honour, not a career ladder, not a way for university graduates to secure a lucrative living. A particularly potent weapon here would be a rule requiring all our elected representatives and officials to take only the average wage of a skilled worker - a principle upheld by the Paris Commune and the Bolshevik revolution. Our MPs are on a basic £67,060 annual salary. On top of that they get around £12,000 in expenses and allowances, putting them on £79,060 (yet at present Labour MPs are only obliged to pay the £82 parliamentarians’ subscription rate). Moreover, as leader of the official opposition, Jeremy Corbyn not only gets his MP’s salary: he is entitled to an additional £73,617.<sup>7</sup>

Let them keep the average skilled worker’s wage - say £40,000 (plus legitimate expenses). Then, however, they should hand the balance over to the party. Even without a rule change Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell, Diane Abbott ought to take the lead here.

**12.** Relying on the favours of the capitalist press, radio and TV is a fool’s game. Yes, it worked splendidly for Tony Blair and Alistair Campbell. But, as Neil Kinnock, Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband found to their cost, to live by the mainstream media is to die by the mainstream media.

The NEC should, by rule, establish and maintain our own press, radio and TV. To state the obvious, tweeting and texting have severe limits. They are brilliant mediums for transmitting simple, short and sharp messages to the already converted, but, when it comes to complex ideas, debating history and charting out political strategies, they are worse than useless. We should provide time and space for controversy and the whole range of different opinions within the party. Without that our media will be dull, lifeless, pointless. We should also take full advantage of parliamentary immunity to circumvent the oppressive libel laws. Then we can say the unsayable. That would prove to be electric in terms of shaping and mobilising public opinion.

**13.** We should adopt a new clause four. Not a return to the old 1918 version, but a commitment to working class rule and a society which aims for a stateless, classless, moneyless society, which embodies the principle, ‘From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs’. That is what socialism is all about. Not a measly £10 per hour “living wage”, shifting the tax balance and a state investment bank. No, re-establishing socialism in the mainstream of politics means committing the Labour Party to achieving a “democratic republic”<sup>8</sup> ●

**Notes**

1. <http://thirdavenue.org.uk/a-beginners-guide-to-the-labour-party-rulebook-part-2-reselection-of-mps>.  
2. [www.progressionline.org.uk/2015/09/28/the-price-of-a-seat-in-parliament](http://www.progressionline.org.uk/2015/09/28/the-price-of-a-seat-in-parliament).  
3. *Ibid.*  
4. <http://thirdavenue.org.uk/a-beginners-guide-to-the-labour-party-rulebook-part-2-reselection-of-mps>.  
5. <http://labourlist.org/2016/02/mcdonnell-and-woodcock-clash-over-plan-to-scrap-member-checks>.  
6. Independent Labour Party *Report of the 18th annual conference* London 1910, p59.  
7. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leader\\_of\\_the\\_Opposition\\_\(United\\_Kingdom\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leader_of_the_Opposition_(United_Kingdom)).  
8. *Labour Party Marxists* July 7 2016.

## OUR HISTORY

# Triumph of 'revolutionary parliamentarism'

Elections - as a means, not an end - were central to Lenin's strategic thinking, argued August Nimtz in his concluding talk at the CPGB's Communist University

Lenin was in exile in Switzerland when Russia's masses once again became protagonists of history. This time, in February-March 1917, they did what they could not do in 1905-1907: they finally put to rest the sclerotic 300-year-old Romanov dynasty. A provisional government, composed mainly of Cadets and other bourgeois forces, took its place and claimed its legitimacy in what remained of the fourth duma.

But almost immediately Lenin rained down criticisms on it:

In its manifesto, the new government promises every kind of freedom, but has failed in its direct and unconditional duty immediately to implement such freedoms as election of officers, etc, by the soldiers; elections to the St Petersburg, Moscow and other city councils on a basis of genuinely universal, and not merely male, suffrage; make all government and public buildings available for public meetings; appoint elections to all local institutions and *zemstva* [councils], likewise on the basis of genuinely universal suffrage; repeal all restrictions on the rights of local government bodies; dismiss all officials appointed to supervise local government bodies; introduce not only freedom of religion, but also freedom from religion, immediately separate the school from the church and free it of control by government officials, etc ...

The soviets of workers' deputies must be organised; the workers must be armed. Proletarian organisations must be extended to the army (which the new government has likewise promised political rights) and to the rural areas. In particular there must be a separate class organisation for farm labourers.<sup>2</sup>

Why was Lenin so insistent that elections be held, especially for "the soldiers"? Because the Bolsheviks, I argue, would then be able "to count their forces and to lay before the public their revolutionary attitude and party standpoint";<sup>3</sup> as Marx and Engels advised in their 1850 *Address of the central committee to the Communist League*; to see if "the thermometer of universal suffrage registers boiling point among the workers"; as Engels put it in his *The origin of the family, private property and state* in 1884; and, to see if "universal suffrage ... indicates with the most perfect accuracy the day when a call to armed revolution has to be made";<sup>4</sup> as Engels explained to a French comrade eight years later. Did subsequent developments confirm his expectations?

If it had been premature in the first few months of the 1905 uprising to employ the 1850 *Address*, as Lenin had argued against Plekhanov post-February 1917, now was the time to do so. A popular democratic revolution of workers and peasants had overthrown the old regime. The *Address* spoke exactly to such a moment - what the worker's movement needed to do to ensure a "revolution in permanence". But, as Lenin sought to explain to his Bolshevik comrades, a unique situation arose, an unanticipated outcome - two contradictory institutions sharing state power: that is, "dual power".

On the one hand, there was the provisional government, which clearly, on the basis of the class interests of the parties in power, sought to keep the process from being "permanent" - the last thing they wanted. That was still true a few months later when the government was joined by Socialist Revolutionaries such as Alexander



Vindicated: Lenin's approach of using elections

Kerensky - "near socialists", as Lenin sarcastically called them. On the other hand, soviets, the institutional embodiment of the popular uprising, had quickly emerged, independent of Lenin's calls from abroad to do so - not unlike what had happened in 1905.

### Soviets

In calling for the organisation of soviets, Lenin was following the advice of Marx and Engels in the *Address*. The worker's movement in such a situation, they wrote, should have "unconcealed mistrust in the new government ... Alongside the new government they must immediately establish their own revolutionary workers' governments, whether in the form of ... municipal councils ... workers' committees", etc.

Compare this to what he advised to one of the first groups of Bolsheviks returning to Russia after the February revolution: "no trust in and no support for the new government".<sup>5</sup> What had not been foreseen in the *Address*, the uniqueness of the situation, is that the alternative workers' institutions, the soviets, were not contesting "the new government", but willingly conceding power to the provisional government.<sup>6</sup> Much of Lenin's task for the next seven months was to make a convincing case, through "patient explaining", why the soviets and not the provisional government were the real expression of the interests of Russia's plebeian masses and why, therefore, they needed to stop ceding power to the provisional government and take power in their own name. Independent working class political action in the electoral arena - what Marx and Engels and the prior decade of duma work had prepared Lenin for - would be the way to realise his goal. The *Address*, I contend, again, served as Lenin's play book.

Lenin clarified his demand for elections:

Reference is not to the Constituent Assembly, but to elections to *municipal* bodies. Elections to the Constituent Assembly are, so far, merely an empty promise. Elections to the Petrograd city council [duma] could and should be held *immediately*, if the government is really capable of introducing its promised freedoms. These elections could help the proletariat organise and strengthen

its revolutionary positions.<sup>7</sup>

To be clear, he still supported the convening of a Constituent Assembly, but "without the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies ... [its] convocation ... is not guaranteed and its success is impossible".<sup>8</sup>

Prior to his return to Petrograd Lenin penned his now famous 'Letters from afar', in which he outlined his vision for the next stage in Russia's revolution. Especially relevant were his comments about the Soviet of Workers' Deputies formed in Petrograd. That the Soviet was "drawing in *soldiers'* deputies, and, undoubtedly deputies from rural *wage-workers*, and then (in one form or another) from the entire peasant poor" was most encouraging. The inclusion of the soldiers' deputies gave licence to say that the soviet comprised "over 1,500 deputies of workers and peasants dressed in soldiers' uniform":

The prime and most important task, and one that brooks no delay, is to set up organisations of this kind in all parts of Russia without exception, for all trades and strata of the proletariat and semi-proletarian population without exception ... I shall mention that for the entire mass of the peasantry our party ... should especially recommend soviets of wage-workers and soviets of small tillers who do not sell grain, to be formed *separately* from the well-to-do peasants.<sup>9</sup>

Just as Lenin had once sought to use the four dumas to construct the worker-peasant alliance, he was now advocating that the soviets be the vehicle for doing the same - a far more democratic representative body, akin to the Paris Commune.

Of crucial importance for the effectiveness of the soviets, he emphasised, was the organisation of a "genuine *people's* militia: *ie*, one that, first, consists of the *entire* population, of all adult citizens of *both* sexes; and, second, one that combines the functions of a people's army with police functions, with the functions of the chief and fundamental organ of public order and public administration".<sup>10</sup> Along with independent working class political action in the electoral and parliamentary arenas and workers having "their own revolutionary

workers' governments", an "armed" and "organised" proletariat was the third essential weapon in the *Address* for ensuring the "revolution in permanence". Not for naught did Lenin place such emphasis on the militias (*nota bene*: "of *both sexes*").

Lenin's first task once he returned to Petrograd was to win over fellow Bolsheviks to his position. Campaigning for "all power to the soviets" would require "a systematic struggle within the soviets (by means of propaganda and new elections) for the triumph of the proletarian line".<sup>11</sup> With Trotsky, who once headed the legendary St Petersburg soviet of 1905, now on his side after having been a bitter opponent for more than a decade, Lenin was on surer footing in trying to win over the soviets via "propaganda and new elections". In the May 15 issue of the newly revived *Pravda* Lenin raised publicly for the first time the slogan: "*All power to the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies! No confidence in the government of the capitalists!*"<sup>12</sup> But only for propaganda and not agitation - at least at this time.

### Opportunity to teach

Almost immediately upon his return in April, Lenin plunged into electoral work, picking up from where he had left off three years earlier before the arrests of the Bolshevik deputies. If there was one thing that characterised post-Romanov Russia, it was the ubiquity of elections, this time not only to soviets, but to local dumas as well - why Lenin called Russia "the freest of all the belligerent countries [in World War I] in the world".<sup>13</sup> Elections, as he was fond of saying, were an opportunity "to teach".

He soon composed a piece of campaign literature for mass distribution, modelled on something he did for the 1906 duma elections that neatly distinguished the stances of the four competing parties - "Parties and groups to the right of the Constitutional Democrats [Cadets]"; the "Constitutional Democrats and kindred groups"; the "Social Democrats [Mensheviks], the Socialist Revolutionaries and kindred groups"; and, lastly, "Bolsheviks - the party which properly should be called the *Communist Party*".<sup>14</sup>

Especially important for Lenin was how the parties stood on "the elective principle". If the principle applied to government officials, should not soldiers be able to elect their officers? "Not only must they be elected, but every step of every officer and general must be supervised by persons specially elected for the purpose by the soldiers." And if civilians could displace government officials, should not soldiers enjoy the same right? "It is desirable and essential in every way. The soldiers will obey and *respect* only elected authorities".<sup>15</sup>

Whether Lenin's pamphlet impacted upon soldiers is uncertain. It may have helped to generalise practices that were already in place, as mounting losses on the battlefield sparked increasing rank-and-file resistance to the commands of officers. What is known is that the Bolsheviks' success in October was due in large part to the support they enjoyed among soldiers and sailors: the promise of democracy and the elective principle - which no other party had put in writing - no doubt made them attractive. For the party's new programme he proposed that the principle apply at all levels of governance and throughout the new society it sought to bring into existence. It applied as well, he argued, to the party itself.

Lenin's pamphlet appeared just in time for the 12 Petrograd district duma elections held at the end of May. As they were about to take place, Lenin pointed to "two shortcomings in our party organisation and party work". They concerned the Bolsheviks' list of candidates for one of the wealthiest districts in the city:

Our list for Liteiny District has only 33 candidates, as against the 63 of the Cadets and the Menshevik bloc. ... Apparently, our party workers have not been able to find more than 33 candidates of the proletarian party in this wealthy district. But this is an obvious shortcoming in our work, an obvious indication that we have not gone down far enough into the midst of the working and exploited people. We must break with established custom. In the wealthy districts we must 'go among the people' more energetically than ever, and waken more and more strata of the working and exploited people to political consciousness. We should get the non-party proletarian elements - especially the *domestic servants*, for instance - to take an active part in the elections and not hesitate to put the most reliable of them into our proletarian list. Why should we fear a minority of non-party *proletarian* elements, when the majority are class-conscious internationalist proletarians?<sup>16</sup>

Nothing in the published corpus about his activities in 1917 reveals better than this directive the seriousness that Lenin lent to elections - precisely because he was trying to measure public sentiment to determine when best to resort to armed struggle.

A few months later elections to the Petrograd city duma took place. William Rosenberg provides the most detailed account in English.<sup>17</sup> Of significance are the gains the Bolsheviks made over the prior elections - a 14% improvement that foreshadowed their future fortunes. The party went into full campaign mode not only in Petrograd, but in Moscow - where it increased its vote by 40% - and other locations where local duma elections were to take place. Crucial evidence for my argument is that post-revolution Bolshevik

memoirs say that they regarded their gains “not only as a means of ‘taking the revolutionary temperature of the masses’ [Engels’ “thermometer”], but also as a potential aid in seizing power”.<sup>18</sup> Not only Lenin, but other Bolsheviks, were familiar with Engels’ metaphor.

Of tremendous assistance to the Bolshevik campaigns was the start-up of two party newspapers, *Proletary* and *Soldat*, in place of the now banned *Pravda*. The Bolsheviks could now disseminate their programme on a mass scale. Very reminiscent of the campaign literature Lenin had once written was the appeal to voters in three issues of *Proletary*:

Every worker, peasant, and soldier must vote for our list, because only our party is struggling staunchly and bravely against the raging counterrevolutionary dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and large landowners. [Only our party] is fighting the reimposition of capital punishment, the destruction of worker and soldier organisations, and the suppression of all the freedoms won with the blood and sweat of the people. You must vote for our party because it alone is struggling bravely with the peasantry against large landowners, with workers against factory owners, with the oppressed everywhere against the oppressors.<sup>19</sup>

This appeal and all the details of the campaign make it hard to believe that Lenin - who was on the run, a fact that probably explains the lack of a paper trail - was not the orchestrator of and largely responsible for what was achieved. No Bolshevik knew more about how to conduct an effective and successful election campaign.

Krupskaya, Lenin’s comrade and wife, provides the best circumstantial evidence. After returning to Petrograd, “my work at the secretariat bored me more and more,” she wrote:

I wanted to get into real mass work. I also wanted to see Ilyich [Lenin] more often ... The district duma elections took place in June. I went to Vasilevsky Island to see what progress was being made in the election campaign ... The elections to the district dumas were over. I was elected to the Vyborg district council. The only candidates to be elected to this council were Bolsheviks and a few Menshevik Internationalists ... I learned a great deal from the work in the Vyborg district. It was a good school for party and soviet work. During the many years that I had lived abroad as a political exile, I never dared to make a speech even at a small meeting, and until that time I had never written a single line in *Pravda*. I needed such a school very much.<sup>20</sup>

Krupskaya’s education speaks volumes about what was opened for the Bolsheviks with the new opportunity for “mass work” through the local duma elections. Again, it is highly unlikely that Lenin was not intimately involved with her new and more fulfilling political life.

More decisive than the elections to the local dumas, however, as history would show, were those to the soviets. Unlike those for the local dumas, elections to the soviets were more frequent and included the right of recall, the details of which, however, are not captured in the extant published Lenin corpus. A decisive turning point in the revolution came in July, when the Bolsheviks - who, in Trotsky’s words, “occupied a wholly insignificant sector” of the workers’ section of the soviet in April - now constituted “two thirds of its members” as a result of by-elections in the factories: “That meant that among the masses their influence had become decisive”.<sup>21</sup>

The Bolsheviks achieved a major victory in the Petrograd and Moscow

soviets on, respectively, August 31 and September 5, when an overwhelming majority of delegates in both bodies passed motions calling for a rejection of any compromises with the bourgeoisie and the transfer of “all power to the soviets!” - testimony to the deepening of the revolutionary process. About this moment Trotsky writes:

The city dumas, which had made an effort to compete with the soviets, died down in the days of danger and vanished. The Petrograd duma humbly sent its delegation to the Soviet ‘for an explanation of the general situation and the establishment of contact’.<sup>22</sup>

## Eve of October

In the lead-up to the October revolution Bolsheviks debated whether they enjoyed sufficient support for carrying out an armed overthrow of the provisional government. The carnage on the battlefield, enabled by Kerensky’s government, specifically, the price that Russia’s peasants and workers were paying in blood, was the pressing issue. Lenin, in the minority - Trotsky was the central committee member closest to his views on this - insisted that adequate support existed:

The Bolsheviks, having obtained a majority in the Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies in both capitals, can and must take state power into their own hands ... The majority gained in the soviets of the metropolitan cities resulted from the people coming over to our side ... Compare the elections to the city councils of Petrograd and Moscow with the elections to the soviets. Compare the elections in Moscow with the Moscow strike of August 12. Those are objective facts regarding that majority of revolutionary elements that are leading the people.<sup>23</sup>

For Lenin, again, elections were an invaluable tool for calculating the probability of success in the most important election: the masses voting with their feet, their willingness and ability to not only take power, but defend it. Note “objective” - exactly the term he had used in analysing the fourth duma election results in 1912. Also note the qualifier, the “majority of revolutionary elements that are leading the people” - the most effective voters, those voting with their feet.

Lenin reiterated this point about the value of elections five months after the October revolution in a debate about the prospects for a Bolshevik-like revolution in Germany:

As matters stood in October, we had made a precise calculation of the mass forces. We not only thought - we knew with certainty - from the experience of the mass elections to the soviets that the overwhelming majority of the workers and soldiers had already come over to our side in September and in early October. We knew ... that the coalition [provisional government] had also lost the support of the peasantry - and that meant that our cause had already won.<sup>24</sup>

Engels would have nodded in agreement.

The Socialist Revolutionary-Menshevik leadership of the executive of the soviet convened in mid-September the ‘Democratic Conference’ - basically an attempt to divert the energy boiling from below, and increasingly led by the Bolsheviks, into the parliamentary arena. Lenin urged the party’s leadership not to be enticed:

It would be a big mistake - sheer parliamentary cretinism - on our part if we were to regard the Democratic Conference as a parliament; for, even if it were to proclaim itself a permanent and sovereign parliament of the revolution, it would nevertheless

decide nothing. The power of decision lies outside it in the working class quarters of Petrograd and Moscow.<sup>25</sup>

Consistent with all of the lessons Marx and Engels had drawn about 1848 and the experiences of Russia’s own revolution, Lenin explained - in anticipation of Russia’s future “civil war” and its outcome - why “outside” the electoral and parliamentary arenas was more important:

A comparison of the data on the ‘parliamentary’ [local duma] elections and the data on the ... mass movements [since April 20] fully corroborates, in respect of Russia, an observation often made in the west: namely, that the revolutionary proletariat is incomparably stronger in the extra-parliamentary than in the parliamentary struggle, as far as influencing the masses and drawing them into the struggle is concerned.<sup>26</sup>

When Lenin decided that the Bolsheviks should boycott the conference he drew on “the elements that went into shaping the correct tactics of boycotting the Bulygin duma” in 1905 and the “incorrect” ones of “boycotting the third duma” in 1907.<sup>27</sup> Again, note the importance of his prior practice with the four state dumas. Note, also, his love affair, once again, with “data”.

After delays and postponements the provisional government finally set a date for elections to the Constituent Assembly: November 12. Having insisted for months that they be held, the Bolsheviks immediately made preparations to take part. Ever vigilant about a proletarian approach to the electoral process, Lenin, however, criticised the composition of the list the central committee had put together. There were two problems. First, more workers - “four or five times more” - needed to be included, because in what would be an overwhelmingly “peasant Constituent Assembly ... they alone are capable of establishing close and intimate ties with the peasant deputies”. The second and related problem had to do with the political histories of many on the list:

It is absolutely inadmissible also to have an excessive number of candidates from among people who have but recently joined our party and have not yet been tested ... In filling the list with such candidates who should first have worked in the party for months and months, the CC has thrown wide open the door for careerists who scramble for seats in the Constituent Assembly.<sup>28</sup>

His more than decade-long work around the four state dumas had prepared Lenin for this moment - to ensure that the Bolsheviks who might be elected, including himself, hewed strictly to a course of independent working class political action and the forging of the worker-peasant alliance.

In the meantime, and almost anticlimactically, Lenin was finally able through the use of “data” and “objective facts” to convince the majority of the Bolshevik central committee to organise an armed overthrow of the now-discredited provisional government. The relative ease with which the revolution was carried out on October 25 - marked by the absence of any real defence of the provisional government and, thus, minimum bloodshed, especially in Petrograd - offers convincing evidence that Lenin was indeed right that the effective majority of the population - those willing to vote with their feet - would support the insurrection. And nothing was as important in his calculus as the results of the various elections that preceded it - an opportunity, as the ‘Address’ put it, for the Bolsheviks to “count their forces”.

The fundamental question of the Russian Revolution - which class would rule after the overthrow of

the monarchy - was officially settled on January 6 1918. The new soviet government, at Lenin’s initiative, essentially declared null and void the long-delayed Constituent Assembly that finally met the day before. Events on the ground from at least October 25 to January 6 revealed that the coalition of workers and peasants via the soviets constituted the country’s *de facto* and new ruling classes. ‘All power to the soviets’ was no longer just a demand, but now a *fait accompli*.

Unlike in July and August 1917, when soviet power was threatened by the bourgeoisie - the attempted *coup d’état* of Kerensky and Kornilov - the masses did not come out into the streets to defend the Constituent Assembly when it was dissolved on January 6. This was telling testimony to what had transpired over the course of the preceding year. Its dissolution meant that the bourgeoisie no longer had the prospect of a government, like the provisional one, to protect its class interests. The bourgeoisie and its supporters had made the mistake of confusing an election - to the Constituent Assembly - with the actual exercise of political power: what I call voting fetishism (the necessary complement to ‘parliamentary cretinism’).

Realising that real political power lies outside the electoral/parliamentary arena, Russia’s bourgeoisie sought to recoup its losses by launching a civil war, with the assistance of fellow bourgeois governments, including that of the United States. The Bolsheviks had anticipated as much - one reason why the internal debate had been so heated. It was not enough, the argument went, to take state power: could it be held? When the data for the Constituent Assembly elections finally became available in 1919 - more than a year into the civil war - Lenin’s penchant for number-crunching kicked into high gear. The data, he argued, explained not only why the Bolsheviks were able to take power in October, but why they were winning the civil war at the end of 1919.

Even Lenin’s opponents grudgingly admit to the objectivity and validity of his analysis.<sup>29</sup> His article, ‘The Constituent Assembly elections and the dictatorship of the proletariat’,<sup>30</sup> with its concluding list of 10 thesis-like points, proved to be Lenin’s penultimate declaration on the revolutionary employment of the electoral and parliamentary arenas - a summary and generalisation of the Russian experience.<sup>31</sup>

Lenin’s final word on the topic came a few months later in *Leftwing communism: an infantile disorder*, his most extensive writing after the October revolution. In preparation for the second congress of the newly founded Communist or Third International, its purpose was to convince revolutionary forces elsewhere inspired by the October revolution of the need to fully understand Bolshevik ascendancy. For those who thought that participation in bourgeois elections and parliaments was a waste of time, he demurred. Referring to the four state Dumas, he wrote:

We Bolsheviks participated in the most counterrevolutionary parliaments, and experience has shown that this participation was not only useful, but indispensable to the party of the revolutionary proletariat, after the first bourgeois revolution in Russia (1905), so as to pave the way for the second bourgeois revolution (February 1917), and then for the socialist revolution (October 1917).<sup>32</sup>

Lenin could not have been clearer about how “indispensable” he saw his decade-long experience in electoral-parliamentary work around the four state dumas was to Bolshevik success in 1917. The evidence also makes clear, I claim, that Marx and Engels were his

“indispensable” informants in that work.

The only addendum Marx and Engels ever made to the *Communist manifesto* - in 1872 - was what they regarded to be the principle lesson of the Paris Commune of 1871: “One thing especially was proved by the Commune ... the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purpose”.<sup>33</sup> The bourgeois republic, in other words, could not be a vehicle for socialist transformation - a lesson either ignored or unknown by many a workers’ movement party ever since and, tragically, to their peril (the most notable recent casualties arguably are Syriza in Greece and the Workers Party in Brazil).

The Commune revealed that a new kind of state was needed for such a transformation, such as what Russia’s toilers invented - soviet governance. Participation in the bourgeois electoral-parliamentary arena, Marx and Engels recognised, was indeed fraught with all kinds of reformist dangers. But to abstain, as the anarchists advocated, was a dead end. The alternative, squarely rooted in Marx and Engels, was what Lenin came to call “revolutionary parliamentarism”.

Rather than an end in itself, taking part in bourgeois elections and parliaments was a means to an end - working class ascent. That is the lesson of the October revolution which has, I argue, more currency than ever ●

## Notes

- Comrade Nintz’s first talk discussed how Marx and Engels informed that strategy (‘Bringing Marx and Engels into the picture’ *Weekly Worker* September 21). The decade-long work around the four state dumas from 1905 to 1915, and how it allowed him to develop that strategy, was the subject of the second talk (‘Taking elections seriously’ *Weekly Worker* October 5). This concluding talk discusses the fruition of that election work a century ago, in October 1917. It was based on the article, ‘The Bolsheviks come to power: a new interpretation’, published in *Science and Society* Vol 81, no4, October 2017.
- VI Lenin *CW* Vol 23, pp289-90.
- K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 10, pp280-81.
- K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 50, p29.
- www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/mar/29.htm.
- M-A Waters, ‘The workers’ and farmers’ government: a popular revolutionary dictatorship’ *New Internationalist* summer/spring 1984.
- VI Lenin *CW* Vol 23, pp292-93.
- VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, p25.
- www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/lfafar/third.htm.
- VI Lenin *CW* Vol 23, pp324-29.
- VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, pp295-96.
- VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, p334.
- www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/04.htm.
- www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/02.htm.
- VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, pp93-101.
- VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, p512.
- WG Rosenberg, ‘The Russian municipal duma elections of 1917: a preliminary computation of returns’ *Soviet Studies* October 1969.
- Ibid* p162.
- Quoted in A Rabinowitch *The Bolsheviks come to power: the revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* New York 1976, p92.
- N Krupskaya *Memories of Lenin* London 1970, pp303-06.
- L Trotsky *The history of the Russian Revolution* New York 2009, pp523-24.
- Ibid* p795.
- VI Lenin *CW* Vol 26, p19.
- VI Lenin *CW* Vol 27, p25.
- VI Lenin *CW* Vol 26, p25. It is no accident that Lenin re-employs “parliamentary cretinism” at this moment. He had been reading Marx and Engels on the German revolution of 1848, as his letter to the central committee, ‘Marxism and insurrection’, shows.
- VI Lenin *CW* Vol 26, p33.
- VI Lenin *CW* Vol 26, pp54-55.
- VI Lenin *CW* Vol 41, pp446-48.
- See, for example, Oliver Radkey, who writes: “... his point of view was by no means as biased as one might expect, for he consciously sought in the figures the lessons they contained for his party, whether flattering or otherwise, and his deductions constitute a thoroughgoing and penetrating analysis of the results” (O Radkey *Russia goes to the polls: the elections to the all-Russian Constituent Assembly, 1917* New York 1990).
- VI Lenin *CW* Vol 30, pp252-75.
- Trotsky and Zinoviev drafted a set of theses on the communist parties and parliamentarism for the Second Congress of Comintern in 1920 that drew on that experience. See J Riddell *Workers of the world and oppressed peoples unite! Proceedings and documents of the Second Congress, 1920* New York 1991.
- www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/ch07.htm.
- K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol; 23, p175.

**IRELAND**

# Make it free, safe and legal

The struggle for abortion rights is an essential part of the fight to end women's oppression, writes **Alan Gibson** of **Rebels4Choice** (personal capacity)

As most readers will know, abortion is illegal in Ireland, except in very restricted circumstances. The current legal framework of the 2013 Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act allows for abortion only in cases of a risk of loss of life from physical illness or from suicide.

In the three years following the passing of the legislation there were only 77 abortions carried out under its provisions. This contrasts with the approximately 10,000 women who gave Irish addresses at abortion clinics in Britain during those same three years - not to mention the hundreds more who did not give Irish addresses or who travelled to other countries like Spain and the Netherlands; nor indeed the many undocumented others who are increasingly turning to the online purchase of 'abortion pills'.

Under section 40.3.3 of the constitution (eighth amendment):

The state acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right.

But the movement to change all this had clearly been gaining momentum and September 2016 saw the largest 'March for Choice' so far, with between 20,000 and 25,000 participants - clearly demonstrating the increasing support for a referendum to repeal the eighth amendment.

In response the government set up a 'Citizens Assembly' in November 2016 to consider a number of matters, including constitutional reform. Under the assembly's terms of reference, it was directed to first consider the eighth amendment - its conclusions on the matter were to be submitted to the Houses of the Oireachtas (parliament) for further debate and a final decision.

The Citizens Assembly was made up of 99 members of the public chosen at random by a private polling company - the aim being an assembly that was 'representative' of society as regards age, gender, social class, regional spread, etc. Any potential participants who were activists, on either side of the debate on the issue, were to be excluded - this did happen with at least one person I know of who had been active in the Cork pro-choice movement a couple of years previously.

Although this had obviously not been openly stated, it is safe to assume that the government's primary reason for creating the Citizen's Assembly was to postpone having to make a decision so early in its tenure about holding a referendum on such a contentious issue. Undoubtedly it also hoped that the recommendations issued by this sample of the 'middle ground' would be limited in scope and could then be watered down even further in the Oireachtas.

The assembly's report on the eighth amendment and what, if anything, should replace it was finally published on June 29 2017. The key recommendations were to be a surprise - not only to the government and the anti-choice lobby, but also to most pro-choice activists, in that they were far more radical than expected.

A majority of assembly members favoured access to abortion with no time limit at all when there was:

- real and substantial physical risk to the life of the mother (including by threat of suicide);



**Record numbers take to the streets**

- serious risk to her physical health (including mental health);
- foetal abnormality likely to result in death of the baby before or shortly after birth.

The situations where a majority favoured access for up to the first 22 weeks of pregnancy were:

- risk to the mother's health (including her mental health);
- significant foetal abnormality not likely to result in death before or shortly after birth;
- socio-economic reasons.

On pregnancy resulting from rape, the majority were in favour of allowing termination, but split fairly equally between up to 12 weeks, up to 22 weeks and no time limit.

The most surprising recommendation was on completely unrestricted access. A majority was in favour, but only for a limited period - they were split between 12 and 22 weeks (on each of the questions assembly members were given the options of 'never', '12 weeks', '22 weeks' and 'no limit').

## Referendum

On September 26 the taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, announced that a referendum on the constitutional framework for Ireland's abortion laws will be held in May or June 2018. The exact wording of the referendum will be the result of a parliamentary vote on the recommendations of a special Oireachtas committee, which was established in April to consider the Citizens Assembly recommendations.

On September 30 the latest March for Choice filled the streets of Dublin with double the previous year's figures - somewhere between 40,000 and 50,000 took part. As a pro-choice activist in Cork, these numbers came as no surprise to me. Rebels4Choice activists in the city organised three

buses, while another two were filled by the supporters of the Feminist Society at the university. In previous years there had been a maximum of two buses booked in total.

It is clear that momentum for a referendum to repeal the eighth amendment is growing and the key questions now facing us concern the wording and the nature of the alternative legislation when, as expected, the constitutional restriction is removed.

The forces in favour of repeal are now organised in the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment, which comprises over 100 organisations. This coalition is still focused on the short-term goal of fighting for a referendum rather than the alternative wording to replace section 40.3.3 of the constitution.

The most consistently pro-choice position on a future legal framework is taken by those in the coalition who argue for the decriminalisation of abortion, so that it is treated like any other medical procedure. Whether to have an abortion would be up to the individual woman in consultation with her healthcare professional, the woman's decision being taken in the context of free and widely available abortion services with appropriate health-focused regulations guaranteeing the highest possible quality of care.

While, as I say, the coalition has no agreed position on an alternative legislative framework, the majority of member organisations seem to be arguing that the recommendations of the Citizens Assembly are the minimum that would be acceptable.

One noticeable exception to this is the position of the Socialist Party of Ireland and its sister/front organisations, Solidarity and ROSA (whose initials

stand for 'For Reproductive rights, against Repression, Sexism and Austerity'!). The SP proposes calling for a plebiscite, or public consultative vote, to be held at the same time as the referendum on four options for extending availability of abortions that are broadly in accordance with the Citizens Assembly recommendations: in the case of fatal foetal abnormality, risk to health, socio-economic problems, and without restriction for the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

While the pro-choice movement as a whole is calling for all four options to be passed in the plebiscite, the SP's recommendations are in effect arguing for those options to be presented to the Oireachtas as the maximum possible basis for new legislation. This is quite strange, given that the Socialist Party is trying to project itself as the most militant pro-choice voice of the movement, when in fact its position is actually the most limited amongst all pro-choice organisations.

## Reactionary role

A major obstacle to greater access to any kind of abortion services is, of course, the Catholic church, which actively campaigns against any change in Ireland's restrictive laws. And, in fact, even if there were to be a significant liberalisation of the current legislation there would still be a problem in accessing the necessary facilities, as the church plays a central role in the provision of hospital services. It will take whatever steps are necessary to prevent abortion services being provided in hospitals which remain under its control.

Ireland has an appalling record on all aspects of women's rights, not just access to abortion. The barbaric horror of symphyotomies procedures imposed on many women during childbirth without their knowledge or

consent. The abuse that occurred in the Magdalene Laundries and "mother and baby homes". Until 1973 women in the civil service faced mandatory retirement on getting married, and divorce was only permitted from 1996. It was only six years previously, in 1990, that rape within marriage was criminalised and not until as recently as 2005 was there a successful conviction for this crime that affects so many women.

The Catholic-influenced constitution provides the framework for this misogynist culture by not only restricting access to abortion, but, in article 41.2, actually stipulating that a woman's primary social role is motherhood:

1. In particular, the state recognises that by her life within the home woman gives to the state a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.
2. The state shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.

The constitution further promotes the family "as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of society" (article 41.1.1) and "the necessary basis of social order" (article 41.1.2).

The oppression of women under capitalism is based around their role in the family as unpaid providers of the domestic services necessary for the maintenance of society and reproduction of the working class. The more ugly manifestations of women's oppression are reflected in the reality that most sexual violence is committed in the family home - in Ireland nearly 10,000 women a year receive support for domestic violence, while many thousands of other incidents are believed to go unreported.

The Catholic church runs 90% of the country's primary schools and despite its weakened influence it is still able to exert considerable social control under the guise of promotion of the "Catholic ethos". Ending women's oppression will require total separation of church and state and the creation of a secular education system that includes comprehensive sex education. As well as free and universal access to contraceptives, alongside free, safe and legal access to abortion, there should also be, at the very least:

- the right to immediate divorce at the request of either partner
- full funding for women's refuges
- extended parental leave for both parents on full pay
- full employment on good wages, index-linked to the cost of living
- free, quality healthcare (including care for the disabled)
- 24-hour childcare
- decent affordable housing for all.

Despite the vast productive capacity available to humanity in the 21st century, the capitalist system has shown itself to be incapable of providing even these simple needs for all people. It is only the working masses - by overthrowing capitalism and constructing a new, non-exploitative socio-economic order, including fully socialising domestic labour - who can provide the material foundation to finally end women's oppression: part of the creation of new human relations based on true equality and respect.

In Ireland today the fight for free, safe and legal access to abortion is an important step towards that goal ●

**MIDDLE EAST**

# Still on the cards

A US attack on Iran is far from impossible, warns Yasmine Mather

Just when you thought nothing much was happening in the Middle East, the region is bracing itself for more upheavals. By all accounts, Donald Trump will announce later this week that he is “decertifying” the Iran nuclear deal signed in 2015 between Iran’s Islamic Republic and the world’s major nuclear powers (plus Germany), the P5+1. Currently Trump’s only supporter for this reversal of US policy is the Israeli prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, who has campaigned relentlessly against any deal with Tehran.

There is a group photograph of Trump with military personnel, taken in early September 2017, and apparently during the photo shoot he told reporters that we are now witnessing ‘the calm before the storm’. The comment has been interpreted as an indication of possible military action against North Korea, or Iran - or both. However, as we know, with Trump this could just be showmanship, leading to no concrete foreign policy initiative.

Of course, the US president cannot claim that Iran is violating the nuclear deal - International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors would no doubt contradict him. So what he has been saying recently is that the ‘spirit’ of the agreement has been violated and that its continuation is therefore not in America’s interests. The decertification process is not actually part of the international nuclear deal either - it is a process involving the US government, president and Congress. And if Congress sees Trump’s move as a green light to impose new sanctions and goes along with him, there is little doubt that the deal will eventually collapse.

In the last couple of weeks Germany, France and even the United Kingdom have openly called on him to avoid decertification. On October 11 Theresa May urged the US to “recertify the nuclear deal with Iran because it is vitally important for regional security”. The same day foreign secretary Boris Johnson called the deal “an historic achievement”. And if Trump goes ahead with this plan he will do so against the near consensus opinion expressed by his own political and military advisors. However, as we know, the US president is unpredictable and the world is bracing itself for escalation of the conflict between Iran and the United States.

Of course in theory Iran and the European Union (including the UK) can continue working within the framework of the deal until such a time as new sanctions approved by Congress impose severe penalties on companies and financial institutions dealing with Iran. The question is, how many such institutions would take the risk and for how long?

Inside Iran it appears that hard-liners have convinced president Hassan Rouhani and his foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, that under such circumstances Tehran should walk out of the deal, even if the US does not take concrete military action against the Islamic Republic. One thing is certain: even the threat of decertification has already jeopardised the long-term future of the deal.

## Israel-Palestine

Surprisingly we have not heard much from the Israeli prime minister on the subject. According to Anshel Pfeffer, writing in *Ha'aretz*,

There are three possible reasons for this. First, Netanyahu knows that whatever Trump touches usually



Threatening talk

turns to manure. He hates the Iran deal, but doesn’t want to be burned if it goes up in flames. Second, Israel’s more immediate concern right now is Iran’s entrenchment across the border in Syria. For once, the nuclear issue can’t take precedence. Third, just like his own security chiefs, who are not exactly enamoured with the deal, Netanyahu begrudgingly realises that a decade’s respite from the Iranian bomb is not such a bad deal after all.<sup>1</sup>

More worryingly, Netanyahu has been relatively passive on the current talks held between Fatah and Hamas. After a couple of weeks of speculation the two sides finally met on October 10 in Cairo, under the auspices of Hamas’s new best friend, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the Egyptian coup leader and current president. Khalil al-Haya, a leading member of the Hamas delegation, told reporters that the discussions will concentrate on “forming a national unity government with the participation of all Palestinian political parties and preparing for legislative, presidential and national council elections”.

Of course, this is not the first time the two main Palestinian organisations have launched such an attempt and, going by previous experience, it may not be the last. Unity discussions fell through in 2006-07 and in 2014. This time both sides are more desperate for a deal, but this is not necessarily a reason to believe they will reach agreement. Hamas is facing major economic difficulties in Gaza - its government cannot even pay for emergency electricity for hospitals. There is mass unemployment and appalling conditions in overcrowded areas. In addition the Hamas leadership’s support for opponents of the Assad regime in Syria means that relations with Iran are not at their best, despite talks held in the summer aiming to improve them. All this has resulted in reduced financial aid to Gaza.

Hamas’s new best friend is its former enemy, al-Sisi, and he has been encouraging, sponsoring and now hosting the rapprochement with Fatah. Of course, Sisi has other ambitions: he sees the talks as the first step towards an Israeli-Palestinian ‘peace’ and appears to be under the illusion that history will remember him as the hero of an Israeli-Palestinian settlement, as opposed to the leader of an unpopular military coup.

Of course, Fatah also needs a deal - the Oslo accords are now dead and buried, while talks with the Zionist state are going nowhere. On top of this, the corruption and incompetence associated with Fatah’s leaders has made them rather unpopular.

Netanyahu’s official response to the talks was not unexpected: “Any future Palestinian government must disband the terror organisation’s arms, sever all ties with Iran and recognise the state of Israel.” The US holds a similar position and, although some Middle East commentators believe the imposition of these conditions makes a deal unlikely, the truth is that, for all its shortcomings, if elections were held today in the West Bank, Hamas would win comfortably. So the main stumbling block will be the guarantees demanded by Abbas and other Fatah leaders that they will continue to play a role in a future coalition government, even if Fatah is defeated in the polls.

Egypt and Sunni Arab countries are working with Hamas to find an acceptable formulation regarding the state of Israel. On the question of arms, again a compromise can be found if Hamas’s current weapons (which do not amount to much) are amalgamated with those of the Palestinian Authority and come under some form of control/scrutiny. Severing relations with Iran might not be necessary, now that current relations have cooled, following Hamas’s support for anti-Assad forces in Syria.

## Instability

Iran’s relations with Hamas and Hezbollah are often mentioned as a

source of ‘instability’ in the region. Apparently this is what Trump means by Iran breaching the ‘spirit’ of the deal. I have been a life-long critic of Hezbollah and I have no illusions about its ‘social’ activities in south Lebanon. I blame it for its part in Irangate and, as I keep reminding everyone, after the 1967 war with Egypt Israel hunted down secular Palestinian Liberation Organisation factions, but in Gaza it dropped Egypt’s harsh restrictions against Islamist activists. In fact, Israel for many years tolerated and at times encouraged such activists as a counterweight to the secular nationalists of the PLO and its dominant faction, Fatah, and this inevitably strengthened the position of Hamas.

However, we have to remember that, as far as Iran’s Islamic republic is concerned, sending arms to both Hamas and Hezbollah was a form of insurance. Iranian nationalists who keep telling us that ‘Iran should stop arming these terrorists’ forget that, had it not been for fear of retaliation by Hezbollah, Israel would have bombed Iran’s nuclear installations a long time ago. Such a bombing would have had disastrous consequences not just for Iran, but for the entire region.

So here we are again. Hamas’s best friends are Sisi and the emir of Qatar, but Netanyahu remains obsessed about its relationship with Iran - all sides seem to be under the impression that peace in the Middle East could be achieved if only Iran is isolated. Nothing could be further from the truth. Of course, Tehran is outside the US direct sphere of influence. However, its integration within the world economic order means that at the end of the day the country’s rulers have limited choices - leaving aside their tired old rhetoric on foreign policy issues. Irangate, the support for the US in the wars that overthrew the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Ba’athist regime in Iraq, the nuclear deal - all show Iran’s acceptance of, and indeed compliance with, US hegemony. In other words, the problems of the Middle East are far more complicated than what western propagandists would have you believe ●

yasmine.mather@weeklyworker.co.uk

## Notes

1. www.haaretz.com/us-news/premium-1.816414.

## Fighting fund Twice the price

Comrade OG tells me that the *Weekly Worker* is “definitely worth twice the price!” And she’s as good as her word, doubling her £30 resubscription payment for the next six months - and, just for good measure, she wrote her cheque three weeks early too!

But hers wasn’t the largest cheque received for our fighting fund this week. Comrade NH wrote one for £100 - and has also set up a standing order for £30 a month! Not bad at all for a new subscriber. I hope your first issue arrives in good order, comrade.

We also received half a dozen already-established standing order payments, varying from BL’s £75, through the £25 from RK and GD, and DV’s £20, to the £10 from SM and AN. Finally there was the usual

monthly PayPal donation from US comrade PM - although he was the only one out of 3,401 online readers to click on that button last week.

But, all in all, it’s been a bit of a sluggish start to October’s fighting fund. The £310 that came in this week means that after 11 days we have only £672 towards our £1,750 target. So we need over a grand in exactly 20 days.

But I’m confident we can do it. We just need a few more comrades to take a leaf out of OG’s book - how much do you think we’re worth? ●

Robbie Rix

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

## What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# weekly WORKER

**Cliff-edge  
Brexit poses  
crisis situation**

## Hanging on by a thread

While Theresa May has just about survived the Conservative Party conference, worse challenges lie ahead, reckons Paul Demarty

**B**ut the Lord thy God shall deliver them unto thee, and shall destroy them with a mighty destruction, until they be destroyed. And he shall deliver their kings into thine hand, and thou shalt destroy their name from under heaven: there shall no man be able to stand before thee, until thou have destroyed them.<sup>1</sup>

Things are approaching the point where we must ask, in all seriousness, whether Theresa May is cursed.

Tory conference was, of course, utterly torrid. There were a few policy announcements, many of which had the whiff of retreat about them. Some sort of return to the student grant system is suggested. Hands are wrung about the housing crisis. As expected by the more intelligent bourgeois commentators in the summer of 2015, a Corbyn-led Labour Party, now that it has been allowed two years to bed in, has dragged *everything* to the left, so that a humbled Tory front bench has at last caught up with Ed Miliband's energy price cap.

Apart from that, there was an intrusive security-state expansion here; a shake of the magic money tree there. Chatter about the place was dominated, naturally, by Brexit, concerning which the government is in a pickle and uniquely *unable* to offer credible promises (to which we will return later). Conference seemed to be getting even greyer - those youths who turned up were either careerist apparatchiks or devotees of the extraordinary Jacob Rees-Mogg.

The chorus of whisperers - those 'unnamed senior Tories' of a million inches of newsprint - were united on one point: May needed to pull a good speech out of the bag. In truth, when 'unnamed senior Tories' say this sort of thing, it is not because they expect that their stated wishes will be unambiguously denied. Tory conference is not a decision-making body; it has always and only been a media showpiece. There is - or ought to be - very little that can go wrong, with the complement that an apparently 'good speech' is not necessarily enough to save you when the Tories' well-honed survival instinct kicks in. (Iain Duncan Smith received 17 standing ovations in 2003, before catching 90 knives in his back a few short weeks later.)

Somehow, however, it all went horribly wrong. Much attention focused on the prankster who handed the PM a P45, and on the foul luck that had her descend into repeated coughing fits. But the most poetic part of the whole calamity was the way the letters kept falling off the display behind her, as if the stage-set itself was against her, or else trying to commit suicide out of shame at being a part of such a punishment. For it is that which tells us most about the Tory Party in its current predicament: not necessarily May's leadership, but a Tory Party *that would put up with* May as a leader, given how utterly



**Not if it breaks, but when ...**

destroyed her authority is. This is the natural party of government, yet at the moment it cannot even decorate a podium in good order. The proverbial piss-up in a brewery seems wildly over-ambitious for this sorry crew.

### Challengers

May survives, for now. In part, that must be because none of the alternatives pass muster.

There are first of all the 'unsackables'. Philip Hammond at the treasury is popular with City types, but despised by the Brexiteer hard core, who would be in open rebellion at every step, as he pursues a Brexit that 'puts jobs first' - which is to say, a Brexit that is not really Brexit. So he is out. What about Boris Johnson? Calling him unsackable may actually be slightly out of date, as *The Sunday Times* reports that he is to be demoted in the coming reshuffle. He certainly has brand recognition, and more charm than the rest of them put together; but the prospect of his floppy mop in Number 10 is a matter of some horror to those remaining Tories who are able to view their historic role as the British party of the state in anything other than absurdly fabulist terms. Hence the leaked video footage of him reciting Kipling in Myanmar, and a million other things - somebody is out to get him.

You cannot get more fabulist than Jacob Rees-Mogg, of course, whose idea of a barnstorming speech consists almost entirely of reciting famous battlefields - with the implication that the struggle against the Common Agricultural Policy is like them in kind, significance and heroic death toll. Rees-Mogg is a scion of the minor gentry, whose hyper-identification with the English aristocracy lies in some realm

beyond camp. He claims to have become a Tory at the age of five, under the careful moral instruction of his nanny, Veronica Crook, who accompanied him on his first parliamentary campaign 20 years later. Add in his Catholic traditionalism, and you have a living fossil of a milieu thought to have been dealt its mortal wounds half a century ago, under the twin hammer-blows of the 1960s counterculture and Vatican II. Yet there he stands - Brideshead Reanimated - surrounded, bizarrely, by adoring young Tories (young, at least, by Tory standards).

It is difficult to know quite what to make of the Rees-Mogg phenomenon. It shows at the very least that there is a layer among the young Tory activists that might remind some MPs of their own university days and the beloved 'Hang Nelson Mandela' badges, full of zeal and barely repressed hatred of the cliquey, Sloaney insiderness of the central office apparatchiks (who equally skew young, albeit liberal and technocratic in wider outlook); people who want to show the Americans how a tea-drinking nation throws a Tea Party. The idea among them is to create a 'grassroots movement like Momentum' (leaving aside, for the moment, how laughable a description of Momentum that is) that will propel an anti-Corbyn into command of the Tories.

Whether Moggmentum will triumph or turn out to be a piece of cargo-cult idiocy remains to be seen - given the course of the last few years, it would be quite foolish to write it off too quickly. Certainly if the honourable member for North East Somerset were to make it onto the ballot in a contested leadership election, all bets are off - the Tory Party gets more rightwing, the closer to its genuine grassroots you get - and those

are the people who get to vote on such things.

### Downward is heavenward

That the question is even being asked is most bizarre - even those who comment on Rees-Mogg's foibles (and Boris's gaffes in remote climes ... ) seem somehow to underplay the thing. The fact that 'moderate' Tory voices pine so much for Ruth Davidson - someone who as a non-MP is literally ineligible for the post of prime minister - tells you how desperate things are in the Commons.

There is an awful lot at stake even in the most run-of-the-mill bourgeois statecraft and right now the United Kingdom is in an extremely delicate situation. It is a bad time to have a malfunctioning instrument of government, as the Conservative Party undoubtedly is. In an editorial urging May into a bold reshuffle, the *Financial Times* spells out exactly why a leadership contest would be a disaster:

[It] would suck the oxygen out of the Brexit negotiations, as a crucial EU summit approaches in mid-October. Once again, the Conservatives would be putting party before country. Once again, Britain would lose a prime minister over Europe. Worse, the Tories would risk opening the door to a Corbyn government.<sup>2</sup>

The Tory Party above all else likes to think of itself as pragmatic. This is *not* the same as being 'moderate' - it stands to the right, historically, of its apparent equivalents in the Christian Democratic parties of Europe - but rather consists in a ruthless application to the principles of statecraft: dignified where possible, efficient where necessary. There have always been

swivel-eyed true believers at the base - all the better to get the vote out, and indeed physically intimidate potential voters for the Whigs or Labour at various times. That they, and their 'men on horseback' like Boris, are even *in sight* of the summit of the party is almost as extraordinary as an insurrectionary general strike would be if it broke out tomorrow lunchtime.

We have gotten here because the Tories have not so much dug themselves a hole, but rather dug themselves four levels of basement, like a Russian oligarch making the most of his Bishops Avenue mansion. One: they gave their party to David Cameron, whose attitude to politics is congenitally short-termist, and whose attempt at Blairite triangulation made a sleeping and vengeful enemy out of most of his party. Two: Cameron promised a referendum on the question of EU membership, not expecting to have to call it. Three: he lost it, upending the political balance and making his successor hostage to the Brexiteer head-bangers by way of a wafer-thin majority. Four: the aforementioned curse on Theresa May, presumably incurred while running through that field of wheat.

It has been the habit of mind of the left to call the Tories weak at every disadvantage, and our habit to restore some sense of historical perspective to such judgments. Now is clearly not the time for such an adjustment: the Brexit vote is in principle a manageable problem for a party like the Tories, but in their present state it is a dagger to the guts, and there is no way out that does not leave significant elements in extreme dissatisfaction; and, thanks to the magic electoral touch of Theresa May, any one of them has an effective veto over government policy.

The bottom line, especially given the intransigence of our erstwhile friends on the continent, is that the notorious cliff-edge Brexit is now a very likely outcome, being as it is the default option if the Tories cannot quit bickering for long enough to (in reality) grovel their way into a transition deal, or else be replaced with a Labour government sufficiently pliant to take clear and direct orders from the City to do the same. Frankly, we do not rate their chances on either count - so the British masses had better fasten their seatbelts ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

### Notes

- Deuteronomy 7:23-24.
- Financial Times* October 7.

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