

LETTERS



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

Snapshot

A general election is a useful means with which to capture the mood and political direction of a state. But it is a snapshot and has its limitations. It is not an all-encompassing explanation and, depending on one's political analysis, different people will draw different conclusions.

Israel's March 17 general election was useful in helping us understand the political trajectory of the world's premier settler-colonial state. Its importance lies in the strategic placement of Israel and its alliance with the United States and its Arab clients. However, while Moshé Machover's recent article contained some interesting and innovative ideas, it was over-prescriptive and even conspiratorial ('Searching for a pretext', March 26).

The idea that the official reason for the breakdown of the previous coalition, over the Jewish State Bill, was a ruse, is problematic. Moshé suggests that the real reason for the parting of the ways between Binyamin Netanyahu's Likud, on the one side, and Tzipi Lapid of Hatnuah and Yair Livni of Yesh Atid, on the other, was Iran and the new approach to relations with the United States. However, if this is true then why was it not articulated as such at the time? If the reason for the breakdown in the coalition lay in Israeli relations with the United States and Iran, this raises a number of questions - the most obvious being why was there a need for such a pretence.

That the exit of Yesh Atid and Hatnuah from the coalition government was engineered by Netanyahu may indeed be true, but that does not explain why the real reason was different from that which was given: ie, differences over the Jewish State Bill. This dispute was a very real one, which also caused a split within Likud and between Netanyahu and Reuven Rivlin, the president of Israel.

The attitude towards Israel's Arab or Palestinian population is not a question of national oppression (as opposed to settler racism directed towards a minority). The suggestion that Israel's Arab population are members of another nation, which is an idea that many subscribe to without even thinking of the consequences, is a dangerous one. It suggests that their real 'home' lies elsewhere, over the borders. Although the context is different, this was precisely the charge made against European Jews and concretised in the Nuremberg laws: ie, that they belonged to a different nation.

Above all, this idea depends on whether or not you see Israel's Jewish population as forming a nation separate from that of the Palestinians. I do not accept that because of the nature of settler colonialists: they are incapable of forming separate nations unless they utterly vanquish or exterminate the indigenous population. The alternative is to accept the two-nations theory that the Communist Party and Stalinism espoused in Ireland. If you see a settler population as being incapable, be it in South Africa, Algeria or Ireland, of forming a separate nation, then the obvious conclusion is that Palestine, in the borders of the British mandate, contains one nation - Jewish Palestinians or Hebrews and Arab Palestinians. To argue, as the majority of Jewish settlers do, that Israeli Arabs are a different nation and do not belong within the Israeli state, that they should be 'swapped' for the

settlement blocs, is a primary example of racism.

I agree that Netanyahu's war-making and his alliance with the Republicans has nothing to do with any threat from Iran and everything to do with domination of the region. However, this has been true for the whole period of this and the previous government. I would have expected Lapid and Livni to have broken with Netanyahu far earlier, or indeed to have refused to form a coalition government in 2013, if this was the real reason for the breakdown in the governing coalition earlier this year.

The primary difference between Isaac Herzog of Zionist Union/Israeli Labour and Netanyahu is over the approach to the relationship with the United States: Netanyahu believes in biting the hand that feeds Israel; Herzog is more reticent and would prefer to maintain good relations with both the Democrats and Republicans rather than relying on the latter. However, Herzog (and Israeli Labour) has never politically broken with Netanyahu's warmongering over Iran, confining himself to saying it was not an existential question.

What the election did mark was a swing among Jewish Israelis (except the small number who voted for the Arab-Jewish Joint List) to the overtly racist Zionist right. I must confess that I do not therefore understand Moshé's point that there was a slight shift to the left, of two seats, in the Knesset. This was entirely due to the increase in seats for the Joint List (from 11 to 13), nearly all of whose votes come from Israeli Arabs. Israeli politics, like so much in the Israeli state, is firmly compartmentalised between the Jewish and Arab populations.

Amongst the Zionist parties, the only remaining left-Zionist party, Meretz, saw a decline from six to five seats and the Zionist Union's 24 seats compares with 23 for Labour, Kadimah and Hatnuah before the election. The emergence of Kulanu (10 seats), a party hawkish on the Palestinian question and populist on social issues, cannot be seen as a move to the left.

Incidentally the Joint List refused a vote-sharing agreement with Meretz, which was in danger of losing any presence in the Knesset owing to the 3.25% hurdle. Hadash and the Communist Party were in favour of such an agreement, but Balad (nationalist) and Tal (Islamic) were opposed. My own view is that, despite the fact that Meretz is a Zionist party, a voting arrangement should have been agreed to, since Meretz has differentiated itself within the Zionist bloc on issues such as anti-Arab racism.

I am also perplexed by Moshé's statement that Netanyahu's victory in the election was no surprise because "both of us [ie, Moshé and myself] could read the polls and they did not lie". In fact the opinion polls did lie, putting the Zionist Union marginally ahead or on parity with Likud. It was on this basis that Moshé wrote before the election: "... even assuming that the Likud gets more votes than the Zionist Union, Bibi may have difficulty in finding partners for a new coalition" ('Netanyahu's double gamble' *Weekly Worker* March 5). Moshé went on to say: "Another complication, which may prevent Netanyahu heading a government even if Likud wins a plurality of seats, is the formation of a joint electoral list ... sometimes referred to as the 'Joint Arab List'."

In fact the opinion polls were a very poor guide as to who would form the next Israeli government, because what was important was the overall balance within the Zionist camp. The far right and further-still right,

coupled with the Orthodox Jewish vote, favoured a Likud coalition.

What does Netanyahu's victory entail? Moshé envisages a major ethnic cleansing of the West Bank. However, this will be very difficult politically in the short to medium term and it may not even be necessary from a Zionist perspective. Whereas the Zionist 'left' does not want to be tarred with the apartheid brush, it is of little or no consequence to Netanyahu. The present situation also has a number of advantages, including a captive market, a cheap pool of labour, a quisling Palestinian Authority and in Gaza the opportunity of a cost-free war, whenever it is politically advantageous.

The conclusions one can draw from this are that there is no possibility of a two-state solution and that the Jewish settler population in Palestine has no alternative to living in a single state with Arab Palestinians. The primary question is whether the Arab Israelis or Palestinians are accorded equal political, civil and religious rights to those of Jewish Israelis. The other conclusion, as one looks around the Middle East, is that a precondition for the removal of Zionism is the overthrow not only of the principal Arab regimes in the region, but the defeat of counterrevolutionary forces such as Islamic State and al Qa'eda.

Tony Greenstein
Brighton

Tempo

Will capitalism collapse or - albeit at a declining rate - is it capable in principle of expanding the productive forces indefinitely? Either view may be compatible with a theory that the rate of profit tends to decline, but it is not so clear that potentially unlimited capitalist expansion is compatible with historical-materialist principle: a system is replaced only after exhausting its possibilities.

That the linear trend to zero rate of profit converges at the middle of this century, as Maito and Roberts report, supports the collapse view ('The lucky generation and the historic limits of capital', March 12). Maito and Roberts don't hesitate to term the end point 'collapse' - a term of art which means that the long-term trend of capitalism has become upside-down; then after, the economy loses more in contraction than it gains in expansion.

Mike Macnair recently pointed out that the Second International - all of its factions - adhered to the collapse view. Not just that, but the universal opinion was that collapse was imminent. Bolshevik theoreticians even calculated that capitalism had exhausted its net productive possibilities by 1907. Trotsky, to his death, continued to believe that capitalism had collapsed, writing in 1939 in *Marxism in our time*: "Marx foretold that out of the economic collapse in which the development of capitalism must inevitably culminate - and this collapse is before our very eyes - there can be no other way out except socialisation of the means of production."

Trotskyists continue to proclaim that capitalism is in 'decline', although productive forces obviously have expanded over the post-war period. We followers of Lenin have assumed that an error of 150 years in assessing tempo was innocuous. To the contrary, a generalised crisis underpins expectations of international revolution.

Stephen Diamond
USA

Flipside

Comrade Paul B Smith mixes truth and irony in a very fine way, exposing the fundamental problems of socialist-communist politics

(Letters, April 2). Before I go further, however, there has been a parliamentary-boycott Marxist party available since 1904 - the Socialist Party of Great Britain. In fact, you now have two to choose from.

Arguments about the route to revolution have often been lost because workers need to live. Spoiling a vote may feel good, but does it feed your family? It is a discussion that needs to be had. One can denounce 'halfway houses', but the working class needs to live. It isn't an academic 'reproduction of labour power'.

The flipside, of course, is that you endlessly seek that extra wage rise, forever putting off changing the world. Don't rock the boat.

I don't know what the answer is, but I think we can find it.

Dave Brown
Clevedon

Thanks, Steve

The general election highlights the true positions, policy and priorities of the British left. In England some are backing Miliband's Labour Party. To the left is the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, an alliance or front for the Socialist Party, Socialist Workers Party and RMT union bureaucracy. The election is establishing it as the major power with over 120 candidates and rising. Left Unity has lined itself up as a junior partner. If Tusc does well, then merger is surely inevitable.

Left Unity, a halfway-house party, is backed by Socialist Resistance, the CPGB, Workers Power and has various tendencies, including the Republican Socialist Tendency. For some unfathomable reason the Republican Socialists have decided to come out in the open and appeal directly to the working class.

Why have they done such a mad thing? It is one of the mysteries of this election. Many theories have been advanced on social media, such as maverick actions, sectarianism, egomania, sheer hatred of halfway house parties and general unreasonableness. I am sure there must be some more reasons we haven't even begun to comprehend.

The smart money is on the Scottish referendum. British politics has changed significantly as a result of the 45% that voted to reject the Westminster constitutional system. This election will confirm we are now in a different place, even if the left in England is determined to carry on up the Khyber. Republican Socialists have a very different approach from Tusc and Left Unity. The election will surely make this clear.

Republican Socialists are anti-unionist, whereas Tusc-LU are British unionists. But, more than that, anti-unionism is and must be the policy of the advanced part of the working class in England. The problem in England is not 'left nationalism', but English chauvinism. The British ruling class has and will mobilise English chauvinism in defence of the union. The UK Independence Party and the English Defence League are one manifestation of this.

Therefore the working class movement in England must be won to anti-unionism. Communists must be hard-line anti-unionists and call openly for the immediate end to the Acts of Union and a new democratic relationship between the people of England, Ireland, Wales and Scotland. The election in Bermondsey is a test for the CPGB to see where it stands - not as a theoretical abstract, but when choosing whether to back the unionist Tusc-LU or the anti-unionist Republican Socialist.

All the signs and predictions are bad. Since you have 'Great Britain' in your party name, it is going to be very

difficult for you. This will weigh like a nightmare on your brain. I realise that you would have to be revolutionary to turn your world upside-down, but I am ever the optimist. Being a conservative on this matter is not a good sign.

So you should be thanking me for giving you the opportunity to escape your past. It was not a good start to come forward and offer yourself as the executioners for the moves of Socialist Resistance and the LU leadership. You would have thought after the disastrous line of abstentionism which LU (and the CPGB) took in the referendum there would be more caution.

Not a bit of it. The CPGB rushed to the front of the queue. Perhaps you might ponder on the irony of moving from opposition to this halfway-house party to volunteering to be Socialist Resistance's bouncers on the door. I hope they are paying you the living wage, not the minimum wage!

Steve Freeman

Republican Socialist candidate, Bermondsey and Old Southwark

Party up north

Some of your readers may note with interest the formation of the Northern Party.

The key demand of the new party is a devo-max government with tax-raising powers for the North of England. Although it is not a 'socialist' outfit, I believe it has the potential to attract those on the left in the north who are fed up with the London-centric nature of British politics and have given up hope of a viable leftwing party emerging onto the political scene.

As the party says in its manifesto, "We believe the current political system in Britain is no longer fit for purpose and that, instead of the present centralised system in which unfairness, corruption, inefficiency and waste are institutionalised, Britain urgently needs radical devolution and a new political system, in which the regions, rather than London, hold the balance of power."

I'd encourage comrades to have a look at the party's website (www.northern.party) and make up their own minds.

Mick Taylor
Liverpool

Not reptiles ...

I am grateful to Tony Clark for his response (Letters, April 2) to my letter (March 28). I certainly do not subscribe to the theory that humanity is controlled by an alien reptilian race for nefarious purposes or that Earth is being 'buzzed' by alien UFOs, using the moon as a pit stop.

I happen to think that the science of Marxism, especially through its key concepts of the materialist conception of history, the labour theory of value and the political theory of the class struggle, provides more than an adequate explanation and understanding of the world today, where it has come from, and what is required through the revolutionary reconstruction of society to end class division and to commence a new phase of genuine human civilisation, where humanity can prosper in harmony with the Earth's natural resources.

Everything in human history can be explained in terms of class-divided society and human motivations and behaviours. The science of Marxism requires an equally scientific approach to understanding other aspects of our reality. On the question of our moon, its creation, role and purpose, I confess there is a genuine mystery around its origin and potentially its purposes. The principal theories simply don't stack up.

The moon's composition and structure is completely different from

that of Earth, yet appears to have been in place for at least four billion years. It is, however, far too large to have been randomly 'captured' by the Earth's gravitational field, still less to have randomly settled into such a 'perfect' orbit with such exact mathematical relationships with respect to the sizes and orbits of the Earth and the sun.

I have indeed read *Who built the moon?*, the Knight and Butler book referenced by Tony, and think they are correct that the mathematical relationships I reported in my letter at the very least seem to indicate some degree of artificiality and intelligent design. While much of their book is interesting, rigorous and thought-provoking, I am afraid they lost the plot completely with their principal conclusion that the moon was created by a future human generation who realised its existence in Earth's prehistory would have been essential to the creation and stimulation of life on Earth and who went back in time to the point of the Earth's formation and created the moon out of the raw solar material available to them.

We are in the realms of Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* here, where God, challenged to prove he existed, said: "I refuse to prove that I exist, for proof denies faith, and without faith I am nothing", but, having proved his existence by speaking, he then promptly disappeared in a puff of logic.

The Marxist materialist conception of history shows how different forms of human society have emerged and subsequently fallen, how primitive communism gave way to class-divided society, where increasing organisation and complexity in the production of the means of life meant a division of labour, and the emergence of strata able to exercise influence, control and direction over the production of the means of life, the social product itself and those who laboured to produce it.

But this conception only goes back around several hundred thousand years, when evolution theory suggests the human race started to emerge and was inevitably highly speculative as to the nature of pre-class-divided human society. Its main contribution is the explanation of how capitalist society emerged from feudal society, how capitalism operates and functions, and how and why it must be replaced by communist society.

If Engels, Darwin *et al* turn out to be wrong that this is the first evolution of human society on this planet, does that in any way invalidate the materialist conception of history, the case for communism, and the role of socialists and communists in the here and now? I would not have thought so.

I personally do believe that up to several million years ago there was a very advanced civilisation on both the Earth and other planets in the 'habitable zone' of our solar system. Indeed, it may well have been solar system-wide, capable of both planetary and interstellar travel. These 'ancients' probably originated from a far distant solar system, maybe because their sun was dying (as will ours), or simply as explorers and scientists wanting to discover new solar systems, planets and life forms, to experiment with the creation and development of different forms of societies, perhaps even looking to create an 'ideal' system and structure.

Around a million to two million years ago, this civilisation appears to have suffered a series of cataclysmic events, affecting Earth and what is left of Mars, which ended with the destruction of that civilisation and

the near wipeout of that race of people. Whether those events were natural, generated through conflict either internal or external, or through inherent contradictions in that civilisation, we simply do not know. On Earth, stories of the great flood in a number of modern religions and the destruction of Atlantis in Greek mythology may well stem from this catastrophe.

It is claimed that remnants, artefacts and long eroded and shattered structures from this past civilisation have been photographed by Nasa on both the moon and on Mars, and some may even have been recovered by the Apollo space programme.

The survivors of that population, I believe, managed to establish the ancient Egyptian civilisation, at a time when mankind was meant to be in the Stone Age, an astonishingly highly developed society, which appears to have created out of the blue. Plato described the ancient Egyptians as far superior in every aspect to all other peoples at that time, even the Greeks: "Egypt has recorded and kept eternal the wisdom of the old times, all coming from time immemorial when gods governed the earth in the dawn of civilisation."

'Gods ruling the earth' is the faintest and most distant of human memories of the time of that original civilisation, that 'first human evolution' - what ancient Egyptians called the 'Zep Tepi': the 'first time'.

The high priesthood and the pharaoh (the Horus-king, the living embodiment of the 'gods') were the repositories of the knowledge and powers of that shattered former civilisation, entrusted to keep them secret, protected and preserved, and transmit them to future generations.

The ancient Egyptian texts, religions and rituals point to a philosophy and a science which enabled the initiate to cross realms and boundaries which to us today appear separate and opposite: life and death, the material and the spiritual, the mental and the physical, and to communicate directly with the leading figures of that original society across space and time, since deified and then largely forgotten as 'gods'.

The second evolution of the human race appears to have lost that connection set up between the survivors and the 'ancients', probably during the period of ancient Egypt itself, accounting for the failure of that 'perfect' society to develop

'normal' features of subsequent human societies.

Was there, as Arthur C Clarke suggested in *2001*, some form of 'helping hand' to trigger the formation, evolution and development of the (second evolution of the) human race? Did the remnants of the first human evolution become part of the second? If humans were not originally indigenous to Earth or even to our solar system, who or what would we consider to be 'aliens'?

But we come back to the beginning and to Marxism, the future of the human race, and our role as human agents and actors in 2015. If we allow capitalism to continue, it will surely result in more catastrophe and destruction, ultimately threatening life on Earth itself. The solution and the future are in our hands, not in any god or alien master race. It is to make the socialist revolution, to make it worldwide, and to create a(nother) great human civilisation on this planet and to realise and understand our true destiny and purpose.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

Soup Dragon

In response to the previous week's numerology about celestial bodies (Andrew Northall, Letters, March 26) we got a message from Tony Clark (captain's log, star date April 2, warp 10, space coordinates not disclosed), claiming there's scientific evidence that the moon may be like an Easter egg: hollow.

I know the Age of Aquarius has dawned, and that this is the time of year to openly fool around, but it all makes sense now, why Oliver Postgate, son of a co-founder of the CPGB, creatively went from the adventures of Noggin the Nog to trump Nasa's plonking of Neil and Buzz on the Green Cheese by conjuring up the onomatopoeic Clangers. Never let anyone tell you that we lack a sense of humour.

Indeed, Tony may even have the Soup Dragon in his kitchen. Perhaps Mark Fischer has already booked her for the Communist University this August - ensconced in a nice temporary home, a protective environment, designed by that caring and well-intentioned little earner of the Left Unity leadership, the one still with a lingering love for the 'red wedge' aesthetic, Safe Spaces Ya Us. Communist transparency demands that we should be told.

Jara Handala
email

Fighting fund Prove me wrong

A couple of new standing orders have boosted the total we received from that source this week - £20 from II and £15 from GT. They were among 11 SOs that came our way, ranging from £10 to £30, and totalling £225.

Then there were three cheques - from RG (£40, added to his subscription), NF (£25) and KT (£20). Plus a couple of PayPal contributions from NW (£20) and LS (£10). The last two were among 4,841 online readers last week, by the way.

But back to those standing orders. Although I mentioned the two new ones, they were actually among the £110 I noted last week, which is the total of new money pledged each month from SOs. In fact I've had no new commitments this week, which is a pity, as we really could do with another £140 or so every month in

regular donations.

Nevertheless, we are doing all right so far in April, as the £330 received over the last seven days takes our running total up to £469 - just about the going rate to reach the £1,750 we need by the end of the month. But the usual word of warning: standing orders come in disproportionately at the beginning of the month, so I normally wouldn't expect the money to keep on arriving at that rate.

There again, this month could be different and I could be pleasantly surprised. Why don't you prove me wrong? ●

Robbie Rix

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

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

Every Monday we upload a podcast commenting on the current political situation. In addition, the site features voice files of public meetings and other events: <http://cpgb.org.uk/home/podcasts>.

London Communist Forum

Sunday April 12, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and *Capital* reading group. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. This meeting: Vol 2, chapter 1, section 4: 'The circuit of money-capital as a whole'. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Rescue the NHS

Saturday April 11, 10am: National conference, Emmanuel Centre, Marsham Street, London SW1. Organised by People's Convention for the NHS: www.nhsconvention.org.uk.

Critique conference

Saturday April 11, 11am to 5pm: Conference, London School of Economics, Academic Building, 54 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London WC2. Speakers: Volodymyr Ishchenkov and Marko Bojcum on Ukraine; Hillel Ticktin on economic crisis; and Raquel Varela on revolution in the metropole. Organised by *Critique*: www.critiquejournal.net.

Hands off Yemen

Saturday April 11, 1pm: Protest, Saudi Arabian embassy, Charles Street, London W1 (nearest tube: Green Park). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Socialist films

Sunday April 12, 11am: Screening, Bolivar Hall, 54 Grafton Way, London W1. Costa Gavras's *Le capital* (France, 114 minutes). Followed by discussion. Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com.

War on democracy

Monday April 13, 7pm: Film screening, Bolivar Hall, 54 Grafton Way, London, W1. John Pilger's documentary, followed by discussion. Organised by Venezuela Solidarity Campaign: www.venezuelasolidarity.co.uk.

Defend Clara Osagiede

Wednesday April 15, 9.30am: Lobby, Interserve offices, Capital Tower, 91 Waterloo Road, London SE1. Support Clara's appeal against sacking as cleaners' secretary on London Underground. Organised by RMT: www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk/clara.

Nato and nuclear war

Wednesday April 15, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Trinity Church Hall, Trinity Street, Frome. Speakers: Kate Hudson (CND), Lindsey German (Stop the War). Entry £4. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

People's Assembly

Thursday April 16, 6.30pm: London activists meeting, Unite the Union, 33-37 Moreland Street, London EC1. Help plan and mobilise for the End Austerity Now national demonstration. Organised by People's Assembly: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Music for peace

Saturday April 18, 7pm till late: Music, performance, poetry, Globe Inn, 39 Clifton Road, Newton, Devon. £10 with veggie curry, £5 without. Organised by Exeter CND: <http://exetercnd.org/event.html>.

Democracy and the media

Saturday April 18, 1pm: Debate, Red Shed, Vicarage Street, Wakefield WF1. Speakers: author Granville Williams, Campaign for Broadcasting Freedom; Don Mort (NUJ); and Alan Stewart (Wakefield Socialist History Group). Plus showing of Lindsay Anderson's classic 1952 documentary *Wakefield Express*. Free admission and light buffet. Organised by Wakefield Socialist History Group: www.theredshed.org.uk/SocialHist.html.

Crisis cabaret

Sunday April 19, 7.30pm: Alternative comedy, the Bolton, 326 Earls Court Road, London SW5. With Paul Ricketts, Don Biswas, Dzifa Benson, Bob Boyton, Buddy Hell and Simon Hardy. Book tickets online at www.westleft.co.uk. All proceeds to Left Unity election fund. Organised by West London Left Unity: www.facebook.com/LeftUnityWestLondon.

The media and the 'loony left'

Tuesday April 21, 7.30pm: Talk, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. LGBT London in the 1980s. £9 (£7 concessions). Organised by Bishopsgate Institute: www.bishopsgate.org.uk.

Stop the war, have dinner

Wednesday April 22, 6.30pm: Food, drinks, music and speakers, Troia Restaurant, 3F Belvedere Road, London SE1. £40 solidarity, £30 standard. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk

Children behind bars

Thursday April 23, 7pm: Meeting, Five Leaves Bookshop, 14a Long Row, Nottingham NG1. Stop the abuse and neglect in young offender institutions and secure training centres. Speaker: Carolyne Willow. Free admission. Organised by Five Leaves Bookshop: www.fiveleavesbookshop.co.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.

IRAN

Will the deal bring peace?

Yassamine Mather examines the prospects following the Lausanne agreement

Finally, after eight days of intensive negotiations, on April 2 Iran and the P5+1 powers agreed a statement of intent, which will become the framework for the final deal to be signed in June 2015.

This does not mean the US administration has decided on a strategy of rapprochement with Iran - the proposed 'framework' does not address any issues beyond the immediate subject of the country's nuclear installations. However, if the final deal is reached, it will herald a new era in the two countries' bilateral relations and for Iran's economic and trade relations with the European Union. Sections of Iran's industry, paralysed by sanctions, will resume operation, the rate of inflation might fall if the price of the rial rises, and the price of basic goods might come down if the internal mafia of black marketeers can be controlled.

It is too early to speculate how all this will play out in detail, but we can safely, I think, predict four things. Firstly, European companies will return in the hope of securing new markets and large profits. Secondly, the Islamic Republic will persevere with its neoliberal economic policies. Thirdly, in any ensuing economic upturn, the gap between the rich and the poor will get wider, non-payment of workers' wages will continue. Fourthly, the 'reformist' faction of the Islamic regime will maintain power for longer than one presidential election.

Lengthy negotiations are in store until the agreement is signed. And already opponents of the deal, inside and outside Iran, are lining up to denounce what is known about the main points. On paper it looks like both sides have made concessions, while keeping to their 'red lines'. As far as uranium enrichment is concerned, Iran has agreed to reduce its centrifuges by approximately two-thirds, from 19,000 currently to 6,104, with only 5,060 of these enriching uranium for 10 years, and at levels below 3.67% for at least 15 years. The country will reduce its current stockpile of about 10,000kg of low-enriched uranium (LEU) to 300kg of 3.67% LEU, while excess centrifuges and enrichment infrastructure will be placed in storage and monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Iran will convert its nuclear facility in Fordow so that it is no longer used to enrich uranium, again for at least 15 years. However, the country will be allowed to enrich uranium at the Natanz facility, using first-generation centrifuges for 10 years, with excess centrifuges being handed over to IAEA inspectors. Iran has also agreed to destroy the original heavy-water reactor in Arak. It will redesign and rebuild this reactor so that in future the plant cannot be used to produce weapons-grade plutonium, and instead the facility will be used to support peaceful nuclear research and produce radioisotopes.

Sanctions

In return, according to the official White House statement, "Iran will receive sanctions relief, if it verifiably abides by its commitments." However, "If at any time Iran fails to fulfil its commitments, these sanctions will snap back into place." Furthermore, "The architecture of US nuclear-related sanctions on Iran will be retained for much of the duration of the deal and allow for snap-back of sanctions in the event of significant non-performance." Finally, "All past UN security council resolutions on the Iran nuclear issue will be lifted



P5+1: lined up alongside Iran

simultaneous with the completion, by Iran, of nuclear-related actions addressing all key concerns (enrichment, Fordow, Arak, PMD and transparency)."¹

The two sides have different interpretations of both nuclear decommissioning and the lifting of 'all sanctions'. One of the red lines of supreme leader Ali Khamenei has always been the demand that all sanctions (it is assumed by this he means sanctions imposed because of the country's nuclear programme) will be lifted in one go. The US administration's interpretation is that sanctions will be suspended gradually after each step of compliance with the agreement and lifted permanently after Iran has adopted all the measures stipulated by the agreement. Either way, the majority of the Iranian people are facing years more of misery, economic hardship and high inflation.

In its first session of the new Iranian year (1394) the Iranian majles (parliament) was divided on the subject. President Hassan Rowhani and his foreign minister have hinted that throughout negotiations in Lausanne Khamenei was informed of every detail and therefore the signed statement and details released by both sides have his seal of approval. Of course, the fact that there is confusion about the thorny issue of sanctions does not help and Iranian opponents of the deal have picked up on this. A day after his triumphant return from Lausanne, foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif was heckled in a session of the security committee of the majles. The arguments became so heated that he threatened to leave the meeting and cameras were removed. A leading conservative figure compared the deal to "trading a saddled horse for a few broken reins".

However, other conservative figures welcomed the agreement and congratulated the government. The supreme leader is likely to express his opinion later in the week and it is expected he will give it a guarded welcome. The leader of Friday prayers, ayatollah Emami Kashani, who is close to the more conservative factions of the Islamic regime, hailed the deal. And in a significant move, Mohammad Ali Jafari, the commander of Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guards, expressed support for the agreement: "With God's grace, the revolutionary children of Islamic Iran have succeeded in defending the rights of the Iranian nation, and the Revolutionary Guards appreciate their honest political efforts."

The Iranian parliament might insist on a vote regarding the delay in the lifting of sanctions, but the government

is only obliged to place the issue of Iran allowing more extensive inspection of the country's nuclear facilities, as well as related industries, before parliament.

Rightwing Republicans and pro-Israeli Democrats in the US congress and senate will also try to stop the deal. Scott Walker, a candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, said he would - if elected - "renege on any deal with Iran", while Michael McCaul, a Republican from Texas, alleged: "Iranian leaders will now find a nuclear weapon dangerously within reach."

Responding to such claims, Barack Obama went on the offensive to defend the deal, calling it the best possible option: "Bombing the country" and starting a new war in the Middle East would only set back Iran's programme a few years, while just continuing sanctions would not be sufficient, as they had never stopped Iran "making progress with its nuclear programme".²

The Iranian people have suffered considerably from the sanctions that have crippled the country's economy, isolated its banks and financial institutions, yet now we hear from the US president that they made no difference to Iran's nuclear programme. The Iranian exiles (on the left and the right) who remain advocates of sanctions (or, as Hillary Clinton called them, "targeted sanctions") should bear this in mind. By definition sanctions increase the power of the existing state, punish ordinary citizens and only result in two possible outcomes: regime change from above or the creation of a failed state, in both cases for the sole benefit of imperialism.

Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu has called the Lausanne agreement a "bad deal", even though some, if not most, of his demands were added to the conditions by US secretary of state John Kerry, including the reduction of uranium stockpiles and the decommissioning of the current reactor in Fordow. So the Zionist leader is now forced to look for new demands. On April 4, he said the final deal must include Iran's recognition of the state of Israel. A bizarre addition, given that these talks were supposed to be solely about Iran's nuclear programme.

Hegemon

As negotiations dragged on in Lausanne, it was clear that all parties were desperate to reach a deal:

- For Iran it was necessary because the economy is on its knees following the collapse of the price of oil.
- For the EU because a new market desperate for goods and services in a semi-developed country, with

a population of nearly 80 million, presents many 'opportunities'.

• For the US because it is facing so many challenges in that part of the world that reaching agreement with Iran could be presented as the Obama administration's crowning success.

As Iranians celebrated the possible end of punitive sanctions, many commented on the billions of dollars spent on developing nuclear plants, a project that benefited from astronomic funds at a time when most people were suffering from food shortages, lack of medicine ... all courtesy of the west. The Iranian people have paid a heavy price for the supreme leader's 'heroic flexibility' regarding the nuclear issue. Contrary to silly comments by sections of the exiled left, the celebrations on the streets of Tehran last Friday were not in support of the government, but an expression of hope that the economic situation will improve after sanctions are removed.

For the EU, the prospects of new markets were making some capitalists salivate. The ink on the Lausanne deal was barely dry before Richard Branson purred with satisfaction: "Well done to Iran's foreign minister ... in bringing home an historic deal for Iran and the world. Commendations to John Kerry and the leaders from the UK, France, Russia, China and Germany in reaching an agreement ... There are millions of young, ambitious, decent Iranians who can now start to enjoy some prosperity in Iran, as sanctions are lifted without the threat of war."³

However, predictions that Iran will become the US's best friend in the region, or a regional economic power allied to the US at the expense of Saudi Arabia,⁴ are premature to say the least. Since 2001 US policy in the region has been such a disaster it is difficult to see how a deal with Iran will improve the situation. The world hegemon has managed to create and oversee disaster in Iraq following the invasion and occupation, and it has inflicted poverty, hunger and the threat of war on the peoples of Iran. It egged on fundamentalist groups in Libya to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi, only for them to end up fighting each other in a civil war. During the 'Arab spring' the US supported president Hosni Mubarak until it became obvious that his regime could not survive, so it then tried to make deals with the Muslim Brotherhood and finally supported a military coup. A coup that effectively ended hopes of radical change for millions of Egyptians and Arabs.

Since 2012 the word hegemon power and its allies, encouraged by Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf states, have been pursuing one aim: to

weaken Iran's regional influence. That is why they have supported jihadists in Syria (the same jihadists who ended up as Islamic State). While the rhetoric was for democracy and civil society, in practice the three main allies of the US were reactionary religious and semi-religious states: Saudi Arabia, Israel and Turkey. As far as relations with the arch-enemy is concerned, while the Iranian people were punished through sanctions, the US administration had no hesitation in coming to arrangements with the regime whenever their common interests demanded it, including in the 2003 war in Iraq, in Afghanistan since 2001 and now in opposing IS in Syria or Iraq.

In Syria the regime of Bashar al-Assad remains the main enemy - because, according to many in and around the administration, Iran is more of a threat than IS. In the last few weeks there have been many days when the US army was bombing IS forces in northern Iraq, while using drones to attack pro-Assad forces in Syria and sending arms to jihadists fighting the Assad regime. In the first instance the enemy was this major threat to world peace, IS, while in the second it was about undermining Iran's regional ambitions. All this while Obama's secretary of state was engaged in the nuclear negotiations.

Muddled and ineffective US foreign policy in the region has been disastrous for the peoples of the Middle East and north Africa, those who have to live with the subsequent chaos. Many have argued this is symptomatic of a superpower in decline and there is historical precedence to validate such an argument. On the other hand, it could be that there is method in this madness, that the world hegemon power is deliberately following a policy of producing failed states: Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen ... Far from seeking stability, it could be that the US actually wants to spread chaos, hoping to benefit from national, regional and religious divisions, thanks to the good old tactic of divide and rule. With current US policy there is the prospect of decades of war, civil strife and regime change in the region.

The deal in Lausanne has done nothing to change this •

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Notes

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SOUTH AFRICA

Split that need not have happened

The criminal actions of the South African Communist Party have severely weakened Cosatu, writes Peter Manson

The Congress of South African Trade Unions edged a step closer to formally becoming two separate organisations last week, with the decision of the Cosatu central executive committee (CEC) to dismiss its general secretary, Zwelinzima Vavi.

The crisis began when Vavi was suspended from his post in August 2013 - ostensibly over an affair with a Cosatu office worker, but in reality the South African Communist Party leadership wanted rid of a man who had become far too critical of the ruling African National Congress over its attacks on union members and the working class as a whole. For the SACP tops, the tripartite alliance - which links the SACP and Cosatu in support of the bourgeois ANC - is a matter of dogma which cannot be challenged.

And, since just about all Cosatu unions have traditionally been dominated by members of the SACP, the party's opinion is not unimportant. The SACP, which claims to have well over 150,000 members, has served to demobilise the masses with its absurd claim that the current period of neoliberal privatisation and capitalist stabilisation represents a "national democratic revolution" that is the "most direct route to socialism" in South Africa.

But Vavi, an SACP oppositionist, had struck a chord and his suspension in August 2013 led to calls for a Cosatu special congress - not just to reinstate Vavi, but to reverse the federation's pro-ANC positions. The Cosatu constitution states that a special national congress (SNC) must be called if a third of affiliates demand one, and back in 2013 nine of the then 19 Cosatu unions did indeed demand an SNC. But the leadership around president Sidumo Dlamini, a staunch SACP/ANC loyalist, prevaricated, quoting "practicalities" and "expense", until finally, in February 2014, the CEC for the first time came out with a straight 'no' - without even attempting to justify this blatant contravention of its own constitution.

Revolt

This point-blank refusal served to deepen the divide, with several unions - including the largest of all, the 330,000-strong National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) - stiffening their newly found anti-ANC resolve.

In December 2013 a Numsa congress voted unanimously to break from the ANC and to cease paying the union's regular levy to the SACP. This was not without significance, since Numsa's previously SACP-loyal leadership had played a central role in the replacement in 2007 of sitting ANC president Thabo Mbeki by Jacob Zuma. If there had been any doubts about its rebellion against the SACP, these would have been dispelled when Numsa delegates voted at the same congress to set up a campaigning, anti-neoliberal "United Front", not to mention a "Movement for Socialism", with the eventual aim of establishing a workers' party to rival the SACP.

Meanwhile, Numsa had also launched a legal challenge to Vavi's suspension and in April 2014 it was overturned by the high court in Johannesburg, to the consternation of Dlamini and the remaining loyalists. SACP control over Cosatu was now looking distinctly insecure and so the party decided it had to act. To

the disquiet of the ANC leadership, which was hoping that somehow Cosatu could be held together and kept in its entirety within the alliance framework, the SACP embarked upon a splitting course - Numsa had to be expelled if the party was to keep control over the federation.

The fact of the matter is that Cosatu affiliates under SACP hegemony are hobbled when it comes to pursuing pay claims and improvements in working conditions - though, of course, as I write, several loyalist-led public-sector unions are on the verge of major strike action. But workers in South Africa want something more than the crumbs delivered by the SACP trade union leaders. And it is their rising expectations that lie at the heart of the split in Cosatu and has led to a whole string of trade union leaders demanding some sort of independent working class political agenda outside the ANC-led popular front.

That is why Numsa had to go. A number of charges were cobbled together - not least that Numsa had acted against Cosatu "policy" by withdrawing support from the ANC! Realising the paper-thin nature of such a charge (it surely meant that Cosatu policy could never be changed, for affiliates adopting a different line on any major question would automatically be excluded), the loyalists claimed that Numsa was guilty of poaching members, since it had expanded its membership base beyond the metal industry and had been recruiting miners, for instance, thus breaking the principle of 'One industry, one union'. Here they were on firmer ground - and, of course, they could overlook the minor matter of just about every other union behaving in exactly the same way (which is unsurprising, since the main problem does not arise from several unions trying to recruit the same workers, but from the fact that more than 70% of all workers belong to no union). Numsa was duly expelled in November 2014.

Despite this, for a while Vavi attempted to act as conciliator, trying to persuade the SACP loyalists to accept that the strong differences within the federation could all be contained and that both loyalist and oppositionist-led unions could be brought back together - seven unions that were in sympathy with Numsa had stopped attending Cosatu meetings, demanding the metalworkers' reinstatement.

But there was no turning back for the loyalists. Just to rub home the point, Dlamini indicated that a tiny, pro-SACP split from Numsa, the Liberated Metalworkers Union of South Africa (Limusa), whose claimed membership is 1,670 (!), would be accepted as an affiliate. So much for 'One industry, one union'!

At this point, Vavi decided to end his cooperation with the loyalists and earlier this year joined the seven oppositionist unions in their boycott of central executive committee meetings. The loyalists had the excuse they needed - by refusing to attend the CEC at the beginning of March, Vavi was failing in his duties as general secretary. They demanded he explain himself before a special CEC scheduled for March 30-31.

Unity?

On March 29, Vavi announced in a lengthy statement the reason why he would not be present. He said he had attended a CEC in November "on the

understanding a unity initiative would be taken, so that the seven unions boycotting it would change their mind and attend. But the hard-line anti-Numsa unions would not hear of it and there was no such initiative." Furthermore,

a number of affiliates [stated] that they could not attend the meeting unless it was linked to a unity process, *inter alia* involving the ANC ... Accordingly and regrettably, I will also not attend the upcoming special CEC on March 30-31 too ... I am not convinced that the important task of building unity is on the agenda of this special CEC ... Adopting a 'business as usual' approach when a significant section of our unions are no longer participating ... is irresponsible.

Vavi went on:

I will not attend meetings of the federation whose sole purpose is to pursue the factional agenda of one grouping, no matter how powerful they may think they are. Legitimising such meetings is tantamount to giving credibility to the idea that these are genuine forums to resolve problems. In reality such meetings are only mechanisms to annihilate opposition to the agenda of a powerful faction, parading under the semblance of constitutionality.¹

Interestingly, in his pre-CEC statement Vavi revealed the disastrous state of Cosatu's finances following the expulsion of Numsa. The ridding of a political nuisance came at a price - the abrupt end of a source of regular income in the form of the affiliation fee of a union with 330,000 members (Numsa claims that its membership has since passed the 350,000 mark, by the way). Vavi declared:

Cosatu is currently living R300,000 [£17,000] a month beyond its income. Cosatu staff could only be paid in February and March by raiding the political fund (designated for other purposes). This source will dry up soon. Campaign activities - the core of our work - will be curtailed, and there is the likelihood of having to go with a begging bowl to our class enemies for money to hold a congress later this year.

This is a recipe for a complete loss of independence. Our research institution, Naledi, and the Chris Hani Institute will have to close down, the *Shop Steward* magazine will have to close down and ... Cosatu House can't be maintained.

Cosatu president Sidumo Dlamini was furious, accusing Vavi of irresponsibility for making public the federation's financial state. You would never find company directors behaving in that way - "A CEO of a company can't go public and brag about that situation." Somewhat contradictorily, he said of Vavi: "He knows he is lying." In any case, he "wanted to create that situation. He knows he did almost everything to paralyse us from inside ... if he was at the centre of Cosatu, he should then be saying he is also responsible for that situation if it does exist."²

Everyone knew what would happen at the special CEC in the absence of the oppositionist unions

and Vavi himself. It decided with only one vote against to immediately dismiss the general secretary. "By not coming to this CEC to explain his conduct," declared Vavi's deputy, Bheki Ntshahintshali, "he therefore waived his right to put his side of the story."

That seems reasonable as far as it goes, but Vavi countered: "I have no doubt that the dismissal is unfair and illegal. I have been dismissed without a hearing conducted by an independent chairperson." And socialist journalist Terry Bell claimed: "... the central executive committee ... has no constitutional authority to finally dismiss, suspend or expel any office-bearer or affiliate; only a national congress may do that."³

This seems a little dubious to me. Surely any organisation must have the right to act against one of its officers who is failing to carry out tasks for which they were elected and for which they are paid - ie, not attending and reporting to that organisation's leading committee. To say that is not to side with the loyalists, of course, whose motives were primarily political and clearly undemocratic.

But Vavi was not the only one who had to clear out his desk. On the same day that the decision to dismiss the general secretary was announced, Cosatu's national spokesperson, Patrick Craven, announced his resignation. He could not "defend the indefensible", he said. This came as a surprise to many people, including this writer - personally I had assumed that Craven was an unquestionable loyalist, having read his name at the top of every emailed Cosatu bulletin or announcement for as long as I can remember.

'Walk away'

The loyalists' contempt for democracy is, of course, symbolised by their unconstitutional refusal to countenance a special national congress. Regular congresses are held only once every three years and the next one is due in September of this year. But, on the same day that the sacking of Vavi was announced, president Dlamini confirmed that there would, after all, be an SNC. It would be held in June - just two months before the regular congress and almost two years after it was first demanded!

A chance for the oppositionists to win back control? Not a bit of it. Numsa is no longer an affiliate and so would not be allowed to attend. In Numsa's absence, it seems certain the loyalists will have a majority and will endorse the CEC decisions regarding both Numsa and Vavi. The expulsion of the metalworkers is, of course, very convenient from a purely logistical point of view - with Numsa present it seems probable that the loyalists would have been defeated.

In fact the oppositionists now seemed to have all but given up on Cosatu. In the words of Vavi,

We are now trying one last-ditch attempt to reclaim the organisation from below, by mobilising the members to assert their rights to control their movement. If this fails, history will record that we tried everything in our power.

... If all avenues are closed, we will have no option but to walk away. But this is ultimately a huge decision, which only the members, and workers more broadly, can make. If members decide there is nothing further that can be done

to rescue the organisation, I will respect that decision.

However, the boycott indicates that the oppositionists have decided there is no possibility of 'reclaiming the organisation'. Surely that is what lies behind it. A pity, because in my view there was a strong possibility of defeating the loyalists in the long term. In just about every loyalist union there has been disquiet against the leadership's pro-ANC line, with oppositionists coming to the fore in various regions and committees.

For its part, the United Front originally sponsored by Numsa stated that it "regards this decision as the final nail in the regrettable terminal decline of what was once a mighty, principled, independent and militant federation of workers' trade unions".⁴

Fantasy world

The SACP has been strangely muted in its response to the latest developments. In its post-CEC statement it made vacuous noises about Cosatu's "serious problems of maintaining unity, cohesion and discipline" and declared that the "latest divisive developments facing the federation are undesirable, and cannot be a cause for celebration".

The only criticism of Vavi came in this implied form:

Workers should recognise the dangers inherent in the development of the cult of personality and the undermining of the fundamental principles of internal democracy, collective leadership, discipline and self-discipline, constructive criticism and self-criticism.⁵

But the SACP's reticence is understandable. It knows that this "undesirable" splitting outcome is the direct result of its own criminal actions. Rather than break with the ANC popular front and stop excusing ANC neoliberalism, it was quite prepared to see Cosatu cleaved in two.

And now the SACP leadership seems to be inhabiting a fantasy world. According to national spokesperson Alex Mashilo, writing in the SACP's online journal, *Umsebenzi*, on three occasions in March

President Jacob Zuma emphasised the necessity for socialism, and the superiority of socialist values over the ruthless system of capitalist exploitation. History will record this as having been the first time since our April 1994 democratic breakthrough that the president of the republic and the ANC has explicitly supported socialism in any way.⁶

So Zuma 'supports' socialism. Strange that the bourgeois media failed to report this bombshell, isn't it? ●

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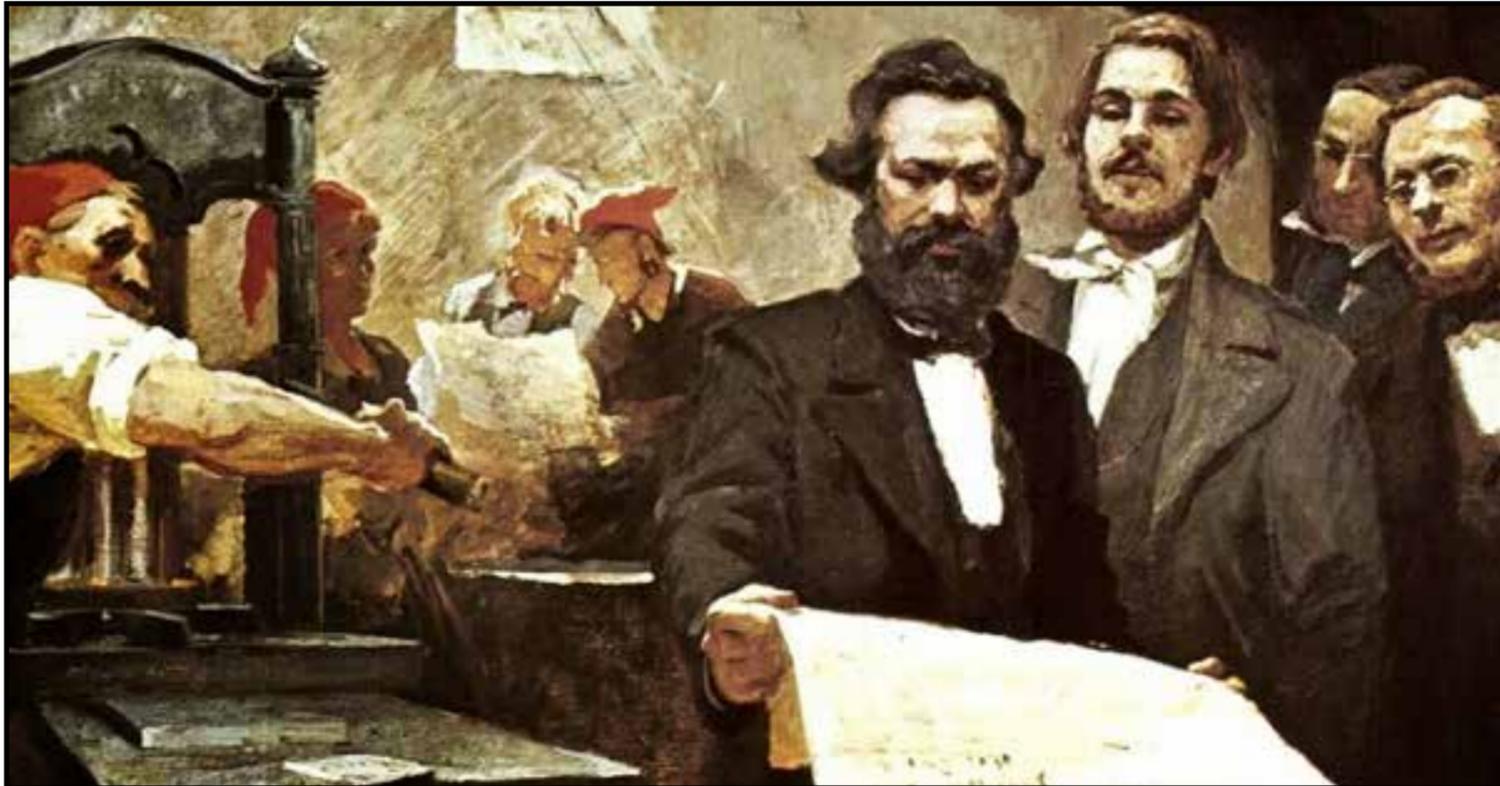
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STRATEGY

Thinking the alternative

Should the movement have a final goal? **Mike Macnair** argues for the maximum programme



Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: beyond class society

In my recent article on the young women who ran away to become brides for Islamic State, I concluded that “the left needs to organise itself to fight for a really radical alternative to the present order”.¹

This is not just a matter of the left standing for the revolutionary overthrow of the existing state system. To compete with the appeal of the utopian aspirations of reactionary anti-capitalism, an immediate defensive policy (‘no war’, ‘no austerity’, etc) is insufficient. Nostalgia for a more social democratic capitalism in the form of ‘back to 1945’ in Britain, ‘back to the New Deal’ in the US, and so on, are equally insufficient. We need to actively promote what was traditionally called the ‘maximum programme’: a vision of a possible long-term alternative to capitalism, in relation to which the overthrow of the existing state system in favour of working class rule is a *step along the road*.

This issue was also raised in my recent exchange with Chris Cutrone of Platypus in the letters column of this paper, and I said in my letters of January 15 and January 29 that I would return to it (“the questions of liberalism, its ‘promise’, the relation between the dictatorship of the proletariat, socialism and communism, and more broadly the nature of general human emancipation”) in more depth. (Comrade Cutrone himself has in a sense returned to the issue in a distorted form in his letter of February 10, where he accuses me of sharing Bernstein’s view that “the movement is everything and the goal nothing”.)

In this series of three articles I will approach the question in three steps. The first consists of some comments on comrade Cutrone’s argument and the obscure indications in his article and letters of his own approach; and a brief introduction to what the CPGB views, in our *Draft programme*, as the final goal of our political project. The second step is to review two recent books which approach the issue in very different ways: Peter Hudis’s *Marx’s concept of the alternative to capitalism* (2012) and Michal Polák’s *Class, surplus and the division of labour* (2013). The third step is to draw out some implications of the first two steps for the ways in which we should

present the final goal as an inspiring aim - rather more elaborately than the brief summary in the *Draft programme* - and its implications for present-day (that is, near-future) political choices.

Luxemburg

It should be obvious from what I have just said that the CPGB - and I - do not treat the movement as “everything” and the final goal “nothing”. Comrade Cutrone’s claim that I am a Bernsteinist is merely a repetition of the cold war line most elaborately expressed in Peter Nettle’s biography of Luxemburg: that the only real choice is between Bernstein’s politics and Luxemburg’s; that Bebel’s politics (for which Kautsky argued) did not represent a real alternative. The cold warriors, including Nettle, of course, thought Luxemburg’s politics romantically inspiring, but utopian and doomed: hence Bernsteinism, which the US state was sedulously promoting in the European labour movement, was to be preferred. For Cutrone in his most recent letter only Luxemburg (as quoted by the cold warrior, Michael Harrington!) is Marxist in the debates before 1914; hence only ‘Luxemburgist’ theorists, starting with György Lukács and descending to the Frankfurt school, count as Marxist.

Luxemburg’s argument - “it is an illusion, then, to think that the proletariat can create economic power within capitalist society. It can only create political power and then transform capitalist society” - is flatly contrary to Marx’s actual policy in relation to trade unions, cooperatives and the struggle for a workers’ political party within capitalism, which are abundantly documented from both the young and the old Marx. It is, in fact, a version of Ferdinand Lassalle’s ‘iron law of wages’ argument against trade unions.

It is understandable in its context, since it is taken from Luxemburg’s *speech* at the 1899 Hanover Social Democratic Party congress.² This speech is quite clearly *extempore*, rather than prepared, and the point is addressed to the argument of Eduard David earlier in the debate: that the proletariat had to win the level of economic power under capitalism which Marxists of the time *imagined*

the capitalist class had under late feudalism, after which the state would naturally fall into its hands without ‘premature’ attempts on the state power. (I stress *imagined*, because it is now clear that the capitalist class, though it had *some* economic power under late feudal regimes, did not ‘first conquer economic power’ and the state then fell naturally into its hands: rather, the revolutionary overthrow of the late feudal states was necessary for a real ‘conquest of economic power’ for capital.³) In her 1900 book *Reform or revolution*,⁴ Luxemburg is a lot more careful in her expressions than in the 1899 speech to avoid suggesting that the proletariat cannot improve its economic situation in capitalist society; rather, there she correctly points out the *limits* of such improvements and that they will not gradually ‘grow over’ into socialism.

It is, in other words, perfectly possible for the proletariat to build powerful organisations under capitalism and to win real improvements in its conditions of existence, both through merely constructing these organisations and solidarity (cooperatives and mutuals), and through economic and political struggles. But, as long as the *state order* remains capitalist, these gains remain vulnerable to capitalist counteroffensives through the states (as we have seen since the 1980s); and, as long as the fundamental *economic order* remains capitalist, they remain vulnerable to the general destructive effects of cyclical crises, depressions and wars.

It is this circumstance which *immediately* requires us to put forward not merely reforms within capitalism, but a global *alternative to capitalism*: a ‘maximum programme’.

Transparent aims

There is, however, also a more profound ground. It is true that, as Luxemburg argues in the speech, the proletarian revolution is fundamentally different from prior revolutions - though it *also*, contrary to Luxemburg, as Trotsky pointed out (quoted in my December 18 article), contains elements common with these. However, the fundamental difference is not economic versus political power.

It is, rather, based on the points made by Marx in the *Programme of the Parti Ouvrier*:

That the emancipation of the productive class is that of all human beings without distinction of sex or race;

That the producers can be free only when they are in possession of the means of production (land, factories, ships, banks, credit); That there are only two forms under which the means of production can belong to them:

(1) The individual form which has never existed in a general state and which is increasingly eliminated by industrial progress;

(2) The collective form, the material and intellectual elements of which are constituted by the very development of capitalist society ... That this collective appropriation can arise only from the revolutionary action of the productive class - or proletariat - organised in a distinct political party.

The problem is not just that of “the emancipation of the productive class”, but “that of all human beings without distinction of sex or race” Why?

Generalised commodity production - ie, private property + money + market relations in combination - *appears* to allow individuals or families to coordinate their diverse productive activities with only limited, explicit common decision-making. But *the internal logic* of private property + money + market relations has the effect that marginal differences of efficiency between family-scale producers under monetised market conditions will produce accumulation and polarisation of the producers into capitalists and proletarians: this is much of the point of the first part of *Capital* Vol 1.

In addition, though these are absences in Marx’s analysis due to the incomplete character of his critique of political economy (he never reached the state), (a) the ‘hidden hand’ does not actually work and free-market economies require *more* ‘public goods’, hence stronger states, than pre-capitalist social arrangements; and (b) even late-feudal interstitial

market operations require credit money, which in turn requires routine debt enforcement, which requires the state that discriminates against ‘foreign’ nationals⁵ - which creates the recurring capitalist dynamic towards imperialism and war.

This set of infernal dynamics tends towards repeated disasters, not just for proletarians, but for all of us humans. Overcoming them is not a matter of getting rid of the existing big concentrations of capital to restore a lost Eden of small-business market society: this would only, more or less rapidly, *by its own rules* reproduce big capital. Rather, it requires the “collective appropriation” of the means of production. And this, in turn, requires us - all the humans, all the members of society as a whole - to think consciously about our common productive activities.

Put another way, what is new about the proletarian revolution is that it is a revolution of the majority, whose aim is not to transfer power to a different minority (feudal lords and clerics in place of slaveholder-urban literati; capitalists in place of feudal lords and clerics), but to emancipate the majority. And this in turn requires that its aims are conscious, rather than being ideological-apologetic.

Cutrone

How should we think this global alternative, these conscious aims? Comrade Cutrone argued in his January 9 letter:

If ideology eclipses promise in capitalism, the task is to find the socialist promise in capitalist ideology. It is not discontinuous with the liberal promise of bourgeois society. Otherwise, we are left with what Kant called mere “civilisation”, which is barbaric. It was bourgeois civil society that meant to transcend the rule of law - to transcend the state as such.⁶ Socialism, too, wants this.

And

The dialectical crisis and contradiction of liberalism and socialism means that they are inextricable from each other: socialism must, according to Marxist Hegelianism, be the *Aufhebung* (sublation) of - must realise, as well as overcome, complete as well as transcend - liberalism in modern democracy.

This *might* be a way of thinking the maximum programme. But it is mistaken. The problem is that liberalism is *not* non-ideological before the appearance of steam-driven industrial capitalism, then becoming ideological with the appearance of steam industry.⁷ Whiggism, liberalism’s precursor, is certainly revolutionary in John Locke in the late 1600s; but it is *simultaneously* apologetic, both against the non-possessing classes and for the dispossession of the native Americans.⁸ Already when Bernard Mandeville proposed it in 1714 in *The fable of the bees*, the ‘hidden hand’ was false, and early Whiggism as much as later liberalism both implied the strong state as its internal ‘other’, and promoted the Tory ‘party of order’ as its external other.

The idea is worsened by comrade Cutrone’s comments in his October 16 article: “By conflating the issue of government with “rule of law”, however, Macnair mistakes the

contradiction of the modern state and its politics in capitalism.”
He goes on:

The issue, though, is his taking as a norm the parliamentary system of government in the European mode and thus neglecting the US constitutional system. For at issue is the potential disparity and antagonism between legislative and executive authority, or between the law and its enforcement. The American system of ‘checks and balances’ was meant to uphold liberal democracy and prevent the tyranny of either the executive or the legislature (or the judicial) aspects of government.

There is an important domain of political struggle already, between executive and legislative authority, and this would affect any struggle to transform politics. The question is the source of this antagonism. It is not merely formal. If the ‘separation of powers’ in the US constitutional system has served undemocratic ends, it is not essentially because it was intended to do so. The problem of adequate and proper democratic authority in society is not reducible to the issue of purported ‘mob rule’. Any form of government could be perverted to serve capitalism. So the issue is indeed one of politics as such - the social content of or what informs any form of political authority.

And

Indeed, for Marx, communism would be the completion and fulfilment of capitalism, and not in terms of one or some aspects over others, but rather in and through its central self-contradiction, which is political as well as economic, or ‘political-economic’.

What this requires is recognising the non-identity of various aspects of capitalism as bound up in and part and parcel of the process of capitalism’s potential transformation into communism. For example, the non-identity of law (as legislated), its (judicial) interpretation and (executive) enforcement, or the non-identity of civil society and the state, as expressed by the specific phenomenon of modern political parties. States are compulsory; political parties are voluntary, civil-society formations.

These points are deeply obscure; but if they express any positive claims, what is involved is a defence of rule-of-law liberalism in the particular and narrow form of US constitutional patriotism. Cutrone’s reliance on Dick Howard, who deploys a similar form of US constitutional patriotism to form a critique of French politics, tends to confirm this. But the US displays more strongly than European parliamentarism the problem of liberalism’s auto-development of its internal other (the hypertrophied US repressive apparatus) and its external other (Christian fundamentalism and related ‘party of order’ phenomena within the US, Salafi jihadism, Putinite Holy Rusism, Hindutva in India, and so on, as reactions to US-led liberalism’s world dominance outside it).

I have commented above that liberalism automatically produces its other because the hidden hand is false. But there is again another way of looking at the matter: this is Marx’s comment:

This sphere that we are deserting, within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labour-power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham.⁹

When, however, Marx has passed

through the work of analysing surplus labour, we come to this on the working day:

It must be acknowledged that our labourer comes out of the process of production other than he entered. In the market he stood as owner of the commodity ‘labour-power’ face to face with other owners of commodities, dealer against dealer. The contract by which he sold to the capitalist his labour-power proved, so to say, in black and white that he disposed of himself freely. The bargain concluded, it is discovered that he was no ‘free agent’, that the time for which he is free to sell his labour-power is the time for which he is forced to sell it, that in fact the vampire will not lose its hold on him “so long as there is a muscle, a nerve, a drop of blood to be exploited”. For “protection” against “the serpent of their agonies”, the labourers must put their heads together, and, as a class, compel the passing of a law, an all-powerful social barrier that shall prevent the very workers from selling, by voluntary contract with capital, themselves and their families into slavery and death. In place of the pompous catalogue of the “inalienable rights of man” comes the modest Magna Charta of a legally limited working-day, which shall make clear “when the time which the worker sells is ended, and when his own begins”.¹⁰

From this point of view, if liberalism ideologically represents market relationships, the ‘party of order’ ideologically represents the necessary hierarchy of the workplace: necessary because of the antagonism inherent in the labour relation. Both ideologies are then capitalist products, which will be overcome with the supersession of capitalism.

Now liberalism is, of course, an advance on Christian, Muslim or Buddhist clericalism (with its natural other, knights, sipahis, samurai and so on, and their ideologies of aristocratic birth, in fact a bifurcation of the exploiting class between landlord and clerical exploiters). But that is to say merely that capitalism is an advance on feudalism, as feudalism before it was an advance on slaveholder-urbanism.

Are we really to say that Marxism should build its aims on the basis that “the task is to find the socialist promise in capitalist ideology” (remember, these are aims in relation to which Cutrone damns me for abandoning the ‘goal’ in favour of the ‘movement’ like Bernstein)? If so, there is no real ground for us not to seek to “find the socialist promise” in the other side of “capitalist ideology”: that is, for example, in the egalitarianism, and social solidarity in the form of the congregation or umma, and of commitments to charity, of Christianity, Islam or Buddhism, or in the (equally delusive) promise of national social solidarity offered by conservative nationalism.

The task is not “to find the socialist promise” in any of the multiple capitalist ideologies. It is to look below the level of ideologies to the untheorised social practices which support these ideologies (all of them one-sided) and find the possibilities of socialism growing out of the objective contradictions/dynamics of capitalism at this lower level.

CPGB

The CPGB’s *Draft programme* offers at its end our collective version of the ‘final goal’:

Socialism in the 21st century will start from a relatively high level of technique, output and culture. Once the hard task of winning working class state power has been achieved, we will advance towards full communism. The speed of

that advance is dictated by the completion of the world revolution and the correctness of the policy of the working class and its party.

Through society reabsorbing the functions of the state the need for it withers away. Democracy (as a form of the state) negates itself and gives way to general freedom. The higher stage of communism is a free association of producers. Everybody will contribute according to their ability and take according to their need. Real human history begins and society leaves behind the realm of necessity. In the realm of freedom people will become rounded, fully social individuals, who can for the first time truly develop their natural humanity.

This is what we want to achieve. To win that prize we shall overcome all obstacles.

Like everything in the *Draft programme*, this is a bald summary rather than an argument. (We discussed at the time of the most recent redrafting of the *Draft programme* the idea of producing an explanatory book, to play the role Karl Kautsky’s *The class struggle* played for the 1891 Erfurt programme or Nikolai Bukharin’s and Evgeny Preobrazhensky’s *The ABC of communism* played for the 1919 Russian Communist Party programme. But limited resources and pressure of other tasks have meant that the idea has been taken no further.)

The summary is also based largely on ‘traditional’ readings of Marx and Engels. That said, there are significant differences from those readings current on the left. As can be seen here and from the preceding section (5) of the *Draft programme*, we use ‘socialism’ as a synonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat or period of transition between capitalism and communism under working class rule.

From this in turn: we use ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ or ‘socialism’ to mean a period of transition, in which the working class rules over the middle classes. This is a shift from Marx’s early usage, which used the ‘revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat’ in a sense close to the Roman *dictatura*, meaning a short episode of lawless reorganisation of the constitution: ie, political revolution.¹¹

This judgment is based precisely on a sense of the nature of the final goal. As is explained in a very summary way in section 5 of the *Draft programme*,

Classes and social strata exist under socialism because of different positions occupied in relationship to the means of production, the roles played in society and the way they receive their income.

And:

The repressive role of the state is not only connected with overcoming the capitalist class. There is also the division of labour. Until work becomes life’s prime want, laws, courts and state coercion will be required.

The global rule of the working class will make it possible for the state to begin to disappear in its entirety, as classes wither away on the basis of the socialisation of the productive forces on a global scale.

In other words, the transition from capitalism to communism requires a historical period rather than merely a brief period of revolution, because this transition goes to the deep structure of the society: not merely to the foundations of *capital*, but to the foundations of *class* in the ‘social division of labour’ (more exactly, in occupational specialisation).

Our vision of communism, then, is one of the sort which is presented, exaggeratedly, in the 1845-46 text

printed as part of *The German ideology*:

... in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity, but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.¹²

Or, much later, in the 1877 *Anti-Dühring*:

And now see how puerile is Herr Dühring’s idea that society can take possession of all means of production in the aggregate without revolutionising from top to bottom the old method of production and first of all putting an end to the old division of labour; that everything will be in order once “natural opportunities and personal capabilities are taken into account” ... that therefore whole masses of entities will remain, as in the past, subjected to the production of one single article; whole “populations” ... will be engaged in a single branch of production, and humanity continue to be divided, as in the past, into a number of different crippled “economic species” ..., for there still are “porters” and “architects” ... Society is to become master of the means of production as a whole, in order that each individual may remain the slave of his means of production, and have only a choice as to which means of production are to enslave him.¹³

The image is, at a higher level of abstraction, one of a society which has not merely gone beyond profit as the fundamental social goal, but also beyond productivity or total productive output, to set its fundamental goal as enabling rounded development of the human individual and genuinely free individual choices: “an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (*Communist manifesto*).¹⁴

But this truly radical and inspiring image invites questions. Is this alternative really posed for us by capitalist development, or is it just another utopia? And if it really is posed for us by capitalist development, it must follow that this ‘final goal’¹⁵ has implications for the concept of the transition from capitalism to communism (already mentioned), and, hence, of the ‘minimum programme’ of immediate proposals for change. What implications?

To approach these questions, I think, as I have already said, that it is useful to begin by looking at two (fairly) recent books which bear on the issues, which I will do in my next article ●

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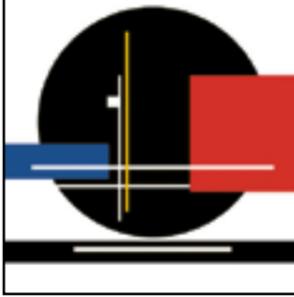
Notes

1. ‘Wrong kind of radicalisation’ *Weekly Worker* February 26.
2. www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1899/10/11.htm. German at http://library.fes.de/parteilage/pdf/pt-jahr/pt-1899.pdf at pp171-76, this at p172: “Es ist also eine Illusion, zu glauben, das Proletariat könne schon innerhalb der heutigen bürgerlichen Gesellschaft die wirtschaftliche Macht sich verschaffen; es kann nur die politische Macht sich verschaffen und dann das kapitalistische Eigentum aufheben.” Harrington’s translation, quoted by Cutrone and here, is not really satisfactory. “Verschaffen” in this context is to “gain” or “win” rather than to “create” (economic or political power). “Transcend” would be a better translation of *aufheben* than “transform” (the alternative “sublate” attempts to preserve the subtleties of preserving-in-transcending in Hegelian usage of *aufheben*, but does so at the price of creating a wholly artificial English academic term of art, which can only have meaning for those who pay attention to the views of Hegelian circles). And

what is to be transcended is capitalist *Eigentum* - ‘property’ - rather than “society”.

3. Eg, D Parker *Class and state in ancien régime France* London 1996; J Goodacre *The transformation of a peasant economy* Leicester 1994 (state intervention to prop up decaying manors); S Pincus *1688* Yale 2009.
4. www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/index.htm.
5. CFY Gonzalez de Lara, ‘The secret of Venetian success: a public-order, reputation-based institution’ (2008) *12 European Review of Economic History* pp247-85.
6. I should comment here that the statement that “bourgeois civil society ... meant to transcend the rule of law” is certainly untrue, even if it had been true (it is very questionable) that “civil society” “meant ... to transcend the state as such”. Liberal theory is grounded on the idea of a natural law which transcends the state, and even the anarcho-capitalists imagine law without the state. Law without the state is indeed possible, but takes the form of enforcement through the blood-feud (eg, W Miller *Bloodtaking and peacemaking* Chicago 1990).
7. In fact, steam industry was still marginal in the politics of the most advanced part of Germany, the Rhineland, in 1848. Cutrone’s (and, here, Marx’s and many Marxists’) turning point: J Sperber *Rhineland radicals* Princeton 1992. The converse of this point is that the shipping and armaments industries already display the ‘real subsumption of labour to capital’ a long way before the ‘steam turn’, so that the existence of a period of ‘petty commodity production’ without existing concentrations of capital, for which liberalism might (in theory) be non-ideological, is, on the European scale or that of the world market, illusory: feudalism gives birth directly to (interstitial) capitalism.
8. Eg, CB Macpherson *Possessive individualism* Oxford 1962; O Feltham *Anatomy of failure* Bloomsbury 2013; B Arnel *John Locke and America* Oxford 1996; Dmenico Losurdo *Liberalism: a counter-history* London 2011.
9. K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, chapter 6.
10. *Ibid* chapter 10.
11. H Draper *Karl Marx’s theory of revolution* Vol 3: *The dictatorship of the proletariat* New York 1986.
12. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm. “Exaggeratedly” because it is actually unlikely that even in an economy of abundance we could switch activities as rapidly as this passage suggests. “Text printed as part of *The German ideology*” because, as Terrell Carver has pointed out on the basis of the work of MEGA2, David Ryazanov in the 1920s stitched together several distinct manuscripts to produce the text we now know as *GI*: http://marxismcritico.com/2013/05/06/the-german-ideology-never-took-place. (I do not mean by recognition of the point to associate myself with Carver’s use of it to support stale ‘Marx versus Engels’ arguments: below next note.) It is sufficient for present purposes that this was written by Marx or Engels as of 1845-46.
13. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/ch25.htm. I have adverted in *Revolutionary strategy* November 2008, note 38, to literature directed against ‘Marx versus Engels’ readings’, which treat the *Anti-Dühring* as in some sense opposed to Marx’s ideas.
14. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm, at the end.
15. Itself, for Marx and Engels, the beginning of truly human history - that is, of real human choices, rather than obedience to blind laws. See K Marx *Preface to the Contribution to the critique of political economy*: “The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation [capitalism]” (www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm). F Engels *Anti-Dühring* chapter 7: “... it should make us extremely distrustful of our present knowledge, inasmuch as in all probability we are just about at the beginning of human history, and the generations which will put us right are likely to be far more numerous than those whose knowledge we - often enough with a considerable degree of contempt - have the opportunity to correct ...” (www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/ch07.htm).

**Communist Platform
Magna Carta and
long history**



**Speaker
Mike Macnair**

**Calthorpe Arms,
252 Grays Inn Road,
London WC1**

Sunday April 19, 5pm

MINERS**Lessons of the Great Strike**

This final reprint in the series of articles from our coverage in *The Leninist* of the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85 is a transcript of an opening at a late March 1985 day school on the lessons of this titanic, year-long battle. The strike had ended earlier

that month - catching the March issue of our monthly paper out a little. This contribution from Jack Conrad appeared in the May issue of the paper and, in hindsight, clearly has strengths and weaknesses.

Readers can judge its strengths for themselves, but

obviously its key failing lay in its assessment of the nature of the defeat that had just been handed out to the miners. At least it had the merit of understanding that this was a defeat. There were those in the movement who, years after, when the once proud National

Union of Mineworkers had been broken and the industry lay decimated, still insisted that the strike had *not* been lost - indeed, that it had won, according to some. We were not that myopic.

However, as the Tories subsequently pressed home

their advantage against the workers' movement in general, it became clear that the defeat of the miners' strike *had* been a strategic defeat for our class. We still live in the shadow of that huge reversal today.

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A defeat, but not a strategic one

The first thing that we would say about the miners' Great Strike is that, while it had many features of past industrial struggles, it gave us a glimpse of what is in prospect for Britain in the future. There has not really been a strike like it in British history. Obviously we have got 1926 to compare it with; we have got strikes in the earlier 20s; we have got the great strike wave between 1910 and 1914. But this strike lasted a year; this strike saw well over 10,000 people arrested; this strike saw the British police force come out in a way that we had never seen before.

We have seen police clobbering miners over their heads, not just with a normal truncheon, not just your 'Dixon of Dock Green' type toughed up, but we have seen the police adopt many European tactics. And, of course, those familiar with events in the Six Counties of Northern Ireland can see many parallels between the policing methods that have been employed in this strike and the lessons learnt by the British army in their struggle against the forces of the republican movement.

Now, in the same way that Lenin looked at the councils of action in Britain just after World War I and called them embryonic soviets, we too can now look back at this strike and see embryonic forms of future working class state power. In the formation of hit squads we see embryonic organs of working class state power in the form of workers' militias. In the Women Against Pit Closures movement we see in embryonic form a mass working class women's movement. And, of course, in miners support groups we see embryonic soviets.

The fact that this strike has thrown up these features, the fact that it lasted a year, the fact that there have been 10,000 arrests and the fact that the bourgeoisie itself threw into the fray not just a newly organised national police force fully equipped with all the paraphernalia of Northern Ireland, but also that it was prepared to spend at least three billion pounds, was prepared to sacrifice the tax concessions to the British middle class in the budget for the sake of beating the miners shows the importance of this strike - not just for revolutionaries, not just for the miners, but for all classes, all strata in British society. So we are not just dealing with statistics here. We are not just trying to say that this strike lasted a year, we are not just trying to say there were 10,000 arrests, and that x amount of money was spent.

What we are trying to indicate by calling it a Great Strike is that British politics has changed. This strike definitely marks a watershed in the development towards a British revolution, towards the situation where we can start to challenge for state power

In the initial period of the Thatcher government living standards rose; and in fact they are still rising in real terms for those in work. A number of sections of the working class, as sections, have been defeated. I think the most notable sectional struggle in the early period of the Thatcher government was that of the steelworkers. They took on the Thatcher government and put up a magnificent fight. Unfortunately they



Arthur Scargill: a reformist when all said and done

had an awful leadership: it not only caved in at the end of the day, but accepted a deal in which half the jobs in the steelworks disappeared.

Thatcher and the bourgeoisie could not be content with picking off the working class section by section: that was not the way forward and they were quite well aware of that fact. They had to confront the working class as a class; they had to force down the wages of the class as a whole. And to do that they obviously prepared very, very well to confront the miners. The miners for good reason have been described as the guards' regiment of the working class. Their idea was, if they could smash the NUM then no other section could stand in their way. This is what lay behind the miners' strike.

The strike

We can now have a look at the strike itself. I think what we can conclude in the aftermath of the strike is that, while it was defeated, it has not produced the results that Thatcher and the Tories wanted. What they wanted was a strategic, decimating defeat. While they have no doubt inflicted a very, very serious defeat, the truth is that the National Union of Mineworkers is intact, many militants are itching to reorganise and fight back and, what is more, the leadership of the NUM has not done a Bill Sirs', but has stood on a principled, intransigent position.

This said, it is important to criticise the leadership. While it was intransigent, while it has not caved in and agreed to massive closures, massive job losses, the fact is that it

fought the strike in ways inherited from the days of consensus or at least from the early 1970s. In other words, what Scargill was after was a repetition of the sort of victory that was secured in 1972 and 1974.

Because of this the whole strategy of the NUM suffered. In essence I think it suffered from the idea that, as a section, the NUM could do it by itself. OK, Arthur Scargill said on numerous occasions, 'Come and join us', 'Fight alongside us', 'Fulfil your pledges', but the fact was that it remained on the level of rhetoric. While calling for workers to join the miners, he was not prepared to break from the TUC in order to achieve that. He was not prepared to challenge directly the leadership of other unions to achieve that. He was not prepared to send out miners *en masse* - not just as pickets, but as political agitators. He was not really prepared, when it came down to it, to compromise his links not only with the TUC, but with left-talking union leaders, such as Buckton, Knapp, Todd and Slater.² He was prepared to accept their token solidarity, but was not prepared to condemn it as *only* token solidarity, to demand more and fight for it.

Now, the reasons for this are relatively simple. While the bourgeoisie has fulminated against Arthur Scargill for being a 'revolutionary', have branded him as being the greatest subversive in Britain, the truth is that, while Scargill is significantly different from people like Sirs, nonetheless he still is only a reformist - a left reformist no doubt, a reformist with syndicalistic inclinations, syndicalistic coloration, but nonetheless Arthur Scargill is a reformist. And to suggest anything

else would be to fool ourselves. He was willing to use militant trade union tactics, but he was not prepared to use revolutionary tactics. And even here there were weaknesses. I think an indication of this is the question of picketing and violence.

Scargill did not once condemn picket line violence; in fact, he made it a principle that if you cross a picket line you get what you deserve. But, away from the picket line, on several occasions - for example, with the Wilkie incident - he actually came out and condemned violence.³ I think that gives you an idea of both the different nature of Scargill on the one hand, and the similar nature of Scargill on the other hand, compared with other trade union leaders. His allies in the trade union movement, such as in the Transport and General Workers Union, while they were ever ready to preach about 'big bangs' and all the rest of it, when it came down to it were not even prepared to link in the miners' strike with their own members who were in struggle.

The most notable examples of that were the dockers. Those strikes by the dockers, certainly the first one, really did get the bourgeoisie worried. The idea of a strike wave starting to embrace more than the NUM really started to give them the heebie-jeebies. Not only that, but we also saw the situation at British Leyland, where the same laws were being deployed against the car workers as were being employed against the NUM. No attempt whatsoever was made to link the two. In fact the opposite was the case. Certainly, when the T&G pulled out its dockers, it made a very pointed declaration that 'This strike

has got nothing to do with the current coal dispute; this strike is simply about the dock labour scheme'. And as a result of that it ended in a most disgraceful situation of where, in order to preserve the dock labour scheme, T&G members were moving scab coal into Britain.

In the same way, when it came to the NUR and Aslef, many fine words came from Jimmy Knapp and Ray Buckton, but that was about all they did deliver ... When the railway unions called a day of action the members in London did not know about it, and when they found out about it they were protesting to their national executives and taking unofficial action on that day in order to stop the rails. Examples like that give you an idea of the sort of solidarity that was delivered, but the real point about it is that it also shows the limitations of Scargill, because Scargill was not protesting about it, he was not organising agitation teams of NUR militants, Aslef militants alongside NUM militants.

But, more important than that, the fact was that Scargill ..., while he in no way, shape, or form is a sell-out merchant, lacked what was needed - and that was a political strategy for victory. As far as Scargill was concerned, really all the NUM needed to do when it came down to it was go on strike, stop the production of coal, send out flying pickets, and then sit there intransigently until the coal stocks got down to the proverbial molehills (we were constantly told that was all the coal stocks were), and eventually the country would come to a halt, the government would give in and, as he said in the early part of the strike, then the years of Thatcherism would be rolled back. The truth was that the government obviously was not, as we have shown, playing that sort of game

'Scargillism'

We can draw a useful lesson about the nature of Scargill and I do not think we want to be totally negative about him. It would be foolish to say simply, 'Ah, Scargill: he's just another trade union bureaucrat, he's no different from the rest'. Because the fact is, he is different. And I think we can learn lessons about his strengths and weaknesses by perhaps looking at his hero from the 1920s, AJ Cook of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, who in many senses has great similarities with Scargill. Cook was an ex-member of the Communist Party; he was elected as a result of the wave of militancy that we have already referred to; he was supported by and a supporter of the National Minority Movement; he was still sympathetic to the young Communist Party; he looked upon the Soviet Union as his own. In other words, Cook was not just a normal, common-or-garden trade union leader in Britain in the 1920s.

But, as we know, he had his weaknesses. And his weaknesses were shown up in the aftermath of the 1926 General Strike, and above all they were shown up by his crumbling at the end of the miners' lockout and his desperate attempts to secure a compromise deal, even though the rank

and file were not prepared to accept it. And ironically he found himself - I will not say outflanked on the left, but certainly outdone in intransigence by the more traditional MFGB president, Herbert Smith: I think his famous phrase was 'Nowt for nowt': that was his intransigent negotiating stance. Not only that, but at the end of the General Strike and the lockout Cook, despite his earlier fraternal relations with the Communist Party, despite being a sympathetic ex-member, eventually turned against the Communist Party and the National Minority Movement.

Now, I am not saying that that is what Arthur Scargill is going to do or anything like it, because the fact has been that after a year strike Arthur Scargill has not done that, Arthur Scargill has not done an AJ Cook. But the fact is that Scargill and militant syndicalism, however intransigent and left, however militant, cannot deliver the goods at the end of the day, because in essence what is behind the capitalist offensive is the crisis of capitalism itself.

Ultimately the only way you are going to prevent an attack on the working class is to deal with the system that feeds that class-war fighter in the Tory party: that is, Margaret Thatcher. It is that system that forces them to attack, and it is only by fighting that system as a system and starting to build the organisation to kill that system can you ultimately win. Even if Scargill had secured a victory it could only have been, in the best of all possible worlds, a temporary victory, a holding operation. It could not have been a strategic victory for the working class.

Now, that view of Scargill, that view of the strike should still be weighed against the fact that the NUM has not been smashed, that Scargill has not sold out the jobs of his members. So, although the Tory government has spent £3 billion, the NUM is still capable of fighting. And therefore for us what is important in this period is correctly conducting a retreat, reorientating the NUM, winning the ideological battle, cementing unity: in essence equipping the NUM to fight another day. The fact has to be recognised that the NUM had been beaten, the NUM had been split down the middle, the bourgeoisie are in an immensely strong position

The future

The second lesson which we can point to (which I have already indicated, I hope quite convincingly) is that this strike is not, as Ron Todd said, "the likes of which we will never see for a hundred years". He is trying to make it into a folk myth already. A 'mantelpiece' strike to tell your children about: 'Eh, that was a strike' - that sort of idea.

The truth is that 1926, yes, was the end of a period of militancy; 1984-1985 is a *new* period of militancy, a new period of militancy in which we will not just see strikes as bitter, but more bitter, more fierce, more dangerous to both sides. And that is a truth that needs to be rammed home time and time again. Not just amongst our own ranks, but amongst the class as a whole. Because, given the idea that the bourgeoisie is trying to force down workers' wages, we also have to bear in mind why, after 1926, it did not force home that offensive, why it was not forced to do a Germany.

The fact was that during the pre-World War II period, Britain still possessed a massive empire. OK, some of it had become a Commonwealth, but nonetheless it had a huge trade area that encompassed a very large section of the world's population; what's more, alongside that empire it had dependent empires. For example, the Portuguese empire was very much under the wing of the great British empire. The same could be said to an extent of the Dutch empire. British investments in places like South America were still massive and Germany lay defeated.

Today, while Britain is still a major imperialist power, it is now one of the weaker major imperialist powers. The fact is that it no longer has that cushion of an empire to fall back on. And therefore I think if you want to learn lessons about the past (without getting too carried away, drawing exact parallels), but if you want to look at a country that we really ought to open our eyes to, and really say, 'It can happen here', it is Nazi Germany.

Germany has got many important lessons for us - not only the idea that the working class will be forced to engage in very militant struggle, but that revolution can be placed on the agenda. And I am not talking about next year or in six months' time, but in the general period that lies ahead. And if we fail in that revolutionary project then, of course, the bourgeoisie in Britain would be forced to employ the same sort of methods as the bourgeoisie in Germany were forced to employ, with the rise of Adolf Hitler and the triumph of Nazism. That is not scaremongering: that is a lesson of history that we need to take to heart.

Women

I have already mentioned the militant rank and file - many of them have learnt very important lessons about the nature of the state. After all, if your pit village is invaded by riot police; if your son is dragged off, beaten up by those police; if your picket lines are declared illegal by the courts; if your union has its funds robbed by those courts; if the Labour Party, instead of providing solidarity with the miners in their struggle, starts to join the other side and denounces the resistance that you are putting up, you learn some important lessons about the Labour Party, you learn lessons about the difference between the working class rank and file of the Labour Party and its pro-capitalist leadership. You learn an awful lot of lessons about the state.

Very few people in pit villages, certainly in Yorkshire, Kent, south Wales, Scotland, have got many illusions left about the benignity of the police force. You ask some of the women who were involved, who previously would have declared themselves, and certainly were, 'unpolitical', what their politics are now. The interviews that we have carried in *The Leninist* are an indication of the self-consciousness, the political consciousness amongst women, who, after all, in pit villages in a traditional mining community were very unpolitical, did play a very traditional women's role. That role was turned on its head.

Obviously there are questions of how long gains can be maintained, but nonetheless important lessons have been learnt by the women - and not just by a few militants, but by a whole stratum of women engaged in struggle. Of course, this is not to claim that you have got out there tens of thousands of revolutionaries - I would not claim that at all. You have certainly got tens of thousands of people who have become politicised, and that is an important difference.

Anyway, as to other political tendencies, groups and parties I am not going into a whole list. I could be here all day doing that. We can divide them up relatively simply. On the right we have Neil Kinnock, Roy Hattersley and the like. Their view can be summed as 'Thank God it's over, thank God that the opinion polls at last are starting to turn in our direction. What an embarrassment it was. The quicker we can bury it and forget it, the better'. This bourgeois fifth column has been joined by some we at this day school don't find surprising but nonetheless some workers might think to be strange bedfellows. What I am referring to is the left of the Labour Party and the leadership of the Communist Party.

Now, I think the best way to prove this is the last edition of *Focus*⁴ - I

am sure that most people in this room have read it and you know what I am referring to. The article was 'Lessons of the miners' strike': on the one hand, it says you have got Militant, the Socialist Workers Party, the New Communist Party, and "ultra-leftists" like that, who are saying that Willis and Kinnock have "sold out" - that was the clear implication in the article (and I say 'implication' because the article was written in a deliberately vague way). What the leadership of the Communist Party was doing in this article in *Focus* was lining itself up with *Tribune*, with the Labour Coordinating Committee, and thereby with Kinnock. The idea that was for the CPGB leadership key in the strike, what was key to its failure, was, in their own words, "the inability of the NUM to project the strike as a national crusade over our industry".

The description of the miners' strike as 'dropping a three-foot concrete post on the *British road to socialism*' is, I think, is a very apt description of what has in fact happened during this strike. All their *BRS* dreams of feminism permeating working class women have been shown to be a myth. The truth has been that, when working class women have been asked 'Are you feminists?', the answer has been a blunt 'no'. And I do not think that is a result of ignorance; I really do not think that is a result of a Fleet Street idea of what feminism is. I think they can get an idea of what feminism is from exactly what the Eurocommunists want to impose on them by *their* understanding of feminism; and that is quite simply summed up by Greenham Common⁵: the idea that women are somehow different from men on the basis that 'men are violent and women are peaceful', that men are the problem; that when you have got two groups of men together you are going to get a duff-up like you saw on the picket lines; that if you put women there they would simply sit down and the police would not know what to do.

Of course, the working class women learnt that the police did know what to do: they beat them over the head, dragged them away and put them in jail. So I think that they did know what feminism was and they knew that they were not feminists. It's as simple as that. And, what is more, they also understood that part of the feminist ideology was the idea that men and women should be fighting each other, and that women in essence should organise against men.

What was very important in the strike was not only did these women fight alongside the men, but the men themselves learnt many important lessons about the women's struggle, and about the importance of the politicisation of their women. Obviously there are going to be conflicts, obviously there are going to be antagonisms, obviously there is going to be a dragging back of many to the domestic role after this strike. But, nonetheless, important changes have taken place in the consciousness of the miners and the pit women themselves.

If you want to look at how the strike has changed individuals, I think it is amongst women that you see the biggest, the most substantial changes. I mean, if you go and talk to some of them now, you really are talking to very politicised, very conscious individuals

Genuine Communist Party

Indeed all talk of councils of action, all talk of the need for a new National Minority Movement, all slogans for a general strike are all very well; and I think they were correct - not in the sense that we *still* call for a general strike like the Workers Revolutionary Party (they would call for a general strike whatever the situation). But for us the difficulty in achieving these aims shows the need for a genuine,

Leninist Communist Party. I think that lesson is something that is shown not just in the course of the strike, but above all in the aftermath.

A good way of seeing the need for a Leninist Communist Party is to compare what happened in 1926 with what happened in 1984-85. During 1925 the Communist Party, like every other section of the labour movement, was well aware that a General Strike was in the offing. Instead of just waiting for it to happen like the TUC and Labour Party leadership did, the Communist Party was agitating and campaigning throughout that period - not only warning the working class that a general strike is coming, but demanding that the TUC and the labour movement prepare and that, where the leadership was not prepared to take necessary measures, then the rank and file must start taking matters into their own hands. Therefore councils of action were constantly being put forward in the *Workers Weekly*. Thus, whatever limitations there were with the Communist Party in 1926, it was able to give the struggle a common strategic direction.

The fact that a General Strike was called was not as a result of the leadership of the TUC: it had everything to do with the Communist Party itself. Tribute to the role of the Communist Party was paid by the bourgeois state itself: during the nine days of the General Strike half the original membership of the Communist Party suffered arrest. The Communist Party leadership were incarcerated throughout that entire period, along with the leadership of the National Minority Movement and the Young Communist League.

The differences with today are quite startling. Not just because of the role that the Communist Party of Great Britain played, acting as a cheerleader and often as a conservative brake, but also, and importantly, the extreme unevenness in solidarity, organisation and approach in both the support movement and the NUM itself. And I am not just talking about the differences, say, between Notts and Scotland - in other words, between an area characterised by the vast mass of people not going on strike, and areas that remained intransigent, that remained solid - but also *within* the militant areas themselves: the difference even inside Communist Party-influenced areas.

Take Scotland, Kent and south Wales. The politics that were being put forward by the Communist Party in those areas varied ... there was no difference in party, but the actual practice was significantly different. In Scotland the Communist Party - not only in the NUM, but in the broader trade union movement - played a very conservative role: demonstrations outside courts when miners had been arrested were banned by the NUM leadership; the mobilisation of non-NUM pickets was frowned upon. In contrast Kent went out of its way to

mobilise people from London. We all know of the days of action, however unsuccessful they were. Nonetheless it saw that a key question was the mobilising of other forces alongside it around power stations.

So you saw a great deal of unevenness, not just between one area and another area, but between one militant area and another militant area. This was exacerbated at the end of the strike. The fact that Kent comrades went up to picket out Yorkshire and south Wales, that militant miners went through Kent picket lines.

All that sort of confusion, all that raggedness and the problems that that caused, I think can be located, when it comes down to it, in the lack of a Leninist Communist Party. In the same way that confusion now exists amongst the supporters of the miners - shall we keep our miners support group going? If so, what role should it play? None of that has national direction and no single group that exists today, whatever grand claims they may make, has got the authority that the Communist Party had within the class in 1926. It was not just a question that the Communist Party had a few thousand members. After all, if we are dealing in numbers the SWP of today has got as many (or thereabouts as makes little difference) members as the Communist Party in 1925-26.

The fact was that the Communist Party in 1925-26 was a genuine Communist Party. It had firm links with the working class, it was a genuine vanguard of the class. So, when we talk about reorganising a Communist Party, we do not just mean building a party of a few thousand that has got a correct programme. What we are talking about is a party that is the vanguard of the working class. We are well aware that to build this party requires ripe conditions.

Comrades the fact is today, slowly but surely, and most heroically with the miners' strike, with that year's struggle, we do not just see the beginning of a new period of militancy, but the raw material for that vanguard Communist Party being thrown up. This party must become a mighty weapon in the hands of our working class. Without it the fate of Nazi Germany awaits; with it we have the possibility of realising our October.

On to the Leninist Communist Party and the British revolution! ●

Jack Conrad

Notes

1. Bill Sims led the largest trade union in the steel industry during this period, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation. Despite the occasional verbiage about supporting the miners, he refused to offer any practical solidarity and - in a pristine example of the treacherous logic of sectionalism that dominated the movement - told Scargill, "I am not here to see the steel industry crucified on someone else's altar" (F Beckett, D Hencke *Marching to the fault line* London 2009, p66).
2. Ray Buckton, Jimmy Knapp, Ron Todd and Jim Slater were respectively leaders of the train drivers, rail workers, transport and seafarers unions.
3. See *Weekly Worker* January 15 2015.
4. The 'official' CPGB monthly in the early 80s.
5. The Greenham Common women's peace camp was a protest, lasting from 1981 to 2000, against the siting of nuclear weapons at this RAF base.

Critique conference 2015

Saturday April 11, 10am to 5pm
New Academic Building, 54 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London School of Economics, London WC2.

10am: Critique editorial board meeting.

11am: Registration.

11.30am: 'Ukraine in its current conjuncture'. Speakers: Volodymyr Ishchenko, Marko Bojuncun. Chair: Alex Marshall.

1.30pm: Lunch.

2.30pm: 'Economic crisis in the present time' and 'From anti-colonial revolutions to the revolution in the metropole, forced labour to workers' control'. Speakers: Hillel Ticktin, Raquel Varela. Chair: Lea Haro.

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ELECTION

Nothing to lose, everything to lose

The April 2 leaders' debate saw the 'impressive' Nicola Sturgeon praised by the Tories. Eddie Ford gives his assessment

Following the two-hour, seven-way leaders' debate on April 2, watched by about 10 million people, at least four winners have been proclaimed - Nicola Sturgeon, Ed Miliband, Natalie Bennett and Nigel Farage. Of course, the latter is a bit of a Marmite politician: people either love or hate what he says, with viewers naming him both the worst and best performer in the debate. Naturally, the UK Independence Party leader declared that the other leaders were "all the same" - they all supported an "open door" approach to immigration. He also reproached the NHS for treating foreign patients with HIV - obviously making a pitch for the very nasty party.

As for Bennett, the Green Party leader, this time she did not have a "mind blank" or "mental brain fade". More importantly she appeared to be sincere and clearly positioned herself to the left of Labour - not exactly difficult, you could argue, even if Miliband is now making noises about restricting 'non-dom' status. The Greens are on 5%-6% poll ratings at the moment, hoping to get maybe two MPs - although, given the vagaries of the electoral system, they could end up with none. The same goes for Ukip, of course, but that seems a less likely outcome.

Ed Miliband gave a well-rehearsed performance - almost *too* polished if anything. In his competent, but extremely predictable, contributions he focused on his traditional themes of the NHS and curtailment of zero-hours contracts. From notes left behind in the dressing room, we discover that the Labour leader wanted to portray himself as a "happy warrior" - a phrase taken originally from a 1806 William Wordsworth poem eulogising Lord Nelson,¹ which had previously been used by president Barack Obama to describe his vice-president, Joe Biden. Its inclusion almost certainly reflected the influence of David Axelrod, Labour's expensively acquired US advisor.² Anyway, only the most churlish - or the *Daily Mail* - can deny that Miliband kept to his brief. He remained "calm" and "never agitated", as the notes instructed, making sure to "relish the chance to show who I am" and talk straight to

the camera in order to "use the people at home".

You could even say that David Cameron came out a bit of a winner despite being widely judged a loser. After all, he never wanted to take part in any live television debates with Miliband in the first place - justifiably afraid that such exposure might puncture the Tory *propaganda* about 'Red Ed' being a totally useless twerp who cannot even eat a bacon sandwich. Forced to backtrack, however, he calculated that a seven-way debate was the safest format in which to engage Miliband - he appears to have been right. Therefore the Tory leader stayed semi-detached, if not aloof - the "invisible man", as Labour taunted. He said nothing embarrassing or substantial, but *kept going on* about the economic recovery. In other words, he strictly followed the low-risk approach laid out by his own election guru, Lynton Crosby: do not get involved in unnecessary debates and stick to *the message*: ie, the economy, stupid. Everything else is secondary or unnecessary.

Nick Clegg was fairly nondescript too, it does have to be said - though more by instinct than design. He apologised *yet again* for past mistakes and made a bit of a blunder, at least in the opinion of this writer, by trying to make Miliband do a Clegg - that is, apologise for "crashing the economy". The Labour leader came out with the obvious response that *all* the mainstream parties failed when it came to bank regulation, especially the Tories - they had seemingly been opposed to *any* regulations, and committed to policies that would have made the economic crisis even worse if they had been in government at the time, said Miliband.

Statesmanlike

However, the overwhelming consensus about the leaders' debate is that Nicola Sturgeon came out on top by quite a margin. Indeed, Michael Gove - Tory chief whip and former education secretary - heaped praise on the "impressive" Sturgeon, and George Osborne stated that the Scottish first minister "overshadowed" Miliband.

Why did she do so well? Matthew

Engel in the *Financial Times* made some interesting comments about the 'we agree with Nicola' show - presumably referencing the 2010 'I agree with Nick' TV debate in Manchester. Anyone remember 'Cleggmania'? Engel compared Sturgeon to the Plaid Cymru leader, Leanne Wood - who sounded as though she was "competing to be mayor of Rhondda" (April 3). Sturgeon, on the other hand, was a "real player" who "married the sectional interest" of the Scottish National Party with the "hint of statesmanlike stature". In other words, she came across - maybe rather ironically - as a *British* politician, concerned with issues and matters beyond the Scottish borders. Thus she emphasised how she wanted to work "constructively" in Westminster and repeated her call for a "progressive alliance" with Plaid Cymru and the Greens against further austerity. She is for the interests of ordinary English and Welsh people too, it seems.

Themes she repeated in the April 7 Scottish leaders' debate, which saw Jim Murphy claim that Labour does not need the SNP to win the election or form the next government. Every poll taken so far shows that Labour faces potential wipe-out north of the border, with the SNP set to gain between 30 and 40 seats - support for the party has surged sharply since the narrow defeat of the 'yes' camp in last September's independence vote, with membership hitting a record 103,000 and its general election polling figures consistently reaching 45% (17 points ahead of Labour). In the other leaders' debate, Sturgeon said Labour had a history of breaking trust with its voters - pointing to the example of Tony Blair, who within months of taking office had introduced tuition fees for university students, begun the process of privatisation in the NHS and later took part in the Iraq war. The SNP, she claimed, could prevent a minority Labour government under Miliband from repeating those errors - it would act as the conscience of the Labour Party.

We now have the 'challengers' TV debate to look forward to on April 16, which will feature Miliband *instead* of a representative from the Democratic Unionist Party. The DUP, as the biggest party in Northern Ireland and the fourth

largest in the House of Commons, is now considering legal action against its exclusion - you can hardly blame them.³ Some Labour MPs fear, at least in private, that Miliband was wrong to force himself onto the show as he is on a hiding to nothing in a debate which will just highlight the fact that he is an *establishment*, Westminster-orientated, politician. But, according to his aides, Miliband was adamant about exposing the way in which a vote for the SNP would increase the chance of a Tory government imposing austerity on Scotland. Finally, on April 30 there is BBC's *Question time* with Cameron, Miliband and Clegg taking questions sequentially from the audience - chaired, of course, by the dynastic David Dimbleby.

Narrow

Obviously, it is the interests of Gove, Osborne and other Tories to flatter Nicola Sturgeon and subliminally 'promote' the SNP. Having only one seat in Scotland, the Tories have next to nothing to lose - it can be sacrificed for the greater good: ie, getting the Conservative Party into office. But Labour, on the other hand, has *everything* to lose. The outcome from Scotland could give David Cameron that precious opportunity to get the first bite of the cherry and install himself in No10, whether as part of a ramshackle coalition or winging it as a precarious minority government.

From the establishment point of view, however, the whole Tory campaign around Scotland and now the general election has been *dangerously* narrow - perfectly illustrated by Cameron's idiotic 'English votes for English laws' comments outside Downing Street on September 19 last year, which opened up a can of constitutional-political worms and played straight into the hands of a delighted SNP. Snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. Digging deeper into his hole, Cameron has rhetorically asked how supporters of the union could consider working "with a bunch of people who would rip up the flag, given half a chance". The SNP must be shunned, locked out of the corridors of power. To be fair, Miliband has played the same game, refusing to countenance the idea of

including SNP ministers in any post-election government led by him.

Yet, as we have seen, the Tories have no compunction in shamelessly boosting Sturgeon if they think it might temporarily serve their own opportunist interests. Overall, a near perfect recipe for fuelling nationalism on *both* sides of the border. Frustrated, and slightly perplexed, one writer in the *FT* has posed the question - do the unionist parties actually "want to drive Scotland from the union"?⁴ Well, while the answer from the Tories seems to be equivocal at the very least, for some sections of the establishment a much wiser strategy involves getting the SNP into the Westminster fold, see it do some sort of deal with Labour, and then *tame* it with the responsibilities of keeping a Labour government in office. Cameron and Miliband may think nothing much has changed, as our *FT* writer observes, but the truth is that the leaders' debate - whilst "mostly dull in itself" - showed a political landscape "transformed by rising nationalisms and splintering allegiances". If the mainstream parties genuinely want the union to survive then that can only come "under very different terms" and by learning to govern with "new partners". Time will tell.

All of this brings us to the infamous leaked memo from a senior French diplomat, which claims that Sturgeon told the French ambassador to the UK she preferred a Tory government, as she did not think that Miliband was prime minister material.⁵ Both Sturgeon and the diplomat concerned have totally dismissed the claim as "100% untrue", with the first minister awaiting the results of an inquiry into the leak - which funnily enough made its way to the front pages of the rabidly anti-Labour *Daily Telegraph*. Conspiracy theory or not, a former UK ambassador and human rights activist, Craig Murray, is convinced that the memo has the work of the security services stamped all over it.⁶

But in a certain sense it does not particularly matter whether Sturgeon said it or not. You can guarantee that a lot of SNP strategists actually *think* a Tory government would not be such a bad idea. The reasons for that are not too hard to fathom. Another administration aggressively cutting public spending and pushing for an EU referendum would make the anti-union, pro-independence message much more attractive - separation will insulate us from the ravages of austerity and Tory/English rule. It is equally true from a SNP perspective that propping up a Labour government carries very real dangers too.

If there is no economic recovery or boom, perhaps with plunging oil prices putting the squeeze on Scotland's GDP and tax revenues, then the SNP would have to take a measure of responsibility for further reducing living standards. The party of anti-austerity will have become the party of austerity, albeit in Tartan colours ●

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Notes

1. www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174781.
2. *The Guardian* April 5.
3. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-31933453.
4. April 3: <https://archive.today/wqSYv>.
5. www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/SNP/11515276/Revealed-Full-text-of-Nicola-Sturgeon-memo.html.
6. www.craigmurray.org.uk/archives/2015/04/frenchgate-definitely-the-security-services.



Seven leaders and not one socialist

NETHERLANDS



Emile Roemer (left) and former leader Jan Marijnissen. SP's tomato symbol comes from when they threw them at opponents

Against coalitionism

Jos Alembic reflects on the progress of the Socialist Party during the recent provincial elections and looks ahead to the party's congress in November

This is a historic moment. We are now the biggest party on the left. The SP has become a factor of importance in the Senate. An ideal starting point for the left in the Netherlands to vote SP into the coalition at the next elections."

These are the euphoric words of Socialist Party leader Emile Roemer. On March 18 the SP increased its representation from 56 to 70 seats combined in the diverse provincial parliaments. In the provinces of Friesland, Groningen, Overijssel and South-Holland there is a serious attempt to get into the ruling coalition. The delegation in Gelderland is already "disappointed" to have been rejected and in Zeeland the SP is not very happy about having been "ignored".

The SP appears to be gradually overhauling the Labour Party (PvdA) as the strongest working class party.¹ However, in the March elections, that resulted more from the fact that the PvdA lost support so dramatically (down from 17.3% in 2011 to 10.0% now) than there was a marginal growth of the SP vote (up from 10.2% to 11.6%), which will translate into one extra seat in the Senate.² But the question of the SP being finally accepted as part of a coalition is becoming more relevant. In all ranks of the party you will hear the logic that Roemer is boasting about: in the next elections, it'll be our time ...

The question that gets raised then should be what exactly the SP is going to achieve in such a coalition. Is it really going to be a reflection of the party's core principles of 'human dignity, equality and solidarity'? I very much doubt it. To give but one example, last February SP councillor Maureen van der Pligt resigned from her position on Amsterdam council in protest against the policy of forcing people to work for their benefits, a policy that the SP has inherited now that it is in the ruling

coalition and which is set to continue. And the party is prepared to enter coalitions with all the pro-capitalist parties: Greens (GroenLinks), Liberals (D'66), Christian Democrats (CDA), Conservatives (VVD) ...

And how could you expect otherwise? After all, in the Netherlands there is a very low threshold of votes which parties have to cross to be elected, and because of this there is a strong incentive for parties to form coalitions. This is relatively unique in an international context where there is a higher electoral threshold, resulting in fewer parties getting elected (as in Germany), or where there is a constituency-based system and smaller parties are often excluded (as in the UK). Then there is the famed 'Polder model', according to which the Dutch are reasonable people who talk things through and resolve issues through 'give and take'. A notable cultural difference, in comparison with the UK, is that class is barely a factor in the minds of most people or in political discourse.

The SP nationally has come out with a few ideas to mark its 'radicalism' - like the idea for a tax system that is both 'social' and 'green', or the idea that there should be public healthcare insurance (as opposed to the current system of a 'free market') or the idea that the ABN Amro bank should not be privatised, but remodelled as a 'people's bank' that should set the moral standard. I am calling them ideas, not proposals, because they simply lack the content to be a worked out proposal. They are little more than nice pictures, which do well on social media, but mean little more than that. Programmatically, it is true, they go back to the vision of a welfare state, as in the 70s, but in the current international context of neoliberalism, these ideas are not just vague, but wholly utopian.

The lack of a spelled-out contemporary programme (the current one dates from 1999, when the party was still much smaller) is now a real hindrance for the leadership. It is therefore to be expected that the SP's November congress will discuss a new programme.³ As the party leadership wishes to be taken seriously as a future coalition partner, with the idyllic wish of carrying out 'human' policies, we can expect a further shift towards *Realpolitik*. But, if we are destined to overtake the PvdA, does that mean we should be prepared to sell our soul?

For communist members of the SP it is our duty to warn against this shift to the right and be ready to oppose it. For that we need to organise ourselves. Currently, the SP lacks any oppositional faction of any magnitude. In this we differ a lot from parties like Die Linke, where a formal right to form platforms exists. In the SP, we need to work at a much lower level and start bringing together critical individuals in the various branches. For that we will first need a common platform as a starting point for the exchange of ideas and experiences. We will certainly not convince everyone of our point of view, but without a coming together of oppositional forces we are destined to be the bystander shouting left while the party apparatchiks safely ignore us. Things are moving slowly, but this is what the Communist Platform⁴ is currently trying to achieve.

Meanwhile, the far left outside the SP offers barely any alternative.⁵ The Dutch affiliate of the Committee for a Workers' International, Socialist Alternative, simply repeats its usual economic call for 'action' based on a wage demand of €12.50 an hour, and the International Socialists duly note the marginal growth of the SP and point to 'struggle' as the way forward. As I write, the Stalinoid New Communist Party of the Netherlands has not yet published the April issue of its paper, and has made no mention of the elections (or

anything else) on its website, while the Mandelite Grenzeloos ('Borderless') and Doorbraak ('Breakthrough') also completely ignore the elections. If you have nothing to say, best keep quiet.

But communists do have something to say about all of this. The SP is, with all its contradictions, a proletarian party. It is up to the left within it to fight to make it a *socialist* party. And for that we need political answers. In the run-up to the congress we need to discuss what kind of programme the party needs. If we can win the argument for a socialist programme, based on the political hegemony of the working class, the question of when we will finally be accepted into a coalition by the other pro-capitalist parties will finally wither away. It will be replaced by an awareness that we need a party that aims to achieve an absolute majority for an alternative society ●

Notes

1. See 'Overcoming a false dichotomy' (*Weekly Worker* September 27 2012) if you want a refresher on the Dutch parties of importance.
2. The bicameral system in the Netherlands consists of parliament and the Senate, which will be elected by the provincial parliaments on May 26. Once the provincial parliaments results are known, it is fairly easy to predict the outcome in the Senate.
3. I do not know for sure though. The only thing that is certain to be discussed at this congress is the election of a new party leadership. Given that elections for parliament are due in 2017, it would be good time to set some programmatic standards too.
4. Not to be confused, of course, with the Communist Platform in Left Unity in the UK, or the Communist Platform in Die Linke ... It is apparently not a very original name. Although we do draw a lot of inspiration from what the CPGB is trying to achieve and could adopt very much the same type of strategy.
5. The far left in the Netherlands is tiny even by international standards. We are talking about a few hundred comrades spread across the diverse grouplets, with the International Socialists (Dutch franchise of the SWP) being the biggest with around 150 members. The reason is mostly the existence of the SP, which has a strong activist tradition and draws away a lot of potential members from the other grouplets. Size does matter.

What we fight for

- Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.
- There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.
- Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.
- Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.
- Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'.
- The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.
- Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.
- Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.
- The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.
- We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.
- Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.
- Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.
- Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

weekly worker

Identity politics divide

Headlong into a trap

After Socialist Resistance's bungled intervention into transgender politics, Paul Demarty calls for serious debate - not trolling and trigger warnings

This is the story of how Socialist Resistance - Britain's leading 'Marxist-feminist-ecosocialist' organisation - attempted to host a debate between two feminists, and ended up starting a flame war. There are, unfortunately, many stories like it nowadays.

In March, *Socialist Resistance* decided to commission two articles for its next issue, on the rather thorny matter of the relationship between feminism and transgender liberation politics. It would be a straight 'fight' - on the one side, a representative of trans-friendly feminism; on the other, a specimen of the phenomenon known best as 'trans-exclusionary radical feminists' or 'Terfs', who do not accept the womanhood of trans women.¹

Opening shots

We think of SR as the sort of organisation that is never happier than when it is cobbling together a vacuous fudge between disagreeing parties, rather than hosting a serious barney - we wonder exactly what they wanted to achieve here. Liam Mac Uaid seems to have been the comrade doing the commissioning,² so we presume it was he who wrote to Victoria Smith, the radical feminist who eventually took the bait and wrote an article:

The idea is that there will be an accompanying article by a trans activist and the context is that we are trying to get our heads around the debates... At some point in the next few months we hope to have a public meeting of some sort on the subject and it's been quite a revelation how vociferous some people are when expressing their point of view.

Upon reading the delivered copy, however, comrade Mac Uaid was reassured - "Thanks, Victoria. I can't imagine anyone will find that controversial", he replied. This does not say much for his imagination.

Comrade Smith's article came with the headline, 'Feminists and transgender: why is there a debate?', and the argument runs thus: while it may seem cruel for "many feminists" to deny that trans women are women, it is not merely a matter of a trivial concession to the latter: "If we cannot talk about how patriarchy arises, how it functions and who benefits from it, then we cannot help ourselves, let alone each other. We might as well go home." Gender is not, as she quotes journalist Fred McConnell, "one's innate sense of self", but "a hierarchical system aimed at enforcing women's subservience":

Forced marriage, unpaid wifework, reproductive coercion, sexual slavery, educational exclusion... all of these things continue to be justified by the insistence that women are 'naturally' subservient, caring, decorative, etc. Moreover, the women to whom these things happen do not have the opportunity to identify out of their oppression

because this oppression remains material in basis.

The feminist agenda is to "abolish gender and accept that both male and female people are human, free to express themselves however they choose, regardless of their sex". The trans-inclusive alternative tacitly "reinforces traditional masculinity by insisting that any quality that is considered insufficiently manly is shoved into the 'woman/not man/other' box".³

Trigger

Comrade Smith's article was delivered on time; that of her opponent was not (and still has not been, so far as we can tell). The decision was made to run with the Smith article on the website anyway, at which point - predictably to anyone who has been on the 'dark side of the internet' in the last year or two, but apparently not to Liam Mac Uaid - everything went kablooey.

Facing a storm of criticism for running the piece - including a petition, to which we shall return - SR capitulated. Terry Conway announced that the piece would not be printed; it would remain online, but with a 'trigger warning' attached. Trigger warnings purport to be an early heads-up for traumatised individuals before they read something disturbing, but in reality function as a dishonest form of political criticism. Smith, quite justifiably incensed that any future readers of her piece would meet such a weaselly disclaimer at the top, asked for it to be taken down; it is now published on her blog, with a scathing refutatory note.

From Liam Mac Uaid's initial assurance that "minuscule Trot groups shouldn't take a line on these issues", SR beat an undignified retreat. A statement appeared, penned by Terry Conway, declaring unequivocally that SR was a trans-inclusive organisation. This, naturally, only succeeded in enraging the 'Terfs'. Perhaps they could find common cause with the trans activists in wanting to slaughter Socialist Resistance...

The arguments of those egging them on in their shambolic reverse-ferret deserve some level of scrutiny. We have mentioned a petition, which ended up gathering the signatures of 73 people, including a clutch of leftwing 'celebs' (Robert Brenner, Richard Seymour, etc). It consists for the most part of a long and dismal list of the difficulties faced by trans women in

contemporary society, alongside bad-faith insinuations that SR has a hidden 'Terf' agenda, and a recurring pattern of basically demanding that people shut up and accept that 'we are right':

We reject the idea that solidarity with trans women is a legitimate topic for 'debate'... Such false 'debates' in the sphere of organised socialists only serve to exclude committed revolutionaries from the field of action, the development of theory and what little organisation remains of the left.⁴

The more substantial part of the argument is in some ways ingenious - whereas Smith argues that women's oppression is imposed on the basis (or at least the pretext) of childbearing and rearing, on top of which is arbitrarily built the apparatus of patriarchy, our petitioners argue that it is exactly the inability of trans women to bear children that marks them out for 'special treatment' at the violent hands of men. On the basis of matters like this, it is argued that the struggle of trans women is - if not exactly the same - at least not in contradiction with women who were born so.

Impersonal

We arrive, then, at a situation where two bitterly opposed political perspectives agree only on two things - that, firstly, one must approach the transgender question in a materialist fashion (disagreeing on the definition), and secondly, that this should not be a matter for debate (again, for different reasons). This is frankly bizarre.

The problem consists, first of all, in that both definitions of 'materialism' at work here are deficient. For the radfem side, there is a straightforward contradiction at work: the essence of their discomfort at trans feminism is that it (supposedly) reinforces historically constituted norms of masculinity and femininity, and that these norms are precisely what feminist praxis is to do away with.

Yet, when it comes to the immediately practical question of who is permitted in a women-only space, they fall back to vulgar chromosome-counting. It appears, then, as though the women-only space is powerful enough to somehow pull itself out of the historically constituted structures of patriarchy, yet too weak to deal with fluid gender identities without

being corrupted beyond repair.

If the pro-trans side is guilty often of basically foreclosing the more sophisticated arguments of the 'Terfs', it is at least partly down to the unavoidable implications of calling trans women men (which are not always merely implicit - Smith talks of the preponderance of men, "however they identify", among the perpetrators of violent crime, as if that proved anything on its own).

The opposite error is present among the pro-trans side, however. This is pretty sharply obvious with the intersectionalist hard core, whose theoretical underpinnings are not only anti-materialist, but anti-realist in the strict sense (ie, they deny the possibility of an external referent for utterances; hence all the 'speaking as a woman of colour' stuff). Thus reference to biology *as such* is sometimes, in the wilder fringes of Tumblr, deemed oppressive.

Our petitioners - being more strongly intellectually linked to the 'traditional' left and Marxism - are not that far gone. Yet they seem to believe that it is enough to prove that trans women suffer from violence and oppression (which many of the most hostile of the 'Terfs' would not deny) to establish a strict analogy between their travails and biological women.

A historical-materialist account of transgender politics surely cannot ignore the brute, simple fact that trans liberation grew not out of feminism, but the gay liberation movement. It sits in the most common variant of the gay-lib acronym - LGBT (lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender). Our petitioners open with a citation from Sylvia Rivera - "I've been to prison and I've been raped by men - straight men!" - which was, however, not delivered at a second-wave feminist event, but the Christopher Street gay rights march in New York.

It is hardly surprising, from our point of view: peasant families depend directly on family labour for their members to survive, and thus repress homosexuality and gender non-conformity alike all the more effectively. The rise of capitalism and the huge expansion of the urban population created the conditions for those among the toiling masses - if they so choose - either to live at variance with their biological sex, or pursue sexual relations outside the reproductive family.

Trans women get raped in prison by straight men - but straight men also get raped in prison by straight men. Another

example from the petition: "heterosexual men who attack trans women can avoid jail through arguing they found themselves 'panicked'" - is also basically the same phenomenon as homophobia, which got its medical suffix from the fear bigoted straight men feel that they might be used 'as a woman' by a gay man. The inhuman environment of prison flips this fear on its head, and weaponises the sexuality of the strong against those perceived to be weak.

It would seem, then, that there *are* grounds for treating the oppression of trans women differently from biological women. But this is only one of an inordinate number of axes upon which the world of women is divided. The chief pitfall of both sides of this argument is that they expect to proceed from the direct *experience* of oppression via simple analysis to an agency for its overthrow - yet, starting from different phenomena afflicting different women, they arrive at irreconcilable hostility. For the 'Terfs', the Twitter aggression of pro-trans intersectionalists is a matter of male violence; for the pro-trans side, the hostility of the 'Terfs' carries its own threat of violence.

The debate, should anyone be found who thinks there is a debate to be had, is thus a trap: to take sides directly is to become imprisoned in identity politics. The real differences of subjective experience among the oppressed become unsurpassable chasms. It is *conscious political action* alone that can unite, but that means a radical shift in perspective - from the experience of the suffering body to the abstraction of theory, from trench warfare on social media to dispassionate analysis of the grounds of exploitation and oppression.

Above all, it means debate - not trigger warnings •

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Notes

1. This appellation is unsurprisingly disputed, with one of the more tiresome sub-elements of the arguments between the two sides being over whether or not 'Terf' is a slur. Quite apart from political judgements we may make of these radical feminists, it seems pretty plain to me that it is a slur, or at least a loaded and deliberately insulting formulation. For that reason I am using the term in quote marks throughout this article.
2. See <http://socialistresistance.org/7323/feminism-and-transgender-why-is-there-a-debate#comment-74097>.
3. <http://glosswatch.com/2015/03/29/on-sex-gender-and-socialist-resistance>.
4. www.ipetitions.com/petition/against-socialist-resistance-hosting-of.

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