

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



**Kevin Bean explores the
1912-22 Irish revolution
and counterrevolution**

- Zionism exposed
- May's Brexit speech
- Beppe Grillo's rightism
- CPGB and 1956

No 1138 Thursday January 19 2017

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

£1/€1.10

**Steele's very British coup:
IS TRUMP BEING
SET UP FOR
IMPEACHMENT?**



LETTERS



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

Counterrevolution

Every popular rebellion or revolution produces its equal and opposite reaction in counterrevolution. England's national uprising against the EU was won and lost on June 23 2016.

No sooner had victory had been declared, than the Brexit counterrevolution began. The crown took control with May at the helm. She declared, "Brexit means Brexit". As Humpty Dumpty said to Alice, in Brexit wonderland a word "means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less".

The Brexit counterrevolution has only one real aim - make the working class pay for the mess the Tories have got us into, with the City and big business avoiding any collateral damage to their profits. May has told us we are leaving. But don't take that at face value. It is a 'clean break with exceptions'. Some are happy with the clean break and others have hope invested in the exceptions.

The words 'clean break' are directed to the Tories and Brexit voters. But it tells the European Union that the UK is ready to play hard ball. We are ready and willing to walk away and leave the EU with heavy debts still payable to the City of London. 'We don't need you and can live without you' is a good negotiating position.

'Clean exit' is code for immigration control. It allows the Tories to play the race card by openly rejecting free movement. However the phrase 'with exceptions' keeps the door wide open to special deals for the Tories' friends in the City. The devil is in the detail and this is where crown secrecy begins and ends. Neither parliament nor people will uncover the real deal between the French, German and British ruling classes.

May flagged up the new model of "global Britain" - not Little England, but Greater America. We will become a Singapore in the North Sea, flying the Stars and Stripes with low tax, low social spending, and anti-union policies. Singapore is described as an 'authoritarian democracy', a dictatorship of the free market. The state controls the show and relies on US multinational corporations. This is a social calamity for the working class.

Global free trade is being heavily marketed to the working class, who will have to pay for it. As Donald Trump might say, it is going to be "great". It will be so great as to be unbelievable. There will be limits on workers' rights to come from or go to the EU.

This will encourage and build even greater divisions amongst workers. There is the empty promise of 'workers' on company boards, which the Tories will never agree to.

Of course, the Tories know their Achilles heel is Scotland and Ireland. May recognised this by promising to "listen" and consult with the Scottish, Welsh and collapsed Northern Irish governments. As we have already argued, there was one revolutionary outcome to the Tory referendum, if Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales voted to remain and England voted out.

So the UK referendum has given the ruling class a "clear and ever-present danger". That danger is the possibility that England's Brexit may trigger a democratic revolution. If there is going to be a democratic future, the battle begins in Scotland and spreads to Ireland. All this puts a rocket under English chauvinism of the right or left variety which is ideologically committed to

'Britain' and the 'British' and hence to unionism.

On July 13 Theresa May, the new PM, stood at the podium outside Downing Street. She "vowed to be a unionist and lead a 'one nation' government" (*Daily Star* July 13 2016). She explained that "not everybody knows this, but the full title of my party is the Conservative and Unionist Party and the word 'Unionist' is very important to me. It means we believe in the union - the precious bond between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland." That is something for Jeremy Corbyn and all the Marxist Corbynistas to ponder.

Steve Freeman
Left Unity and Rise

Not face value

Our esteemed British government have laid out their position and ambitions to Johnny 'Eurozone' Foreigner, seemingly doing so in an open, honest, clear and frank manner. But nothing from these Tory gangsters and gargoyles should be taken at face value.

Obviously times have changed and so this is not the 'good old days' - in other words with no bayoneted platoons of 'our brave boys' or gunboats capable of achieving things (as quietly as possible, but otherwise with any amount of blood plus destruction required!).

However, it would be wise for those European adversaries of Theresa May's to remember that our 'golden era' of British empire was built upon cunning, crafty and indeed multi-hypocritical systems, many of which achieved an equivalent Mission Impossible of having your cake and eating it, squaring myriad interlocking circles, etc. Most pertinent to mention here would be the methods employed to run the entire sub-continent of India with a mere handful of civil servants, for the most part by either bribing or otherwise coopting local greedily flexible plus morally pliable potentates.

If your readers replace in their mind Pasha kings with European pharmaceutical corporations; if they swap over African tribal chiefs with Mercedes Benz, Volkswagen or Renault, probably my own drift of thinking in this letter will become more clear?

Johnny Foreigner, beware! They are both scurrilous and poisonous in their pursuit of profit, these deftly amoral establishment Brits. Just remember the so-called 'judicial' enquiry and notionally public report into the Iraq war. Is Tony Blair behind steel bars? Has mammoth compensation for our imperialist barbarity been paid to the workers and peasants of Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, potentially also Yemen?

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

Substance

Reading the Labour Party Marxists response to recent developments ('Reduced to a corpse', January 13) confirms my wariness about working inside the Labour Party and orientating towards Momentum - that comrades will be sucked into faction fights and lose the wider plot.

Lansman is probably doing the wrong thing and the demands of Labour Party Marxists are right. However, for the wider world of activists, potential activists, inside or outside the Labour Party, the prioritisation of the struggle with Lansman must seem like a sectarian obsession. Given the negative scrutiny that anything Corbyn-related attracts from the media, it is not tremendously useful either when these things are knocked about in the papers.

In the meantime, the movement

seems to have lost the plot with regards to immigration and the Labour Party. There is enormous pressure on Corbyn and his leadership team to give ground on immigration. Now we see him doing just that - saying that freedom of movement is not a principle to be defended and some re-examination of controls may need to be looked at. It seemed pretty confused.

This is the sort of thing that Marxists inside Labour, Momentum or outside should be linking up to fight about. No, this won't make us popular either, but it will be an issue of *substance*, which those who have joined Labour on the Corbyn wave and activists in Momentum can understand. I am sure there are others.

David Landau
email

Do both

In a *New Statesman* article, Michael Chessum challenges the bland, and untrue, assumption that Len McCluskey is the best supporter of Jeremy Corbyn in the Unite union: "But on the key thorny issues facing the Labour leadership, Corbyn supporters might find they have more in common with [Ian] Allinson. Many Unite activists may share Allinson's frustration with the union's lack of mobilisation over the NHS, or its stance on immigration. When launching his campaign last year, McCluskey's first policy was support for border controls in the wake of Brexit. Unite has played a role in influencing the PLP against free movement" ('Len McCluskey's grip on Unite is far from assured' *New Statesman* January 13).

The single most important issue facing the British working class after the NHS is the cuts in the local authorities. On top of the £100 billion cuts already imposed since 2009, a further £12 billion of cuts, and the phasing out of the £18 billion central government grant to local authorities; councils will face a further cut of 6.7% in real terms by 2019-20.

Local authorities imposing savage cuts up to now, mentioned in an article by Margot Miller on the World Socialist Website (January 16), include Newham, Croydon, Lewisham, Birmingham, Manchester, Knowsley, Sheffield, Glasgow, Torfaen in South Wales, Lincolnshire, Bath and Southend - most Labour controlled. She adds: "Just months after his election in September 2015, Corbyn and his closest political ally, shadow chancellor John McDonnell, sent a letter to all Labour councils demanding they abide by the law and impose austerity cuts demanded by the Conservative government."

If these cuts continue in the local authorities and the NHS up to 2020, both these causes will be lost; the welfare state and the healthcare system will be damaged almost beyond repair.

Unless a serious fightback begins here, electing Corbyn in 2020 will be futile. That is why a rank-and-file revolt in the unions, linking up with the new mass Labour Party membership, is vital.

And for that two things are vital: 1. A successfully launch of the democratic Momentum conference in February. This is now looking inevitable. According to Jackie Walker, already the conference arrangements committee and nine Momentum groups have opposed the Lansman coup: Kirklees, Leicestershire, Leeds, Liverpool (Riverside Caucus), Southwark, Thanet, London LGBT+ and Northern Momentum (regional committee). Red Labour have declined a place on the national coordinating group. Momentum groups in favour of the new constitution are Manchester and Trafford Momentum, the national steering committee and the Youth and Student Momentum (committee).

2. The election of Ian Allinson as Unite's general secretary and the launch of a powerful rank-and-file movement in Unite and across all unions.

Both are possible. And we do need both.

The London meeting of Ian's campaign took place on January 14. Ray Morell reported what the meeting agreed:

1. Encourage reps and activists to win nominations to ensure we get Ian on the ballot paper. Details of how this can be done are available here: www.ian4unite.org/arrange-your-unite-general-secretary-nomination. The vital nomination meetings must take place between January 16 and February 17. Ian needs 50 nominations, but, knowing the eagerness with which nominations for Jerry Hicks were refused the last two times, he will need at least 100 to get on the ballot paper. We are confident he will get far more than that. We want to collate details of up and coming branch nomination meetings to help us arrange for a speaker to attend and put the case for the campaign. We need more volunteers for speakers at branches. Nominations began this week. Can you help us by agreeing to speak at a nomination meeting? If you're not confident or are unsure of the main arguments, then contact us and we will meet up and help you prepare for the meeting.

2. We agreed to leaflet major workplaces in London. We will soon be circulating a map of key Unite workplaces in London. You probably already have a fair idea of the major workplaces near where you live or work. Why not try and organise a leafleting with a friend or colleague? Contact us if you want any leaflets.

3. Ian spoke about the successful hustings meeting he attended last week in Derby with all three candidates putting forward their cases. We want to organise as many meetings like this as possible. If you are able to win a nomination, why not ask your branch to organise a hustings with other branches in the area?

4. We decided to elect Ian Bradley and Raymond Morell as joint convenors of the London group.

5. A further campaign meeting will be organised at a date agreed by the group.

Finally, we collected £124 at the end of the meeting as a contribution towards the costs of running the campaign.

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

The candidate

The January 14 *Labour Briefing* readers' meeting - organised to hear Corbyn supporter Alex Nunns speak about his book, *The candidate: Jeremy Corbyn's improbable path to power* - attracted a small crowd of about two dozen Labour Representation Committee stalwarts. Comrade Nunns gave an entertaining run through of key points of his story, showing how Corbyn's unexpected sudden rise to prominence was produced by a ripening of three factors.

● Firstly, Labour Party members - the existing ones, not subsequent recruits or £3 supporters - were thoroughly fed up with Blairism and turned against it at long last. This was evident when Corbyn was ahead in the voting only three weeks after being nominated, and ahead in Constituency Labour Party nominations after only one month.

● Secondly, Maggie Thatcher had broken the "corporatist alliance" between trade union bureaucrats and the Labour Party, and the dimming of trade union economic power had produced a 15-year shift to the left in the unions.

● Thirdly, the social movements were looking for a lead after the "failure of Occupy", and after the route through the Green Party was "blocked" by the first-past-the-post electoral system.

When these three streams coalesced in the summer of 2015, this was "the end of spectator politics". The 2008 economic crash had "rattled the buildings of the establishment", but not demolished them. In May 2015, John McDonnell wrote in *Labour Briefing* that this was the left's "darkest hour". Then the opportunity to democratise policy-making in the Labour Party sucked in new blood.

A key moment in making possible Corbyn's victory as party leader was Ed Miliband's Collins review - the result of a number of "miscalculations". After Collins, the right thought they had won - but so did some of the left. Owen Jones advised against standing a left candidate for leader, and McDonnell agreed, explained Nunns. But Corbyn was put forward. He was "the nicest man in politics, and had no enemies". Huge online lobbying succeeded in achieving the required 35 MP/MEP nominations within two minutes of the June 15 2015 deadline.

Comrade Nunns rightly pointed to the instability of the Corbyn movement, consisting as it does of an amalgam of diverse trends, but insisted that the genie cannot be put back in the bottle - the Corbyn movement is "real, tangible and fulfils a need". And he reminded us that Corbyn's position as party leader depends on the continuing support of the trade unions.

In the following discussion, comrades touched on Jon Lansman's January 10 bureaucratic coup in Momentum, and I recalled the possibility, tentatively fielded by the LRC leadership, that the LRC might dissolve itself if Momentum's promise of "democratic governance" was fulfilled. That particular fish is now dead in the water, of course.

Pete Firmin pointed out that the celebrated 'one member, one vote' method of decision-making had not been used to adopt the imposed constitution, and said that Momentum was now an "ineffective stage army". Mike Phipps, on the other hand, voiced the naive, philistine arguments of Owen Jones and Paul Mason. We must not "refight the old battles of the left": we are "interested in taking power". Corbyn is under pressure from the right - he "needs a stage army and a fan club". Jeremy's integrity is "bigger than the left" and we must "focus on winning power".

However, Alex Nunns, replying to discussion, argued that "process is important" and "means produce ends" - which I can only interpret as criticism of Lansman's undemocratic coup. But all is not lost - the Corbyn movement in the party is 400,000-strong, and the Momentum membership is only 5% of it.

Unfortunately, the task of writing up a report of the meeting for *Labour Briefing* was left to ... comrade Phipps.

Stan Keable
Hammersmith

Ridiculous

Pete McLaren of Rugby Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition give a long list of woes about the current universal credit pilot in Rugby (Letters, January 13).

It does sound grim and heart-breaking, but you could write an equally depressing list for any government that has been in power in the UK. They all try to drive down welfare spending and claw back as much money as they can.

As for the ridiculous statement, in the same letter, about "our NHS", surely it's not run in the interests of the working class, but in the interests of British capitalism. Only if these two are the same thing, can it ever be described as that.

Steven Johnston
email

USA

Steele's very British coup

Whatever the truth of the salacious details, the Trump dossier is a reminder that the state is not politically neutral, argues Jim Grant

Shall the fun never end? This paper has already called the present lame-duck phase of the American political cycle the most dramatic since 1860,¹ but in accordance with the laws of the Hollywood narrative arc, the stakes have been raised at the very death.

At issue, of course, is the infamous Trump dossier - 35 pages of allegations against Donald Trump and his people, ranging from the dubious to the treasonous, to the downright bizarre; all rendered in the bland, grey prose of the MI6 house style. The author is widely assumed to be a certain Christopher Steele, a former operative at the Circus gone private; he and his firm, Orbis, are merely one of a whole nexus of private intelligence firms operating in London, whose previous claim to notability consists in compiling evidence of corruption at the top of football's governing body, Fifa, on the UK government's dime, which issued ultimately - after the information made it to Washington - in the dramatic arrests of mid-2015 and the resignation of Sepp Blatter.

Steele's name came up after it was admitted that the source of all these allegations is a Briton, which in the end is hardly surprising. Britain has the right combination - slavish obedience to US policy, coupled with a most hospitable environment for Russian oligarchs to stash their fortunes. No doubt there are many Russian gentlemen with ambiguous relations to the Kremlin available for a 'private chat' in the right sort of Mayfair club. A whole industry, it appears, has grown up around this fortuitous position, with ex-spooks very quickly replacing their income (and more) in the private sector.

There are, now we think of it, a few parallels between Blatter's case and Trump's: both men are sexist buffoons, for a start; and what Blatter achieved within the small circles of football's governing elite (founding a firm and unpleasant regime on the support of more marginal constituencies) Trump aims to replicate on the grander stage of American society. They are both, above all, men who are liable to make enemies, and Blatter's ultimately caught up with him.

While the interest of the secret state and its semi-detached private apparatchiks like Steele in the black heart of international football is merely a testament to how bizarre the distempers of the imperialist world order can get, the interest in Trump's Russian adventures is more easily explicable. US state department doctrine in the recent period has been dominated by the objective of encircling Russia, in order to ensure ready American access from western Europe all the way to the far side of the Mediterranean and the Arabian peninsula. Such activity has increasingly clashed with Russia's perceived interests in its near abroad - a policy that has provoked crises over Nato expansion and the recent wave of fatuous doublethink over who may be said to have liberated cities from Islamic State in the Middle East.

Compromised

Trump's stated foreign policy represents, on this point at least, a dramatic shift. He has made no secret of his admiration for Russian president Vladimir Putin, and is gleeful in ramming home the point that the Russians have a freer hand to bomb the hell out of

jihadi militants than the United States, such is the diplomatic cat's cradle the latter has built for itself in the region.

The dossier purportedly written by Steele alleges in substance that the new president's approach can be explained simply thus: Trump is compromised by Russian intelligence. His close advisors are accused of collaborating in the hacking of Democratic national committee emails. It is alleged that the Russian authorities, while 'cultivating' Trump as a presidential hopeful for five years, were simultaneously gathering compromising material (*kompromat*) as a guarantee of good behaviour, including the eye-catching claim that he paid prostitutes to piss in a bed once used by Barack and Michelle Obama, while he watched.

Trump's response was to call all this so much "fake news" and a "political witch-hunt", which raises inevitably the question of exactly how much there is in these claims. An interesting piece on the website of the *London Review of Books* by Arthur Snell, a former foreign office apparatchik, makes the point that there are rarely smoking guns in strategic intelligence, which is not so much post-truth as para-truth. What the poor, beleaguered spook has to work with is essentially hearsay:

At the heart of this game of betrayal is trust: the source of the intelligence must be trusted by his or her handler. The reader of the intelligence report has to trust the provider of the intelligence, while remaining critical. Intelligence is about degrees of credibility, and reading it is not the same as reading reportage, or a piece of political analysis. In order to make an assessment of its reliability, a reader needs to examine how it's been sourced, insofar as that's possible.²

All news outlets, especially in libel-crazy Britain, are keen to point out the unsubstantiated nature of all these allegations; and it certainly seems at least that the most straightforwardly damning one (that Trump ally Michael Cohen met with Russian intelligence on a particular date in Prague to discuss dirty digital tricks) is factually incorrect. As for the business with the bed, it is unlikely that any interested parties in the west are going to get any DNA swabs from the sheets. Who knows?

The more interesting question is perhaps not whether such things are true in the narrow sense, but whether they are advanced in good faith. The story being told about Steele is that, having been commissioned by the Democrats to look into Trump for them, he was so spooked by what he discovered that he went to the FBI, who merely sat on all this stuff, not

wanting to be seen to intervene in the election. In this version, Steele (or whoever) investigated and reported the allegations out of concern for the west's internal security, and the leak is essentially a disaster, shifting the terms of debate from the probabilistic models of the securocracy to the less nuanced arenas of the civilian legal system and media scrutiny.

There is the alternative explanation, which is that the whole thing is straightforwardly a fabrication - a Zinoviev letter for the right, playing on Manchurian candidate-style fantasies of the White House somehow being seized by an enemy agent. The Steele dossier then has two potential uses - the one, being employed as a pretext for impeachment early in Trump's reign, in a 'very British coup' (spooks, sex, the whole works!); the other, being used to make it *politically difficult* for Trump to pursue his thaw with the Kremlin without appearing to confirm the idea that he is Putin's catspaw.

Left response

On January 20, unless events truly spiral out of control (Trump is indicted for corruption or espionage, say), the transition of power will be complete. The new era will begin. How should the labour movement - in this country and the States - respond?

It is no surprise that the occasion shall be marked with protests; indeed, protests have barely let up since the election. In Britain, too, the event will be marked by many leftwing organisations in the time-honoured format of the street demonstration. The horror among progressives, socialists and democrats is palpable, and understandable, at the rise of this narcissistic, bigoted cretin to the Oval Office; and we are disturbed by the apparent reality that he succeeded in part not in spite of his posturing machismo and gleeful cruelty, but *because* of them. Trump has exposed a rottenness at the heart of political culture in the Anglosphere; the question is merely what exactly it is that is rotting.

Yet it is a peculiar age indeed when American spies and the Stop the War Coalition see eye to eye on anything, never mind changes in US foreign policy; the latter is one of the sponsors of demonstrations coinciding with Trump's inauguration, and it will be interesting to see what (if anything) the comrades manage to say about the virulently pro-imperialist tenor of the present scandal-mongering. The disaster is that the identification of the left with the establishment, the meat and potatoes of the American (and British) right, *has been successful*; it was only a matter of time before a radical rightist who was not secretly a member of the establishment benefited electorally.

The spectre of the 'liberal elite' is paralysing any meaningful counter-strike against rightist national chauvinism; and the radical left has failed to benefit because it fails to acknowledge that mere ritual denunciations of racism, sexism, etc have not only lost the dissident edge they once possessed, but are now *official state policy* on both sides of the Atlantic ●

Notes

1. See 'Different next time' *Weekly Worker* November 17 2016.
2. www.lrb.co.uk/2017/01/17/arthur-snell/how-to-read-the-trump-dossier.



Donald Trump: kompromat

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday January 22, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Study of Ralph Miliband's *Parliamentary socialism*. This meeting: chapter 9 ('The climax of Labourism'), section 4: 'From consolidation to defeat'. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk; and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday January 24, 6.45pm: General introduction to social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1. 'Team reasoning: how people think in groups'. Speaker: David Papineau. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: http://radicalanthropologygroup.org.

No to Trump

Protest against the new president
Friday January 20, 5pm: US Embassy, 24 Grosvenor Square, London W1.
Friday January 20, 5.30pm: The Fountains, St Augustine's Parade, Bristol BS1.
Friday January 20, 5.30pm: Grey's Monument, Blackett Street, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne NE1.
 Organised by Stand up to Racism: www.standuptoracism.org.uk.

Women's march on London

Saturday January 21, 12 noon: Assemble Grosvenor Square, London W1, for march to Trafalgar Square, London WC2. No to Trump. Organised by Women's March on London: www.womensmarchlondon.com.

Defend Corbyn

Friday January 20, 7pm: Meeting, Isabel Blackman Centre, Winding Street, Hastings. Speaker: Alex Nunns, author of *The candidate: Jeremy Corbyn's improbable path to power*. Organised by Momentum Hastings: www.facebook.com/MomentumHGS.

Palestine Solidarity Campaign

Saturday January 21, 9.30am to 5pm: AGM, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

The long depression

Public meetings with Marxist economist Michael Roberts, introducing his new book.
Wednesday January 25, 2pm: Room 111, University House, University of Birmingham, Birmingham B15.
Wednesday January 25, 7pm: Committee rooms 3 and 4, Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B1. Conference of Socialist Economists: csemidlands@outlook.com; and Birmingham Socialist Discussion Group: www.csemidlands.wordpress.com.

Ireland and the Soviet Union

Thursday January 26, 7pm: Book launch, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Michael Quinn's *Irish-Soviet diplomatic and friendship relations, 1917-1991*. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.

Alternatives to austerity

Saturday January 28, 2pm: Public meeting, room 3, Liverpool Central Library, William Brown Street, Liverpool L3. With David Lowes and Paul B Smith. First meeting of five: 'What is austerity? Why is it happening?'. Organised by North West Socialist Theory Study Group: 07952 944318.

1649 revisited

Tuesday January 31, 7pm: Public meeting, Five Leaves Bookshop, 14a Long Row, Nottingham NG1. Speaker: John Rees on the Levellers' Revolution. Entry: £3; reserve your place via fiveleaves.bookshopevents@gmail.com. Organised by Five Leaves Bookshop: www.fiveleavesbookshop.co.uk/events.

No to war

Wednesday February 1, 7.30pm: Meeting, Friends Meeting House, 4 Lechlade Road, Faringdon. Speaker: Mayer Wakefield (Stop the War Coalition). Organised by Faringdon Peace Group: www.faringdonpeacegroup.org.uk/index.html.

Marxist classics

Tuesday February 7, 7pm: Discussion of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* and the *Critique of the Gotha programme*. Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk.

Noam Chomsky 50 years on

Saturday February 25, 1pm to 6.30pm: Discussion, Cruciform Lecture Theatre, University College London, London WC1. Debating *The responsibility of intellectuals*. Speakers include: Noam Chomsky (live video link from Arizona, USA), Nicholas Allott and Neil Smith (co-authors of *Noam Chomsky, ideas and ideals*), Chris Knight (author of *Decoding Chomsky*), Milan Rai (author of *Chomsky's politics*), Jackie Walker (former vice-chair of Momentum). Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: http://radicalanthropologygroup.org.

CPGB wills

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

ZIONISM



Jewish Labour Movement: exposed

Fake claims blown apart

Al Jazeera's *The lobby* exposes the establishment's 'anti-Semitism' claims for what they are, writes Tony Greenstein

This past week Al Jazeera has broadcast a series of four half-hour programmes - *The lobby* - about the secretive pro-Israel lobbying taking place in Britain.¹ They involved an undercover mole, 'Robin Harrow', who became a trusted confidant of leading Zionists in Britain - in particular Shai Masot, the senior political counsellor at the Israeli embassy; Michael Rubin, former chair of Labour Students and now parliamentary officer for Labour Friends of Israel (LFI); Jeremy Newmark of the Jewish Labour Movement; Joan Ryan MP of Labour Friends of Israel; as well as the ghoul of the Labour right, Luke Akehurst.

The background to this is the boycott, divestment, sanctions (BDS) campaign, which began on July 9 2005, when over 170 Palestinian NGOs called for such moves against Israel.² According to Gilad Erdan, the Israeli public security minister, "Great Britain is the world centre of the anti-Israel BDS campaign."³ In June 2013 Benjamin Netanyahu gave Israel's ministry for strategic affairs (MSA) responsibility for fighting BDS.⁴ Israel's active management of British Zionist groups began with Israel's coordination of anti-BDS activities internationally.

Paranoia

Israel's political classes have been consumed by paranoia over BDS for the past few years. This has resulted in thinly veiled threats to the lives of BDS activists. Erdan is on record as saying: "Soon any activist who uses their influence to delegitimise the only Jewish state in the world will know they will pay a price for it."

Amnesty International spoke of "an escalation of acts of intimidation by the government and attacks and threats by settlers and other non-state actors", which "have created an increasingly dangerous environment" for human rights defenders in Israel and the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.⁵ At the 'Stop the Boycott' Conference held in Jerusalem on March 28 2016, intelligence minister Yisrael Katz called for "*sikul ezrachi memukad*"

against the "BDS leadership".⁶ This is the phrase that Israel's military use for extra-judicial executions.

BDS kicked off in Britain in 2005 with the academic boycott endorsed by the Association of University Teachers. Despite condemnation by Tony Blair and New Labour, it was ratified by the new University and College Union. In 2007 both Unite and Unison, Britain's two largest trade unions, adopted policy in support of BDS. Yet the simple facts are that economically the effect of BDS has been on the margins. Veolia has pulled out of Israel, G4S is on the brink of doing so, Sodastream has been hard hit and a few Scandinavian investment banks have stopped investing in Israel. There have been other successes, often at a local level, but overall they have been relatively marginal. However, what BDS has done is to focus the anger of groups, such as students, at the continuation of the world's only active settler colonial and apartheid state. The effect of BDS has been primarily *political*, not economic, and yet the Israeli government has been paralysed by fear. Is this justified?

Yes and no. While the boycott has made no impact on Israel's military sales or the vast majority of its trading activities, Israel's significance for imperialism is not its economic contribution to the western world, important though that has become. Israel's role has been primarily strategic - a combination of the political and military. Israel is particularly vulnerable to political pressure, because its establishment was dependent on western political support.

Israeli leaders have felt more keenly than most the effect of the end of apartheid in South Africa. This was a serious blow to the Zionists' confidence. In the words of Hendrik Verwoerd, South African prime minister and one of the architects of apartheid, "Israel, like South Africa, is an apartheid state."⁷ With the loss of South Africa Israel was on its own. One of the characteristics of settler colonialism is its siege mentality and paranoia. This is because settler colonial states are never at ease with themselves. They are artificial nations

whose existence is predicated upon the dispossession or oppression of the indigenous population. This is one reason why they can never be normal nation-states, at least until they achieve a 'final solution' to the native problem.

The demands of the BDS campaign do not explicitly call for the ending of the Jewish state, but, taken together, they can have no other interpretation.⁸ The call for an end to the occupation of all Arab lands is ambiguous and can be understood as meaning an end to the post-1967 occupation. However, the demand for the full equality of Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel cannot be squared with the existence of Israel as a Jewish state. Although Zionist parties pay lip-service to Palestinian rights, in practice they know that full equality is unattainable. Support for the Right of Return of the refugees ethnically cleansed in 1947-48 and subsequently is wholly incompatible with the maintenance of a Jewish majority state without it being an openly apartheid state.

It is the political - almost psychological - susceptibility of Israel as a Jewish state that lies behind the hostility of the whole Zionist spectrum to BDS. Labour Zionism is equally as hostile to BDS as the far-right Jewish Home. Only at the fringes of the Zionist movement, where liberal Zionism meets non-Zionism, is there support (for boycotting settler goods only).

Role of embassy

At the beginning of November, I spoke to the biannual gathering of the Boycott Israel Network at Coalbrookdale Youth Hostel on the concocted 'anti-Semitism' campaign, which the Zionists have been waging ever since Jeremy Corbyn stood for leader of the Labour Party. Someone asked me: "What was the role of the Israeli embassy and ambassador Regev in all this?" I replied thus:

I don't think Mark Regev began it, but certainly he's involved in it. If you look at it from this perspective, when Corbyn was elected or seemed likely to be elected to the Labour leadership, I imagine panic set in, not

just in the Israeli embassy, but the US embassy. Britain is the closest ally of the United States in Europe - the 'special relationship'; the idea that someone who is anti-Nato, anti-Trident and so on, with his record, I would be amazed if the CIA and the intelligence agencies weren't doing something. I mean, that's what they're paid to do all over the world - why not in Britain? It would be bonkers if they didn't; they would be failing in their duties, so, yes, of course they have been behind this campaign.⁹

Anyone who knows anything of the CIA's destabilisation of governments in central and South America or in Europe with Operation Gladio¹⁰ should know that US intelligence organisations have no respect for democratically elected governments.¹¹

Excellent though the work of 'Robin' has been as an undercover reporter in the Jewish Labour Movement and with Zionist groups such as Labour Friends of Israel, no-one should be under any illusion that what has been revealed about the Israel lobby is but a snapshot of what has happened. We have no evidence of communications between the Israeli and American embassies on the matter, but it is highly unlikely that the Americans have not been involved at some level. We know little of the depth of cooperation between the Israeli embassy and the Jewish Labour Movement other than that they worked with Shai Masot. But with these caveats the programmes were an excellent eye-opener for those who are born innocent.

Credit should be given to 'Robin' for ingratiating himself with key Zionist activists and personnel. It took a lot of skill, but it also depended on their own arrogance. Passing oneself off as a racist is not easy! But it is also testimony to the Zionists' main weakness - a lack of personnel. Attracting youthful activists to a cause as desperate as that of Israel, to actively supporting a murderous regime steeped in ethnic cleansing, is not an easy task.

What the programmes demonstrate is that Zionist politics in this country

are now effectively the British side of the operations of the Israeli state, behind which stands the American state. Although there have always been such connections, it is a recent development that Israel was now in the driving seat.

The fourth programme is most amusing in this respect. It relates how a story appears in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* headlined "Ministries feud over anti-BDS war" - basically an accusation by the foreign ministry that another ministry, the MSA, was in potential breach of British law. Instead of cooperating and working with existing British Zionist groups, it was going further and setting such groups up, effectively interfering in Britain's own political process. Shai Masot asks for a quiet meeting with Robin, in which he clarifies his own role. He emphasises that he cannot be seen to be in control of anything: "I am irrelevant. If I give you an idea, it's off the record - it's not something you can use." Clearly Masot has been given a strict warning that he is operating at the edge of legality and endangering the whole mission in London. He is worried. Whilst he is always available for advice or resources, he cannot be quoted or seen to be in charge! Masot becomes incoherent and almost pleads for Robin's understanding. It was a portent of things to come.

The first programme began with a front-page headline in the *Mail on Sunday*. It revealed that Shai Masot, in a conversation with Robin and Maria Strizzolo, a civil servant and advisor to Robert Halfon MP, minister of state for education, had expressed a desire to "take down" Sir Alan Duncan, Britain's deputy foreign secretary and a known Arabist. When the news broke, ambassador Regev quickly distanced himself from someone he described as a "junior employee" who was not even a diplomat. Masot was thrown under the political bus.

What was even more interesting was the reaction of foreign secretary Boris Johnson. Despite being called an "idiot" who had become "minister of foreign affairs without any responsibilities" -

such that "If something real happened it won't be his fault ... it will be Alan Duncan's" - Johnson accepted the apology and made it clear that there was going to be no investigation. The only person who resigned was Ms Strizzolo, a Conservative Party activist and ardent Zionist, who responded helpfully to Masot's desire to bring down Duncan: "A little scandal maybe?" Given Duncan was the first out gay Tory MP, it is not difficult to imagine what she had in mind.¹²

Craig Murray, the former British ambassador to Uzbekistan, who was sacked by Jack Straw for raising that country's abysmal human rights record and its use of torture,¹³ raised some interesting questions regarding Shai Masot:

1. On what basis was Masot in the UK?
2. Since he was not on the diplomatic list, but was plainly a senior officer, what precise visa and residence status did he hold?
3. How many more officers does the Israeli embassy have with that same visa and residence status?
4. Has the [foreign and Commonwealth office] connived with the Israeli embassy to allow other Israeli intelligence operatives residence in the country other than those officially credited?
5. Did MI5, MI6 or any other of the security services have any input into Mr Masot's acceptance and visa/residency status?¹⁴

Unsurprisingly Murray has not received any response to his inquiries from the foreign office or Theresa May. There is little doubt that what was a programme adopted by a foreign state aimed at destabilising a British political party had the blessing and was carried out with the active connivance of the government. The fact that a government which is normally so keen to prevent immigration had granted someone who was not a diplomat British residence suggests collusion with the Israeli government's anti-BDS strategy at the highest level.

It was not difficult to work out that the hand of the Israeli state and MI5/the CIA were behind the 'anti-Semitism affair'. Why should there be a sudden upsurge of 'anti-Semitism' when Corbyn was elected? The fact that such allegations were being levelled at Corbyn himself, when he first stood, should have been a strong indication as to their provenance.¹⁵ The fact that people like Jon Lansman gave credence to this campaign should raise questions about their own bona fides.

Although the British press did not entirely ignore the story, most of them downplayed it and soon forgot what was, in essence, an espionage programme run on British soil. Imagine if the Russians had been running secret agents who were infiltrating political parties. It is a sad commentary on the state of the British media - from the quality end to the yellow press - that it was a TV station based in Qatar which broke a story that was begging to be told. The verbosity and carelessness of Shai Masot suggested from the start that he was unlikely to be a member of Mossad, Israel's equivalent of MI6. He was the political equivalent of the Keystone Cops. It would surely not have been difficult for *The Guardian* or *The Independent* to have run a few students in the Jewish Labour Movement, but the will was not there. Jonathan Freedland had already laid down *The Guardian's* editorial take on the 'anti-Semitism' affair.

Student movement

Students are one of the key areas of activity for BDS and Palestine solidarity, but in the last year the student movement has been rocked by two things in particular.

The first was the false allegation of anti-Semitism at Oxford University Labour Club in January 2016. As Asa Winstanley has shown, those allegations were wholly false and contrived.¹⁶ The person who made them at Oxford, Alex

Chalmers, left the Labour Party a few weeks later and declared his support for the Liberal Democrats. His LinkedIn profile (before it was deleted!) stated that he had worked for Israel's main propaganda group in this country, the Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre (Bicom). The Labour Club's 'anti-Semitism' had consisted of support for Israel Apartheid Week. As the Zionist, Baroness Janet Royall, later commented on a blog on her own investigation on the JLM site: "I know that you will share my disappointment and frustration that the main headline coming out of my inquiry is that there is no institutional anti-Semitism in Oxford University Labour Club." What kind of political charlatan expresses disappointment that she could find no trace of "institutional anti-Semitism" (whatever that is) in the organisation she was investigating?

The other major event was the election of the first black woman president of the National Union of Students - Malia Bouattia, an open supporter of BDS and anti-imperialism. She was subject to vicious attacks by the bourgeois media, led by the Union of Jewish Students. In June 2015 NUS voted to support BDS.

The UJS received money from the Israeli embassy and attempted first to influence the outcome of the NUS presidency election and then oust Bouattia following her victory. It instigated a disaffiliation campaign, which sank like a damp squib. Oxford University Student Union, despite Alex Chalmers supporting the disaffiliation bid, voted by a margin of 1,000 to remain affiliated to the NUS. Lincoln University, which disaffiliated, has since reversed that decision. Only Hull and Newcastle universities are still disaffiliated.

One key activist in all of this was Michael Rubin, who claimed to work "with the ambassador and embassy quite a lot". He told 'Robin' that Bouattia was "really bad"; she was "awful". Rubin, who was at the time chair of Labour Students, admitted: "We were campaigning for the person running against her, because we didn't want her to win."

During the election campaign, NUS vice-president Richard Brooks held "secret" meetings with Russell Langer, UJS campaign director, and Rubin: "We'd have our secret little purpose meeting where we'd plan how to get moderate people with good politics and any number of things elected to certain places." Rubin told 'Robin' about those trying to oust Bouattia: "You can speak to me because I'm helping organise them." The investigation also revealed that the UJS sent Brooks on a paid trip to Israel, which he failed to declare. As a result leftwing and black students in NUS are seeking his removal as a scab agent in the student movement.

Adam Schapira, who ran an unsuccessful bid for the UJS presidency, revealed, as we always suspected, that "The Israeli embassy in the UK gives

money to UJS." Schapira confirmed that the American pro-Israel lobby, Aipac, is also channelling money to British campuses through the pro-Zionist Pinsky Centre.¹⁷ What the programme confirms is that Britain is at the epicentre of Zionist and US destabilisation efforts.

Fake claims

There are some highly amusing moments in *The lobby*. Ella Rose is the director of the Jewish Labour Movement, the main organisation in the Labour Party spearheading the 'anti-Semitism' campaign. Previously she had worked at the Israeli embassy and before that as chair of UJS. She had sought to keep her work at the embassy a secret, as the JLM did not want its close relationship with it revealed.

When Asa Winstanley broke the story of who her former employer was¹⁸ Ella was not happy, and she happened to bump into 'Robin' at that time. She is filmed crying, "Fuck you, fuck you. Fucking anti-Semites, the lot of them." She was in tears over the fact that the truth of her employment had been revealed and she named Winstanley as one of the "fucking anti-Semites". It would seem that anybody who displeases this spoilt brat is to be defined in that way. For her the normal characteristics of actual anti-Semitism - a belief in Jewish inferiority, in stereotypes, in an international Jewish conspiracy, in the Medieval Blood Libel - are irrelevant. The only thing that is relevant is whether or not you support the apartheid state of Israel. If you do, then it is immaterial if you hate Jews as Jews.

Readers can, however, rest assured that Ella recovered soon enough to tell Robin that she had seen Jackie Walker the previous Saturday and "You know what? I could take her. She's, like, five foot, two inches and tiny."¹⁹ Apparently Rose has trained in the Israeli martial art, Krav Maga. The *Jewish Chronicle's* Marcus Dysche interpreted this as Al Jazeera having "embarked on an exercise that is nothing more than straightforward Jew-baiting dressed up as an investigation".²⁰ In other words classic anti-Semitism - even though the woman that Ella Rose threatened to "take" is herself Jewish!

One of the most interesting parts of the programme was when we saw at Labour Party conference exactly how a fake anti-Semitism incident is manufactured. Jean Fitzpatrick, a conference delegate, comes up to the Labour Friends of Israel stall. She is impressed by their commitment to two states and wants to know more. "What do you actually do to achieve that?" she asks the chair of LFI, Joan Ryan MP, who avoids answering.

Jean Fitzpatrick is a persistent questioner and wants to know exactly what LFI is doing to oppose the settlements, which are an obstacle to a two-state solution. The answer, of course, is nothing. LFI and the Zionist movement in Britain, whilst ostensibly supporting a two-state solution in the abstract does nothing whatsoever to bring such a scenario about. There has never been a single occasion when they have opposed Israel's occupation, its land theft or crop destruction, its theft of water or any of the other acts that make Israel's occupation a vicious and bloody one. Two states is a cover for one - apartheid Greater Israel - with the Palestinians kept under permanent military rule.

She also tells Ryan that LFI appears to have "a lot of money" and "a lot of prestige in the world". She gives the example of her friend's son, who "got a really good job at Oxford University on the basis of having worked for Labour Friends of Israel". Apparently this was an "anti-Semitic trope" (Ryan's words) about rich Jews, bankers and the City of London. In fact she had mentioned none of that, but a complaint was made by Ryan and Jean was suspended. Although she was reinstated after an investigation, it was and is a telling lesson in how fake

anti-Semitic incidents are manufactured out of nothing.

Ryan is ideally placed to be the LFI's chair, by the way. As MP for Enfield North she has demonstrated not only a love for Israel, but a love for parliamentary expenses too. Her much doctored Wikipedia entry states that "In October 2007, the *Evening Standard* reported that Joan Ryan claimed £173,691 in expenses for the 2006-07 tax year, the highest for any MP. She was the second highest claimant in the 2005-06 tax year." In February 2010 Ryan was asked to repay £5,121 she had claimed for mortgage interest.²¹

There is a further section in the entry entitled 'Accusations of editing Wikipedia from within parliament'. It would appear that Ryan is not exactly happy that her appetite for expenses has been given undue publicity. In 2012, *The Independent* reported that "At least 10 attempts have been made from computers in parliament to remove information about [Ryan's] expenses claims and a further 20 efforts were subsequently made to delete the information. During the 2015 general election, the *Telegraph* reported that "The entire section about expenses on Joan Ryan's page was deleted. Ms Ryan spent thousands on repairs and decorations at her Enfield home before 'flipping' it to another property."²²

Indictment

Jeremy Corbyn, who up until his election was a strong supporter of the Palestinians, has been worn down by the Zionists' 'anti-Semitism' campaign. Instead of calling out the Zionist JLM for weaponising anti-Semitism in the fight to defend Israel, he has repeatedly stressed he is opposed to anti-Semitism, seeming not to understand that the 'anti-Semitism' his opponents were accusing people of had nothing to do with hatred of Jews and everything to do with hatred of the actions of Israel. That is why Corbyn's words served to appease his critics.

At Labour's 2016 conference Corbyn abased himself, giving a grovelling speech to LFI, to whom he had never spoken before. Jeremy Newmark's smug and arrogant comments after Corbyn had spoken said everything about the contempt in which the Zionists hold him: "I can kind of live with that for the time being. It will get us through another year." Hardly a ringing endorsement, but confirmation that the pro-Zionists have succeeded in subduing Corbyn.

Luke Akehurst, former Labour national executive member who works for 'We Believe in Israel', another Israeli embassy front group, was full of praise for Corbyn's speech, when he condemned 'anti-Semitism' to a group of racists:

It's a shame he didn't make this speech this time last year. His underlying beliefs won't have shifted ... but, given where he came from, it was a carefully drafted speech that had appropriate wording in terms of the way it addressed core issues in the Middle East and the way it addressed anti-Semitism. My initial sense was there was not much one could find to criticise in what was said.²³

What an utterly damning indictment of Corbyn that this creature of Labour's far right could find nothing to criticise in his speech.

One thing the Al Jazeera programme did prove, however, was that the LFI itself is nothing more than a creature of the Israeli embassy. There was Shai Masot going around appointing the chair of Young LFI until a *Ha'aretz* article stopped him in his tracks.

And then there was the affair of the slush fund. Ryan asks what happened to the names she put in for an all-expenses-paid trip to Israel, and Masot told her that he had just got the money - more than £1 million. It does not take a genius to work out that it costs nothing like that sum to take MPs on a freebie. In other words, the \$50 million that Israel has allocated to anti-BDS work is a slush fund which is

being used to pay for the running of LFI, including no doubt generous 'expenses' for people like Ryan. In short LFI is nothing more than an arms-length organisation run by the embassy. It is to be hoped that Corbyn now cuts his links with this reactionary, state-run organisation and never again speaks at its functions.

The investigation by Al Jazeera has been extremely damaging to the Zionist movement in Britain. We now have conclusive evidence of how Israeli state agents, with the connivance of the British state, have been interfering in both the Labour Party and the student movement, and how MPs like Joan Ryan and others, are in their pay.

Above all, the programmes demonstrate that the fake anti-Semitism campaign of the past year is just that. An artificial concoction dreamt up in Jerusalem, the Israeli and probably the American embassies. It is long overdue that socialists in the Labour Party dispensed with any feelings of guilt over this use of identity politics to shield and protect the privileged and powerful, the racist and reactionary.

The fact that Zionism uses 'anti-Semitism' in order to defend its demolition of Palestinian homes, torture and internment is a sign of its contempt for those Jews who did suffer from anti-Semitism. During the Iron Guard's pogrom in Romania in January 1941 the bodies of Jews were hung from butcher's hooks and their victims were skinned alive. To equate support for the Palestinians or the discomfiture of a spoilt brat from north London with the horrors that Jews have historically experienced demonstrates the utter contempt for actual Jewish suffering the Zionists have.

This should not be a surprise. When holocaust survivors first went to Israel after 1945, they were termed derisively *sapon* (soap) after the myth that the Nazis used fat from those killed in Auschwitz to manufacture soap. It was not until the 1960s, when the holocaust was used as the main instrument of Israel's propaganda war, that openly expressed contempt for holocaust survivors vanished - at least from the surface of Israeli society ●

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Corbyn and Ryan: appeasement

IRELAND**Revolution and counterrevolution**

In this article, based on a presentation to Communist University 2016, Kevin Bean examines the subjective and objective factors that prevented the development of a powerful working class republicanism in Ireland

In this talk I want to outline some of the key themes of the 10 years between 1913 and 1923, a period which has become increasingly referred to as the Irish Revolution.¹ These years are followed by what we might consider a period of counterrevolution beginning around 1922, when the Anglo-Irish treaty results in a new state emerging in the south of Ireland. I would like to pose some questions about the nature and limitations of Irish republicanism - both as an ideology and as an organisational form in this period.

We are in the middle of what is known in Ireland as the 'decade of commemorations', marked by a series of events, both state-led and delivered by the trade unions, the Labour Party and the various republican groups, celebrating the period 1912-1922. The Easter Rising centenary has been a central feature of this year, both commemorated and widely discussed throughout Ireland. By way of introduction I want to cover some of the questions raised by the commemorations themselves and in some of the current debates about their significance.

One of the most interesting and controversial questions for contemporary politics - particularly in light of the current status of the northern and southern states - is whether the revolution was fully consummated. Visitors to bookshops in Dublin or Belfast will see walls of books on the 1916 period. There has been a considerable revival of interest in these texts, making 2016 something of a golden age for historians. A significant degree of popular interest has been reflected in attendance at state commemorations and official events, as well as a whole range of 'unofficial' celebrations and discussions.² The question of the successful completion of the Irish Revolution has often simply been seen in terms of the armed struggle of the Irish Republican Army. Likewise, the counterrevolution has been understood in terms of Ulster unionism and the creation of the partitionist state. However, broader questions surrounding the relationship between national struggles and socialism have become important issues to socialists throughout Europe today.

A key theme of this literature is the importance of individuals such as Éamon de Valera and Michael Collins. Indeed, one popular view explains the period simply in terms of the antipathy and difference in character between the two men. As you might expect, many books emphasise the important role of the IRA as an armed group in the national struggle and the creation of the southern state in 1922.

Two other narratives have emerged that are, in a sense, diametrically opposed to each other. One, that might be called 'revisionist' - although that is not always a helpful title - seems to suggest that there was no revolution or, in the words of Kevin O'Higgins, that the Irish Revolution was one of the most "conservative revolutions" ever.³ According to this argument, the general grain of Irish society was largely undisturbed, apart from a brief period of discontinuity before things got back on track. The former taoiseach, John Bruton, provided a striking example of this view, when he said that not only the Easter Rising, but the events of the whole revolutionary period, were simply a mistake and that the 26-county state would have come into existence in any event as a result of the evolutionary process of home rule. In other words, the 1916 rising lacked any democratic



Easter 1916: James Connolly lies wounded

mandate or justification. If taken to its logical conclusions, this argument has quite shocking implications for the authority of the southern state. In fact, I can think of no other example where a former prime minister essentially pronounces the history of his own state to be illegitimate.⁴

Another, more positive narrative involves attempts to discover a 'history from below', by looking beyond the role of leaders and armed organisations, to discover a history of popular militancy, involving land seizures, industrial action and phenomena such as the Limerick Soviet.⁵ Considering the period in this way gives these events a revolutionary character, over and above simply being an armed struggle. However, there is another side to some of the 'history from below' arguments: namely, debates on the nature of the mass actions. While leftwing and republican histories frame the popular militancy positively, in other circles it is often characterised as sectarian or communal. For example, some of the actions of landless workers are portrayed as petty sectarianism, with small-scale squabbles sometimes escalating into atrocities.⁶

The significance of this narrative is that it is part of an attempt to particularise movements which had much wider political aims. Although people often had their own local grievances, which did play a significant role in motivating action, the idea that this national struggle was purely a patchwork of local struggles without overall coherence is very difficult to sustain. Nevertheless, attempts to smuggle this view in to the wider national story continue to be made.⁷

Tensions within the various mass movements - in particular, the tensions between different classes - have been brought back into the historiography alongside the role of the urban working class. There has also been a deeper exploration of unionism, which had often been portrayed in quite monolithic ways. For example, historians have drawn attention to divisions within unionism and unionist leaders' attempts to maintain control over quite a diffuse movement. Far from being a stage

army, wheeled on and wheeled off, the unionist masses were often quite unpredictable - moving sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left. Much of the work around this topic dating from the 1970s and 80s is now being developed by more specialist studies.⁸

Other interesting themes being explored from this period include closer readings of the thinking of the Irish left. Republicans have always looked to the rising, drawing on it as a guide for their contemporary politics: thus they will quote extensively from James Connolly, Patrick Pearse and Liam Mellows, using their works as texts from which to develop their own positions.

One question that I would like to be discussed relates to readings from the Irish left and those around Connolly. A lot of people of my generation on the left - and I suspect of succeeding generations - read Connolly through the lens of Desmond Greaves. Although everyone understands that his was something of a Stalinistic reading - including attempts to assimilate Connolly as an honorary Stalinist - I wonder if we still carry his interpretation forward with us? If you look at a lot of the material Connolly wrote, particularly during World War I, you can see that his position varied at different periods and that to see him as a fully rounded Leninist is somewhat difficult.⁹

Warning signs

I want to start by looking at Ireland in 1910. A time-traveller would probably not have expected the events of the following decade. Certainly the groups that were committed to revolution in Ireland, whether nationalists or socialist revolutionaries, could not have foreseen the pattern of events that was to come. The situation was very different to that in Russia, where you can see the outlines of some of the revolutionary events that were to occur. Indeed, although he wrote this in 1916, Trotsky talked about the Wyndham Act of 1903, which transferred land from larger landlords to strengthen the layer of strong farmers, indicating that the material basis for the national revolution in Ireland had gone.¹⁰

Many of the Irish politicians of that

period also saw Ireland as relatively stable and believed that the creation of a strong farmer class, comparable to the kulaks, had helped provide the essential underpinning of this stability. Indeed Pyotr Stolypin, who introduced reforms after the 1905 revolution in Russia, referred to some of the patterns developing in Ireland as a model for his policies. The identification of land with national revolution, which had been such an issue in the 19th century, seemed to have disappeared. Ireland seemed now to be moving towards some form of devolved government and - with the strength of the constitutionalist nationalists, the Redmondites and the growing role of the Catholic middle class in local government, the civil service and Irish society generally - it looked as if Ireland would find a new stability under British rule.

Ireland was fairly well integrated into the British imperial economy, although it was relatively underdeveloped and its industries were mostly confined to the north-east. Urban centres elsewhere in Ireland were generally quite small, mainly dealing in services for agriculture. Even where there were examples of unrest and challenges to the existing order, these were easily contained or confined to the cultural sphere. The cultural revival of the late 19th century does throw up a critique of British rule, but this was expressed through a desire to create a distinct Irish identity and promote the Irish language, and was often content to settle for home rule and devolved government, rather than complete independence.

However, there were signs of destabilising factors. If it seemed apparent that the Catholic middle class at the higher levels of administration and business was proceeding smoothly towards home rule, many at the lower levels of society were excluded from that comfortable certainty. The excluded included the lower-middle class, who could expect to find junior positions in administration, but still felt that the union with Britain did not offer them full scope for their talents. In addition, the growing force of the working class, galvanised by the development of Larkinism and militant trade unionism, had emerged as a factor in 1907 in Belfast, and would go on to become a very significant force in the 1913 Dublin lockout. What is interesting about these developments is that they reflect the different character of the Irish economy and society in comparison with Britain. The movement often involved unskilled, casual workers, who were developing a very militant tradition, often quite volatile in comparison with the much more conservative trade unionism of the established industries in Belfast and Britain.

In many ways the 1913 lockout was a social revolt, involving not just the workers, but the local slum populations of Dublin. I am sure you will be aware from the writings of Connolly and others of the nature of those slums - some of the worst in Europe, and some of the worst living conditions of the time. The lockout and the struggles around it take on a much wider character: they are part of the syndicalist movement that existed in Britain between 1909 and 1914, but I think they had a much more elemental character. Interestingly the Dublin lockout prefigures some of the tensions which will occur later in the revolutionary period. The unrest, directed at the state as well as the employers, illuminated the state's determination to support the employers. Significantly for the future

of both the Irish revolution and the counterrevolution, William Martin Murphy, the major employer involved in the lockout, was a nationalist, a Catholic and had various connections with Irish nationalist MPs.¹¹

Crisis

In a sense the counterrevolution begins before the revolution. An important feature of this revolutionary period is that the crisis in Ireland is opened up by the crisis in Britain and the rest of Europe. If we read the Irish newspapers at the time, there are frequent references to events occurring elsewhere, illustrating the close interaction between events in Britain and in Ireland, especially during the 1910-14 period.

The split in the British ruling class between the Conservatives and the Liberals, the people's budget and the House of Lords crisis - all become intimately connected with Ireland. It is impossible to understand the development of the anti-home rule movement and Ulster unionism without connecting it to British Conservatives and trying to understand why the latter were so ready not only to oppose home rule, but to precipitate a major crisis in British politics. In some sense Ireland was being used as a battering ram in parliamentary skirmishes, but significantly the Irish question went to the heart of the future of the empire and the balance of forces within the British ruling class - in particular between the remnants of the old landowning class, finance and industrial capital, as well as the wider imperial interest. The fact that the British Conservatives were prepared to use the threat of Ulster unionism and to assist in the mobilisation of this counterrevolutionary force is highly significant in shaping the way events would unfold.

The Irish counterrevolution came from two sources. Firstly, from within constitutional nationalism, including figures such as William Martin Murphy and sections of the Irish Parliamentary Party. Secondly, it came from without, in the shape of the Conservatives and their Ulster unionist allies. On occasions the two currents of counterrevolution coalesce - particularly in the period of partition and the Irish Civil War in 1922-23.

The seriousness of that crisis cannot be overstated - in particular the possibility of the Tories mobilising unionists for a civil war against home rule. As the Conservative leader, Bonar Law, argued in support of Ulster unionism and 'unconstitutional' resistance to even the very limited form of self-government on offer before 1914:

We regard the government as a revolutionary committee which has seized power by fraud upon despotic power. In our opposition to them we shall not be guided by considerations which would influence us in ordinary political struggle... We shall use any means to deprive them of the power they have usurped... I can imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster will go in which I will not be ready to support them.¹²

That quote, deservedly well-known, indicates the degree of polarisation and threatened violence behind unionist mobilisation. Key events in 1912-14, such as the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force, the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant, and the importation of arms, illustrate that the radicalisation, to use the modern jargon, was injected into the situation by unionists and Conservatives.

A very strong theme in the biographies of many nationalists and republicans in this period was their willingness to settle for home rule: Patrick Pearse, for example, only became a militant nationalist when it became clear that a violent unionist reaction was likely to steal home rule from the nationalist grasp.¹³

Nationalist Ireland's reaction was quite predictable: the formation of the Irish Volunteers as a mass movement was an attempt to put countervailing pressure to that of the unionists to defend home rule. However, unlike the Conservatives and the unionists, they were clearly not prepared for violent struggle. Although the Irish Volunteers were formed, their exact purpose remained unclear. Yes, they are formed to defend home rule, but how far they are prepared to go to do that I think is uncertain. This reflects the Irish middle classes' reluctance to press the situation to any sort of conclusion, and in the case of Redmond to be satisfied with a degree of devolution within the United Kingdom. The limitations of this strategy were revealed by Redmond's response to World War I: he supported the war, called for Irish men to sign up and clearly saw Ireland's future within the empire.

The impact of the war changed the situation, in particular providing the opportunity and impetus for the 1916 rising. As we have seen, Ireland in 1910 was quite stable. In some sense the British government welcomed the war as a way of defeating opposition in Ireland and holding back trade union militancy and other oppositional movements, such as women's suffrage. Although it has been interpreted in a number of different ways, the 1916 rising has been conventionally understood as the beginning of the revolutionary period. I do not think it is necessary to go over the familiar ground of 'blood sacrifice' and how far the rising was intended to be a glorious military failure - the evidence is conclusively against that. If it was a blood sacrifice in any sense, it was a sacrifice of the leaders, as opposed to the men and women who took part in it. The rising could be seen as having had a real chance of success: if, for example, more people had been involved and more material had been available, then events may well have taken on a very different and serious character.¹⁴

More significant from our point of view, however, is the impact of the rising in the immediate years that followed. The standard argument is that the rebels initially had no support and people jeered at them as they were being led away. However, they were turned into martyrs when they were executed, and within a year there had been a dramatic shift in opinion. Some recent work, examining the mood in the countryside, the impact of the war and the threat of conscription, suggests that popular feeling was already turning even before the rising. Records from the Royal Irish Constabulary indicate a much greater degree of hostility to the war than has been previously suggested in standard accounts of the period.

Connolly's role

One of our key themes should really turn on the role of Connolly in that rising. I think this is important, because Connolly is a very significant figure and something of an icon: there are no groups on the Irish left which do not claim him as their own. In addition, Connolly bequeathed a tradition, which republicans and socialists continue to draw on.

When Connolly participated in the Easter Rising, he was aware that large numbers of people in other countries might not have understood what he was doing. Desmond Greaves seems to suggest that Connolly had arrived at a Leninist position and saw the rising as an attempt to turn the imperialist war into a civil war. Others have suggested that his position is more pro-German and that he argued for the victory of Germany as a more progressive force. Some of his contemporary critics, like Sean O'Casey,

who had been a member of the Citizens Army and worked with Connolly, were very critical of the rising and suggested that he had become a nationalist and abandoned the socialist cause.¹⁵

Another familiar trope is that of the 'premature rising'. In this respect, Kieran Allen, although sympathetic to Connolly and a member of the Socialist Workers Party in Ireland, suggests that a number of criticisms could be made of his role. For example, he argues that Connolly had not built a revolutionary party before 1916 and had made too many concessions to republicanism, leaving a very ambiguous legacy (although I think much of Connolly's position is actually quite consistent and coherent).¹⁶

It is worth discussing the relation between the national question and the socialist revolution - a question that many international socialists wrote about in the aftermath of the rising. Connolly's views are most clearly expressed in *Labour in Irish history* (1910), where he argues, firstly, that there is a clear dynamic towards socialism within militant Irish republicanism; secondly, that in all previous movements the rich betrayed the poor and therefore the only people who can carry out the revolution in Ireland are the poor, the working class, the landless labourers and the small famers. This idea is not fully developed and I think it is inaccurate to suggest, as Kieran Allen does, that Connolly had developed a version of the permanent revolution.¹⁷ Certainly Connolly does see the possibility that within Irish nationalism other trends will grow. After 1916 these currents did emerge within the republican movement and within the IRA. The difficulty, which is widely acknowledged, is how those currents are then generalised and whether a revolutionary group can be thrown up during the course of revolutionary events. The developing positions of the various social classes involved in those movements often do pose these fundamental questions of power and the direction of the movement, but increasingly it becomes a question of whether any organised grouping is in a position to take advantage of this situation.

Revolution

I have referred to some major developments after 1916 - the growth of opposition to British rule, culminating in the election of a Sinn Féin majority in 1918; the growth of the IRA; British repression and the development of a mass struggle for an Irish Republic. There are two more features from that period that I would like to consider further.

First of all, does the period constitute a revolution? In Lenin's reading it did and contemporaries in the internationalist movement did see an anti-imperialist movement developing. Increasingly after 1916, and certainly between 1918 and 1922, it was clear that the British ruling class was no longer able to govern Ireland in the old way. Its strategy from the 1890s had been to govern in a type of coalition with the Redmondites and some sections of the middle class. That coalition had been swept away in 1918 by the social and economic impact of the war, the high level of casualties and the threat of conscription.

Likewise in terms of the mobilisation of the masses, though we often focus on the military actions of the IRA, it is very clear that there was a mass mobilisation expressed in the form of elections and also boycotts, protests and strikes, including the general strike against conscription and the actions of transport workers, who refused to handle military equipment and personnel. All this shows that the masses were not willing to be ruled in the old way and there is even evidence at times of dual power occurring.¹⁸

This was reflected in the political terminology of the time. The contemporary use of the term 'soviet' was partly fashionable, consciously borrowed from Russia, but also reflected

a real sense that Russia showed the future path. In general, I do not think that that the form that existed actually constituted soviets - these were mainly just strike committees. However, the Limerick Soviet was a general strike committee, and it did involve elements of workers' power. For example, it gave permission for goods to be moved, for certain services to take place - it even issued promissory notes to act in place of money for the organisation of food supplies. There were similar movements in other towns and cities - even quite small towns had a series of general strikes. Many of these would have been about economic issues, but they often employed rhetoric involving the word 'soviet'.¹⁹ The IRA had about 100,000 nominal members in the latter part of 1918, of which probably about 15,000 were active and 3,000 would have been full-time fighters. Given the size of Ireland's population, this was quite a widespread movement.

Likewise the destruction of police barracks, the related collapse of the British administration, and the creation of an alternative system of courts and a shadow administration in the countryside carried obvious revolutionary implications. However, the model itself is not particularly revolutionary, much of it resting upon existing property relations. Ken Loach's *The wind that shakes the barley* captures this quite well in an incident when a dail court arbitrates between a moneylender and a debtor. The court finds in favour of the gombeen man because, it is argued, the republicans rely upon such people for finance and social support. If the embryonic legal and governmental system did not challenge property relations or real social power in the countryside and small towns, that was hardly more in evidence in the larger cities. So, although there was revolutionary potential, it did not last very long. It was not followed through and the result was that something of a vacuum developed. The ideas are there - of a new way of organising life, of some kind of alternative revolutionary government - but no party or grouping is able to clearly articulate that sense of possibility and develop it into forms of political and social power.

The British counter-insurgency strategy has been well documented, but I think the seriousness and manner of its implementation indicated that the ruling class knew it was faced with a revolutionary crisis. The attacks on civilians, although glossed over as 'excesses', were clearly authorised from the top of the British government. Lloyd George and Churchill did not just give the military free reign: they discussed the use of particular tactics. For example, assassinations were deemed to be a more effective counter-terrorism measure than 'unofficial reprisals', such as the burning of the centre of Cork by British forces in 1920. The fact that the British ruling class was prepared to use such extreme measures within the United Kingdom demonstrates the seriousness of the crisis it was facing in Ireland.²⁰

Counterrevolution

I want to now to conclude by discussing the counterrevolution and the two forms which it took. The first form is the creation of what would become known as the 'Orange state' in Northern Ireland. The second was the counterrevolution inside the revolution. Many narratives reflect the popular imagination and the historiography by focusing on individual backsliding and corruption - for example Michael Collins being 'seduced' by the fleshpots of London; informers guiding the direction of the movement; and Lloyd George's skills as a wily negotiator being able to divert the movement. All of these are significant, but what is often missing from conventional narratives (although not in those of the left) is the way that the counterrevolution, although working in close partnership with British imperialism, was generated from within Ireland itself. Peadar O'Donnell expresses this well when

he suggests that the militant republicans had been defeated even before the civil war started:

We [Sinn Féin] lost out in 1921 because there was no day-to-day struggle making for differentiation, so that in those days we were forced to defend ranchers, enforce rents and be neutral in strikes ... The Free State was in existence long before the name was adopted.²¹

This is an important point. Given the all-class nature of republicanism and given that in large parts of Ireland existing property and legal forms were maintained, the Free State was being built long before the treaty was signed. The Sinn Féin movement that had emerged after 1916 was a broad front and we know from extensive local studies that many of its local activists had transferred wholesale from the existing constitutional nationalist party. The local leaders were often from the middle class - strong farmers, white-collar workers, publicans and so on - who had been the backbone of home rule before moving over to support the mass movement. It was clear to contemporaries that this process was happening: the more militant republicans, such as Dan Breen, were very well aware that many in the Sinn Féin movement that had emerged in the run-up to the 1918 general election were more than willing to compromise with British imperialism. This prompted Breen to kick-start a more revolutionary phase, when he and his comrades fired what are often considered to be the first shots of the Black and Tan war in 1919 at the ambush at Soloheadbeg in Tipperary.

Class compromise, a willingness to come to an arrangement with the British empire, and a cautious and conservative approach were built into the movement for Irish independence. The embryo of the counterrevolution is present from the first, revealing itself in a number of ways from open class tensions and disputes over military tactics to more subtle strategic disagreements. These ranged from 'diplomatic' negotiation, and sending representatives to gain admission to the Versailles conference, through to trying to obtain recognition from the USA. In contrast, the more militant republicans were arguing for armed struggle, land seizures and, in some localities, the creation of a new form of state and different social relations.

The counterrevolution became more apparent when the treaty was signed and it became clear that the forms of the new state were not going to be as radical as many had hoped. The discussions around the treaty and the split in the movement are not always easy to understand. There is a class element in them, but it is not as clear-cut, with the lower social classes on the anti-treaty side and the middle class leading the pro-treaty forces. There were other regional cleavages and ideological dividing lines as well.²² Many of the anti-treaty republicans, although willing to have some dialogue with the left (something that would be a feature of later republican movements), limited their demands purely to the idea of 'the republic' rather than a genuine revolution in the interests of the working class and the small farmers.

One of the key problems facing the anti-treaty forces was their vanguardism - a sense that the mass of the population lacked a developed political subjectivity and that only the IRA truly embodied the will of the nation. Consequently very few republicans attempted to build a political movement beyond the IRA in this period. I am not arguing that this is necessarily an inevitable feature of Irish republicanism, but certainly its definition of the struggle has tended historically to be a narrow one.²³ Whilst class dynamics were present in the 1922-23 civil war, much of the conflict was around purely symbolic issues, which failed to attract wide support and remobilise the mass revolutionary movement against the counterrevolution. The demand for the republic was never made very clear.

It is true that many people demanded a workers' republic and argued for the transformation of social and property relations, especially on the land. However, for many the republic became not just a means to emancipation, but the final goal in itself. What has surprised many commentators since 1922 is that in the debates on the treaty partition it played a distinctly minor role - it is not really mentioned in the Dail debates at all. The focus in the discussions was on the relationship to the empire and on the oath of allegiance. Indeed, from this you can argue that the beginnings of a type of 26-county nationalism can already be seen. Essentially the north has already been written off and that for both tendencies within the national movement the real struggle for the future was going to take place in the south.

The Irish counterrevolutionary period can be seen as both a failure of the left and a failure for republicanism arising from a range of subjective and objective factors. Many on the left have argued that the leaders of the trade unions and the labour movement abdicated their role - the Irish union movement is a very easy target to attack in this context. But should we not also look at the role of left republicans and consider whether, by rallying around the idea of the republic instead of the workers' republic, they failed to give the demand for the republic a definite social and political content? The reasons why the IRA was reining in struggles - arresting people on rent strike, for instance - and why even left republicans were willing to submit to such counterrevolutionary actions in the name of unity are also important areas for discussion. It is also worth considering Connolly's failure to develop a party and how far his syndicalist tendencies were a factor in this failure.

In terms of objective factors, given the nature of Irish society and the relative weakness of the proletariat, could the outcome really have been any different? What lessons can be learned regarding political struggle in countries without a strong proletariat? These are all questions that I hope we can debate and which will be increasingly important in the historiography of the Irish revolution. Given the nature of movements which are emerging in the ex-colonial world, they are questions which still continue to have a great deal of relevance for us today ●

Notes

1. See, for example, J Augustejn (ed) *The Irish Revolution 1913-1923* Basingstoke 2002.
2. For an account of popular response to the 1916 commemorations see K Bean, 'New roads to the Rising: the Irish politics of commemoration since 1994' in R Grayson and F McGarry *Remembering 1916* Manchester 2016.
3. T Garvin *Nationalist revolutionaries in Ireland 1858-1928* Dublin 2005.
4. F Kelly, 'John Bruton says 1916 was "recipe for endless conflict"' *Irish Times* March 29 2016.
5. For an example of a growing body of such work see the bibliographies listed online on *The Irish Story* website: www.theirishstory.com.
6. For an example of this debate about this type of narrative see B Roche, 'Killing of Protestants in 1922: truce not sectarian, study argues' *Irish Times* January 23 2014.
7. P Hart *The IRA at war 1916-1923* Oxford 2003.
8. For one good recent survey see K Allen *1916: Ireland's revolutionary tradition* London 2016.
9. See C Desmond Greaves *The life and times of James Connolly* London 1961.
10. L Trotsky 'On the events in Dublin' *Nashe Slovo* July 4 1916.
11. See P Yeates *Lockout: Dublin 1913* Dublin 2001.
12. www.irishmarxistreview.net/index.php/imr/article/viewFile/190/185.
13. R O'Donnell *Patrick Pearse* Dublin 2016.
14. F McGarry *The Rising: Ireland 1916* Oxford 2010.
15. For a good discussion on the differences between the positions of Connolly and Lenin on the war see L O'Ruairc, 'Red nationalism of the blood or cultural gesture' *The Irish Revolution December 2015*: <http://theirishrevolution.wordpress.com>.
16. K Allen *op cit* p64.
17. *Ibid* p70.
18. J Augustejn *From public defiance to guerrilla warfare* Dublin 1996.
19. K Allen *op cit*.
20. C Townshend *The republic: the fight for Irish independence* London 2013.
- 21.1. K Allen *op cit* p43.
22. J Regan *The Irish counterrevolution 1912-1936* Dublin 2000.
23. T McKearney *The Provisional IRA: from insurrection to parliament* London 2011.

BREXIT

Deal or no deal?

Theresa May feels forced, despite herself, to go for a 'clean' Brexit, argues **Eddie Ford**

It has been clear for some time that Theresa May was on a 'hard' Brexit trajectory, even if the prime minister herself was a 'remainer' during the referendum campaign - albeit a very quiet one that made Jeremy Corbyn seem almost frenetic by comparison. Indeed, as late as December 2016 she was heavily implying at a European Union summit that she wanted Britain to stay within the internal single market. And the majority of the political establishment certainly wants to minimise the damage from Brexit, or ideally throw it into reverse if the opportunity arises.

But May faced an impossible contradiction: 'soft' Brexit effectively amounts to no Brexit, as remaining part of the single market means accepting the free movement of people - meaning pledges to curb immigration were worthless, if not a cynical lie. Obviously, if May were to climb down on free movement this would be regarded as a great betrayal by large ranks of the Tory Party and way beyond - including many of those who voted 'remain', no doubt. She would no longer be 'listening to the concerns' of the British people. Being a canny politician with no desire to commit political suicide (unlike her hapless predecessor), May had to reinvent herself as an enthusiastic Brexiteer.

Which brings us to the prime minister's long awaited January 17 speech, where she laid out her apparently hard-line negotiating position - we will not get down on our knees before the EU or renege on the 'mandate' given to us by the British people last year on June 23. Hence the Tory leader declared that she would be pursuing a 'clean' Brexit that involved no partial or associate EU membership - nothing that "leaves us half-in, half-out" or holding on to "bits of membership as we leave". Nor would Britain "seek to adopt a model already enjoyed by other countries". There would be no EU membership via the back door. Rather, regaining control of immigration and sovereignty is the number one priority for the Conservative government.

She then outlined "12 objectives" for negotiations with the EU 27: first and foremost "explicitly" ruling out Britain seeking continued membership of the single market, once it leaves the EU; and "taking back control" of its borders on the basis that record levels of migration had "put pressure on public services". Other aims include removing the UK from the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, as "we will not have truly left the European Union if we are not in control of our own laws"; not paying "huge sums" into the EU budget, but making an "appropriate contribution" to "some specific European programmes, in which we might want to participate"; and not staying within the customs union in its current form - perhaps, instead, becoming an "associate" member in order to make trading across borders as "frictionless as possible".

As an important part of this "new strategic partnership" with the EU, we heard, the government will be in pursuit of the "greatest possible access" to the single market on a "fully reciprocal basis", through a "comprehensive, bold and ambitious free trade agreement" - and, in tandem, build trading relationships with countries beyond Europe as part of a "global Britain" strategy.

For May, "no deal" is much preferable to a "bad deal" because - in her opinion - "we would be free to strike trade deals across the world". But,



No to the single market

needless to say, May was "confident that this scenario need never arise".

Maybe throwing a crumb of comfort to some, the prime minister announced that a "final deal" on Britain's exit from the EU will be put to a vote of both houses of parliament - although Downing Street sources have made clear that parliament would not be able to stop Britain leaving the EU.

Inevitably, there are endless questions about the finer details. For example, Theresa May so far has not explained what kind of immigration system she envisages for EU citizens post-Brexit - previously rejecting the introduction of an Australian-style points-based regime, as once advocated by George Galloway. Ministers have hinted at the possibility of work visas, but nothing more concrete has yet emerged. Then with regards to the new customs agreement, if it ever happens, May's remarks show that the government will be looking for sector-by-sector deals for certain key businesses - like we saw with Nissan recently, though we still do not know the terms of that deal or the promises made. She also confirmed in the speech that the government would be looking for a special deal for the City that will "give us freedom to provide financial services across borders", as it "makes no sense to start again from scratch, when Britain and the remaining member-states have adhered to the same rules for so many years".

But, whatever the exact details (or not), May seems determined - at least initially - to play hardball when the negotiations start. Whether it is a successful pitch, or pays any dividends, is an entirely different matter. The euphoric rightwing press might start to feel deflated a year or so down the road.

Morphed

Nigel Farage was delighted by the speech, tweeting that he could "hardly believe that the PM is now using the phrases and words that I've been mocked for using for years" - this is "real progress", he added. The chief executive of the Vote Leave campaign, Matthew Elliott, was similarly elated: "Superb speech from PM - everything we campaigned for". Boris Johnson, the foreign secretary, was also enthusiastic about May's "fantastic speech" and looked forward to a "clean break" with the EU.

Others were not so happy. Tim Farron, leader of the Liberal Democrats, said the speech confirmed that 'hard'

Brexit would do "massive damage" to the economy - and it was a "theft of democracy", as Theresa May has "basically taken the 51.9% who voted to leave last June and assumed they all bought Farage's line". So, he remarked, "we wait seven months for a plan" - but when we finally get one, "it's Ukip's". He was also upset that May "wants a stitch-up by politicians in Westminster" which will "allow the partially-elected parliament the final say, but ignore the British people, who will probably disagree with the deal". But, given that the people "voted for departure", he argued, they should also get a "vote on the destination" - ie, hold another referendum on the final deal. Perhaps he has been listening to Jon Lansman.

Farron also attacked the prime minister for warning the EU not to punish the UK, because it was an "unwise negotiating tactic" - a viewpoint endorsed by the former Tory chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, who in a Commons debate following May's speech wondered: "Which country in the world is going to enter into a trade agreement with this country on the basis that the rules are entirely what the British say they're going to be, on any particular day, and if there's any dispute about the rules it's going to be sorted out by the British government?"

Caroline Lucas, the co-leader of the Green Party, straightforwardly denounced May for being "willing to take an extreme gamble with our country's future" - pointing out that the prime minister has "morphed" a "close-run referendum into a mandate for an extremely hard Brexit" which will harm the economy as part of her "desperate desire" to end free movement and appease the xenophobic right.

Jeremy Corbyn too was less than impressed by May, having last week relaunched himself as a populist politician - a move that saw him declare that he was he was "not wedded to freedom of movement for EU citizens as a point of principle" (although in the next breath he added: "But I don't want that to be misinterpreted - nor do we rule it out"). From which we deduce that free movement is a "point of principle" except when it is not. Anyway, the Labour leader correctly pointed out that the speech carried an "implied threat" that Britain will become a "low-tax, bargain basement economy" on the offshores of Europe and that May was determined to use Brexit to strip away

workers' rights: she "makes out this is a negotiating threat" to the EU, "but it's actually a threat to the British people's jobs, services and living standards".

However, striking a completely different tone, shadow Brexit minister Keir Starmer almost welcomed May's speech, pointing to the deep divisions within the Labour Party over the issue. He told MPs that Theresa May's strategy would "fall short of hard Brexit" if she achieves her aims, and in fact May had "committed" to something that would "mimic" full EU membership. Not very convincing.

Meanwhile, Boris Johnson would have us believe that other countries are "queuing up" to sign trade deals with the UK once it leaves the EU, writing in *The Daily Telegraph* - where else? - that, once Britain no longer has its trade policy "run by the EU commission", that "crucially" means that the country "will be able to do new free trade deals with countries around the world" (January 17). Sure, under present EU rules the UK will not be "formally allowed" to negotiate these new treaties until we leave, but "there is nothing to say that ideas cannot be pencilled in".

However, as Rafael Behr observes in *The Guardian*, May "can think big all she likes" but it is far more likely

that Britain's "about to find out just how small it is".¹ More accurately still, Behr reminds the British prime minister - for all the talk of an early trade deal with the US - that, when "viewed from Trump Tower", Britain "sits in the bottom half of the first division of world players": yes, a "leading G7 economy, a nuclear-armed security council member, but not a superpower". Therefore for the US administration, he comments, "our interests matter, but probably not that much more than Belgian interests currently matter in Whitehall" - it really is a "question of perspective". Ultimately, Atlanticist fantasy cannot substitute for a rational approach to economic and foreign policy.

As this paper has pointed out, the Brexit debate does not neatly map out in 'left/right' terms with regard to Labour. Hence the 'soft Brexit' outlook unites a Corbynite like Diane Abbott with traditional Blairites and other pro-EU members of the Labour neoliberal right - both think keeping access to the single market is of paramount importance. But we now have the rather unedifying example of Paul 'nuke them' Mason as well. A former member of the Trotskyist group, Workers Power, and now a convert to Lansmanism, he is glad that "Labour has recognised that free movement is not a basic principle of socialism" (January 15).² Instead, he asserts, the "new defence line of the left and centre" is clear - "we can and must own the Brexit decision" without rancour and then "fight to remain inside the single market", whilst "implementing the express desire of the majority to end free movement".

Unlike the turncoat Mason and perhaps Jeremy Corbyn (it is hard to tell), communists are "wedded" to the notion of free movement, precisely because it is a "basic principle" of socialism. National barriers only serve the interests of capital. We fight everywhere for the principle of free movement and open borders, allied to mass political organisations and free trade unions. This is the perspective that Marxists inside and outside the Labour Party will continue to uphold ●

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Notes

1. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/17/theresa-may-britain-prime-minister-speech.
2. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/16/we-can-escape-brexit-doom-with-one-small-tweak-to-free-movement.

Fighting fund

Foot down

Perhaps I'm a born worrier, but I have to say that the progress of our first fighting fund of 2017 is not exactly filling me with confidence.

Last week we received a below-average £307, leaving our running total way behind on £719. Which means that we still need over a grand to reach our £1,750 target with just 12 days left to go before the end of the month. Well, I know our readers and supporters rarely let us down, but this time they really need to come up with the goods!

Some fine examples of that did come our way in the form of standing orders - from MM (£75), TB (£50), TR (£40) and KB (£20). Then there was a handy £50 cheque from CF, plus two PayPal

donations - from WN (£25) and DB (£7). They were among 2,911 online readers last week, by the way. Finally two comrades made a cash donation - PB came up with £30 at last Sunday's London Communist Forum, while BB's £10 note came from rather farther afield: she handed it to our editor on his recent visit to Cape Town!

But now we really need to put our foot down - we still need £1,031 by January 31. Please don't let us down, comrades ●

Robbie Rix

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

ITALY

Rasputin and Little Red Riding Hood

Claims that the Five Star Movement is some kind of leftwing formation have been well and truly exposed, writes Toby Abse

The last few weeks of 2016 and the start of 2017 have seen an increasingly overt turn to the right by Beppe Grillo's Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S - Five Star Movement).

As has always been the case in such an authoritarian and hierarchical organisation, Beppe Grillo has set the tone for his followers with his pronouncements on his blog. In the wake of the Berlin Christmas market massacre and the subsequent shooting of Anis Amri, the Tunisian jihadist responsible, in the Milanese suburb of Sesto San Giovanni, Grillo called for the forcible repatriation of all "irregular immigrants from tomorrow morning", and the periodic suspension of the Schengen regulations on open borders and free movement within the European Union in the event of any future jihadist attacks anywhere within the EU. This clearly racist equation of immigration and terrorism was a very deliberate attempt on Grillo's part to take the lead in not only endorsing, but actually inflaming, popular xenophobia¹ before Matteo Salvini and the Lega Nord, which normally make the running in xenophobic responses to such issues, had a chance to do so.

The subsequent announcement of a clampdown on "irregular" immigrants with no claim to asylum by Marco Minniti, the new minister of the interior, was very obviously a bid by the Partito Democratico (PD)-led coalition of the recently appointed prime minister, Paolo Gentiloni, to avoid being outflanked by the racist, populist parties in the months leading up to a general election.² Although Minniti initially emphasised a revival of the *centri di identificazione e espulsioni* (centres for identification and expulsion - CIE), most of which are now closed, within a few days the ministry was emphasising there would be only around 100 detainees in each CIE, that they would only include "dangerous irregular migrants", rather than all. This is clearly far too moderate a plan for M5S.

January has also seen an escalation in Grillo's attacks on the traditional mass media (specifically newspapers and television). Grillo's blog has called for "people's tribunals" to adjudicate on the alleged lies of the media. Whilst there are obviously periodic instances of both distortion and censorship in the Italian mainstream media, Grillo's increasing tendency to brand any criticism of M5S as a lie does not bode well for freedom of speech under an M5S government; needless to say, parallels with Mussolini, Stalin and, more immediately, the current Turkish government of Erdoğan have been drawn by print journalists.

Grillo's outburst is clearly in large measure a reaction against investigative journalism about Virginia Raggi's M5S administration in Rome - a matter to which I will return later in this article. However, it could also be seen as a response to attacks on the alleged prevalence of "fake news" on the web by leading establishment figures within the EU, including Giovanni Pitruzzella, the head of Italy's Antitrust (roughly Monopolies Commission), writing in the *Financial Times*.³ Although the potential dangers of judicial control of the web at either national or EU level are quite genuine, Grillo's response to it is not a rational one, let alone a principled libertarian position of the kind he might once have held before his alliance with the Casaleggio family, with their large digital empire.

Moreover, the notion that Grillo could be relied upon as a judge of "fake news" is ludicrous, given his endorsement of all sorts of bizarre opinions on medical and scientific



Beppe Grillo: blame migrants

questions. For years, Grillo denied the very existence of Aids (which, had he held political power, could have done enormous damage, as the notorious example of Thabo Mbeki in South Africa should remind us). Moreover, he has opposed vaccination against diphtheria, polio and hepatitis, and, in the past at least, supported the quackery of the notorious Di Bella method, by which fraudsters extracted huge sums from the families of the terminally ill. One of the regular stocks-in-trade of his stand-up performances used to be relentless attacks on Italy's most famous cancer specialist, whom he accused of being in the pay of tobacco and automobile companies. There does seem to be firm evidence that some poisonously fictitious anti-immigrant stories circulating on M5S websites originated from the Austrian and Italian far right, via the Russian website *Sputnik* - in particular the claim that the US state department was financing the human trafficking of migrants to Italy.

Code of conduct

The third major pronouncement of Grillo's at the start of the new year concerned a new code of conduct for M5S members and elected officials. The key point was that an M5S elected official receiving an *avviso di garanzia* (police statement of investigation) would not necessarily have to resign from his or her office. The "guarantor" (Beppe Grillo's official title, since M5S claims to have no leaders), in conjunction with the *Proibiviri* (a sort of appeals committee directly appointed by Grillo), would have complete discretion in the matter, depending on the precise circumstances of the case.

This very sudden shift in the M5S line on *avvisi di garanzia* was, of course, widely mocked by political opponents, given M5S's previous propensity to demand the immediate resignation of any elected official from the PD or the parties of the centre-right who had received one - usually accompanied by strident allegations of criminality on Grillo's blog, widely shared on the internet. The new code of conduct has been very widely labelled the 'Salva-Raggi' by analogy with Silvio Berlusconi's notorious 'Salva-Previti', the law that the ex-premier devised to keep his former defence minister out of prison. Given that Virginia Raggi, the M5S mayor of Rome, started her legal career in Previti's firm, the somewhat politically incorrect label of 'Salva-Previtigiri'⁴ given to the code by a *Repubblica* cartoonist seems justified satire.

It is increasingly likely that Raggi will receive an *avviso di garanzia* within the next few weeks. The first six months of the M5S administration of Rome under her leadership have been an unmitigated disaster. The city's rubbish crisis remains unresolved, even if the clearly unsuitable *assessore* (municipal cabinet member) Paola Muraro - the subject of a criminal investigation directly related to the treatment of rubbish even

before Raggi appointed her in June - finally resigned in early December, when her long-expected *avviso di garanzia* arrived. Nothing has been done to improve the city's inefficient public transport system - indeed this continues to decay, whilst reliance on the motor car has grown, despite frequent traffic jams, with the inevitable consequence of ever-increasing levels of air pollution. Significantly, some of the pedestrianisation begun by the last PD mayor, Ignazio Marino, has actually been reversed.

Nor is it just M5S's much trumpeted claim to be dedicated environmentalists, embedded in their founding programme, that has proved a dead letter. All Raggi's demagogic promises about balancing the heavily indebted city's books have proved equally empty, with the chief municipal accountant, Stefano Fermante, resigning in total despair in September, because of the impossibility of obtaining any accurate and transparent accounts from the new administration. Fermante's resignation was probably inevitable in the wake of the earlier resignation of Marcello Minenna, the *assessore* in charge of the budget, whose sincere attempt to carry out his role in a competent and honest fashion became impossible in the wake of obstruction from the clique surrounding Raggi - the so-called *Raggio Magico*.

By late December, the official auditors refused to approve the budget on technical grounds. Inevitably, M5S tried to allege political bias, but it is worth pointing out that the auditors praised its overall 'prudence' - in other words, it involved further cuts to municipal services. As the communist daily *Il Manifesto* pointed out, the M5S draft budget did not reject the austerity policies of the central government - in British terms, it was certainly not a 'needs budget' or a 'no-cuts budget'. The miserable and badly-lit municipal Christmas tree - which gave rise to unfavourable international press comment - symbolised Raggi's contempt for the Roman masses at a time when the extraordinarily inflated salaries paid to her close associates not only contradicted M5S's demagogic tirades against 'the cost of politics', but in some instances even drew an unfavourable verdict from ANAC, the national anti-corruption authority.

M5S's total failure to administer Italy's capital city should serve as a warning of the possible consequences of the demagogic gang of populists without much political experience gaining national office. Italy was lucky to escape the direct intervention of the troika in 2011, appalling as the neoliberal technocratic government of Mario Monti was - a country in the hands of M5S might not be so lucky.

However, the Roman fiasco is not simply a matter of incompetence and inexperience, of honest naivety on the part of political newcomers, as their apologists keep suggesting in *Il Fatto Quotidiano*. Whatever criticisms one

might make of other M5S mayors, like Filippo Nogarini in Livorno or Chiara Appendino in Turin, they do not have the shady background of Virginia Raggi, whose incomplete and carefully edited CV gave rise to controversy even during the Roman municipal election campaign. Those who claim that Raggi was too trusting in her choice of associates, and that the arrest on December 16 of Raffaele Marra, her right-hand man, initially promoted to deputy chief executive of the council and more recently appointed head of personnel, came as a bolt out of the blue, are deluded partisans at best, and thoroughly dishonest propagandists at worst.

The argument put forward by Travaglio and his colleagues on *Il Fatto* that the precise corruption offences for which the magistrates felt Marra needed to be held on remand had occurred prior to Raggi's triumph in 2014, and would be therefore have been unknown to her, is unconvincing. Marra's association with the leading Roman construction magnate, Sergio Scarpellini - initially arrested and imprisoned along with Marra, but now only under house arrest - continued over a substantial period of time. The massive discount given to Marra by Scarpellini on one property can no longer be the subject of legal action because of the statute of limitations, so the magistrates could only investigate the more recent matter of substantial cheques paid to Marra by Scarpellini to assist his purchase of another property.

What Raggi and her *Raggio Magico* (Marra, Daniele Frongia, Salvatore Romeo and Paola Muraro) represent is worse than merely the M5S falling into commonplace Italian political corruption and clientelism. The *Raggio Magico*'s collective actions represent a well-organised, systematic attempt to restore the power of the very sinister group associated with Gianni Alemanno, the hard-line, neo-fascist mayor of Rome, whose electoral triumph in 2008 was celebrated by dozens of ecstatic thugs openly giving the fascist salute in the very centre of the capital, and who subsequently doled out scores of municipal posts to neo-fascists with a violent and often terrorist past. Whilst Marra - also a close associate of Renata Polverini, the disgraced neo-fascist president of the Lazio region - was clearly the dominant figure in the *Raggio Magico*, Raggi is no innocent. Former PD mayor Ignazio Marino had done his best to undermine the hold of Alemanno's clients over the mayoral machine. For example, Marino installed honest and efficient characters at the head of the municipal police and the municipal rubbish company, both of whom were driven out of their posts within a few weeks of Raggi's inauguration.

Raggi's links with Marra were established during her days as an opposition councillor during the Marino administration. Daniele Frongia, the M5S deputy mayor until Mid-December 2016, when Grillo demanded his removal in the wake of Marra's arrest, seems to have been the link man between Marra and Raggi. It has been alleged that a book written by Frongia, prior to Raggi's election as mayor, attacking alleged malfeasance by the PD administration, was entirely reliant on Marra's systematic leaking of confidential municipal documents. Marra was moved away from roles connected with housing and planning by Marino (who was doubtless aware of Marra's dubious links with leading builders), and clearly saw M5S as offering him a way back to power

within the city hall.

'Rasputin'

And power he certainly had. Not for nothing was Marra nicknamed 'Rasputin' by conscientious members of the municipal staff, and even those M5S *assessori* trying to do their jobs in an honest fashion. Marra's nominal superior, Carla Raineri, the former council chief executive, found it impossible to discuss any matter of importance with Raggi face to face without Marra being present. Raineri was eventually dismissed by Raggi via Facebook in the middle of the night - a dismissal which led to her friend and colleague, Minenna, the *assessore* in charge of the budget, resigning on September 1.

The resignation of the chief municipal accountant has already been mentioned, and it is worth noting that the chief municipal legal officer also resigned when his advice casting doubt on the legitimacy of well-paid appointments by Raggi was ignored. Marra and Raggi have both denied that the appointment of Raffaele Marra's brother, Renato, as the head of the Roman tourist office at the time when Raffaele was head of personnel involved any conflict of interest.

Raggi claims to have rigorously scrutinised hundreds of CVs (on dates when she was on an official visit to Poland) and had not involved 'Rasputin' in the process in any way. This seems about as credible as the claim that her lunchtime meetings with Salvatore Romeo - until late December the head of her secretariat - took place on the roof of the city hall because she enjoyed looking at the magnificent view when eating her sandwiches.⁵ Although only one of these meetings was photographed - to the extreme embarrassment of the duo - Romeo, probably resentful of Grillo's purge and his own considerable drop in salary, now claims there were "at least 15" and that "from the second day" of the M5S administration he and Raggi were aware that the city hall offices were being bugged (which Raggi denies). Regardless of whether they were - a story that seems to have originated with Marra - they certainly behaved like conspirators, making a total mockery of M5S rhetoric about complete transparency.

Probably the best description of Raggi comes from Annalisa Taverna, the sister of M5S senator Paola Taverna, who is a consistent opponent of Raggi and Marra. Annalisa's post on social media addressing the mayor read: 'You seem to be Little Red Riding Hood, lost among the evil wolves. However, when you choose your collaborators against everything and everybody, you played the part of the Wolf brilliantly'⁶

Notes

1. Italy has been at the very top of European opinion poll surveys in terms of positive responses to statements like 'There are too many immigrants in our country', with the majority of those questioned agreeing. The surveys place Italy ahead not only of the UK, but even of France, where the Front National is stronger than at any time in the past. Despite governmental pleas to Italian local authorities to take reasonable numbers, the distribution of migrants within Italy has been made much more uneven by obstruction from rightwing mayors and, occasionally, by local pogroms - generally either sparked or supported by the Lega Nord and far-right groups like CasaPound and Forza Nuova.
2. A general election is due in February 2018 at the latest, and is more likely to be held later this year, once a new electoral law is agreed.
3. www.ft.com/content/e7280576-cdde-11e6-864f-20deb35ced2.
4. Virginia Raggi is now 38 and, even given the Italian tendency to describe women under 30 as *ragazze* (girls), could not be regarded as a 'girl'.
5. Frongia's claim that Raggi and Romeo had to meet there because Romeo is a heavy smoker is slightly more plausible.
6. *La Repubblica* January 3 2017.

REVIEWS

Reason in revolt

Paul Flowers and John McIlroy (editors) *1956: John Saville, EP Thompson and The Reasoner* Merlin Press, 2016, pp450, £20

The events of 1956 still have the power to strike fear into the hearts of Stalinists - or what this publication generally calls 'official communists'.

The *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain has a small history group that was due, last year, to deliver an analysis of the impact of the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 on the old 'official' Communist Party of Great Britain. Alas, for those who enjoy these happy anniversaries, the CPB tells us that this epic tome "has been very roughly completed for some time, but is now held back".¹ We can well imagine why the CPB would wish to avoid exploring this particular episode, since it is split between those unreconstructed types who probably still pine for the thought of Soviet tanks storming down Charing Cross Road; and others of a more agnostic stripe, who realise that holding on to the Stalinist tropes of the past is merely a signpost to everlasting obscurity. Luckily, we are not likely to miss the CPB's musings much, given the arrival of this excellent work of scholarship at the back end of 2016.

Nikita Khrushchev's speech to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956 denounced Joseph Stalin's criminal role in the mass purges of the 1930s and criticised the "cult of personality" surrounding his former leader. These revelations were enough to send 'official communism' spinning into crisis, given that this was the movement that had deified Stalin across the world. The Soviet Union's military crushing of a nationwide revolt against Stalinist rule in Hungary compacted this crisis further, as the movement then had to come to terms with a brand of 'socialism' that required the brutal suppression of the masses.

Britain was no different to the general rule and a section of the CPGB went into rebellion against its leadership, with some of this opposition being funnelled through the open publication of a dissident journal, *The Reasoner*, led by two socialist historians: John Saville and EP Thompson. This volume includes the text of all three issues of *The Reasoner* alongside other relevant CPGB materials and also offers two essays by John McIlroy (an introductory

essay and another on John Saville); and one by Paul Flowers (on EP Thompson). In general, I agree with the editors' conclusion about Thompson and Saville, which is that, ultimately, neither was able to completely break with Stalinism or shed their illusions about periods of CPGB history such as popular frontism. *The Reasoner* was the start of a revolt, but it was thus unable to move beyond appearances and analyse Stalinism's 'laws of motion', so to speak.

Factionalism

This point can be well illustrated by *The Reasoner's* attitude to factions and factionalism. There are some rather good passages that flesh out the need for rebellion, including, of course, open criticism and debate, and the production of journals *outside* the parameters of the bureaucratic centralist rules being determinedly upheld by the CPGB's sclerotic leadership:

We believe [wrote the editors of *The Reasoner* in the first issue] that the self-imposed restrictions upon controversy, the "guiding" of discussions along approved lines, the actual suppression of sharp criticism - all these have led to a gradual blurring of theoretical clarity, and to the encouragement among some communists of attitudes akin to intellectual cynicism, when it has been easier to allow this or that false proposition to go by than to embark upon the tedious and frustrating business of engaging with bureaucratic editorial habits and general theoretical inertia (p137).

There was an *open* debate going on in the CPGB's official publications in 1956, in line with its general practice down the years. However, as figures such as Thompson found in 1956, debates were subject to an arbitrary guillotine and any controversy was always likely to be framed by 'authoritative' introductions and conclusions by leading figures. This was not a level playing field and the CPGB's journals and its bureaucratic centralism were weapons wielded by the leadership *faction*. I do not have space to go into the origins of this culture here, but it is obviously the offspring of the early Comintern, where, even in the process of 'Bolshevisation' in the mid-1920s, aspirations to a militarised 'ideological unanimity' among its national sections were partially offset by limited notions of 'freedom of criticism' and ideas of 'mass' communist parties.

Thompson and Saville found a neat solution to this problem of 'openness with restrictions' by publishing independently of the CPGB leadership and thus making the ideological playing field much more level. As one might expect, very little of the dour Stalinist cant emanating from the likes of Harry Pollitt, George Matthews and Rajani Palme Dutt kept its credibility for very long in the more robust critique emerging in the pages of *The Reasoner*.

Thompson's and Saville's behaviour was factional (it was understood as

such by the CPGB bureaucracy) and it was a serious one in the sense that a scheme was evolved to pass down the baton of editorship to other sets of party members, as the inevitable disciplinary processes set in. However, *The Reasoner* denied it was a faction or a factional organ. Some of this was clearly defensive, such as when Saville and Thompson went up before the CPGB's political committee on August 31 1956 and denied they were engaged in factional activity, as this involved a difference in policy and approach that the two editors claimed - somewhat strangely - not to have (p249). For its part, the CPGB had always banned factions and disciplined those who took part in them. By not establishing a clear intellectual case for the right of factions to exist, all that *The Reasoner* really did was to partially empower the permanent leadership faction that sat atop the CPGB. This was another 'official communist' inheritance in its inability to advance beyond the immediate, or anecdotal.

Unfortunately, such an inheritance has lived on into today's left. After the Socialist Workers Party's recent travails in 2013, we had the bizarre spectacle of comrades who had organised a bitter factional struggle inside that organisation, and who had been on the receiving end from their own permanent leadership faction, talking about ... the evils of permanent factionalism. Quite how rank-and-file comrades are meant to defend themselves against bullies such as 'comrade Delta', the unlamented product of a long-term culture of organised contempt for the membership, is never quite explained by these wiseacres.

McIlroy's first essay - 'Communist intellectuals and 1956: John Saville, Edward Thompson and *The Reasoner*' (pp1-49) - is particularly good at knocking down some of the more ridiculous theories that have grown up around CPGB intellectuals in the post-war era. According to one apparently serious historian, the party "emerged from the Second World War with a thriving intellectual life" and showed "evidence of a sort of pluralism, and certainly of critical thought, that most subversive of things".² This, as you might guess, was emphatically not the estimation of the comrades grouped around *The Reasoner*. In fact, as McIlroy explains, much of the intellectual work of the CPGB in the immediate post-war period was more about the exegesis of existing texts and ideas than in formulating theories to explain and intervene in the outside world (a culture that persisted into the 1960s and 1970s, according to people educated by the CPGB in that era). Occasional debate there certainly was, particularly in the cultural sphere, but this material nearly always has a certain dry quality to it, which is usually evidence of a formalistic approach. And, of course, the parameters of such debate were tight. Any bright sparks who wanted to, say, investigate the political economy of the Soviet Union or analyse the CPGB's evolving attitude to the Labour Party would be given short shrift by the leadership.

However, one thing that McIlroy perhaps misses is some of the peculiarity of intellectual life inside the CPGB in the post-war period. For example, a few years ago I investigated the 'Caudwell controversy' of 1950-51, a public debate that the CPGB conducted around the work of writer and cultural

theorist Christopher Caudwell (1907-37).³ In this debate, party writers used some of the crude cultural theories of Soviet leader Andrei Zhdanov (1896-1948) to seemingly express much more immediate political concerns in what was a divided and disaggregating party. In one sense that meant the Soviet ideology was somewhat weakened, in that it was being used to express something not directly related to it (in other words, this material was not being written for the love, if there could be such a thing, of Zhdanov); on the other, it was given more power as a suffocating blanket, through which inner-party debate had to be immediately filtered, so as to gain currency in the world of 'official communism'. But in either sense the use of these Soviet theories does have a brittle quality and a certain air of unreality.

Maoism and Trotskyism

I do have issues with some of the formulations that Paul Flowers uses in his otherwise excellent essay on 'EP Thompson and the Soviet experience'. First, I think that calling Maoism "merely the ideological expression of a rival Stalinist state, another form of Stalinism, another form of state-worship" (p411) is just silly and reductive, even as an admittedly small aside. That kind of labelling may be more pertinent to some of the oddities that had evolved by the 1970s and 1980s, but British 'Maoism', as it emerged inside the CPGB in the 1960s, seems to me to be using the Sino-China dispute in order to make sense of the 'anti-revisionist' struggle inside its own 'revisionist' host. These 'anti-revisionists' made some illuminating criticisms of the CPGB's development in the post-war period. Certainly, these groups had a ruinous ideological inheritance from Chinese and other sources (the so-called 'two-line struggle' and so on) that I have detailed elsewhere,⁴ but there is a pronounced similarity between their emergence and development with that of *The Reasoner*.

While *The Reasoner* had at least begun to unravel some of the threads of Stalinism and what had gone wrong in the Soviet Union, there seems to have been little real attempt to understand how that had spread downwards into the more prosaic day-to-day activity of the CPGB. Early 'anti-revisionist' groups offered the same predicament in reverse: groups such as the Committee to Defeat Revisionism, For Communist Unity did make a good analysis of the CPGB's programme, *The British road to socialism*, and of the failures of the CPGB's trade union work. However, no attempt was made to understand the emergence of Stalinism and, worse, Stalin, in line with Chinese predilections, became a totem of 'anti-revisionism'. But reducing this to a simple rubric of 'Stalinism' is not much help in analysing groups that had critiqued some of the

practical forms that Stalinism had taken in Britain. These opposites really should not hold any conceptual terrors for Marxists.

Flowers' analysis does raise a question of why more CPGB members did not join up with the Trotskyists in 1956 and why figures such as Thompson did not gravitate to the movement. Flowers is incorrect, I think, when he suggests that this could be because of a perceived difference between Trotskyism and Trotskyists (p414). This appears to suggest that Trotskyism is a sound body of ideas for prosecuting the class struggle and analysing Stalinism, but the Trotskyist groups and individuals who carry those ideas are posturing, anti-democratic, morbid souls incapable of becoming a true pole of attraction.

I would draw a different distinction between the works and actions of Trotsky himself and Trotskyism as a movement. Trotsky, in his best moments, was a font of creativity, supple intellectual thoughts, brilliant writing and breathtaking feats of leadership. Unfortunately, very little of this culture passed over into the movement that took Trotsky's name and I do not believe Trotskyism should be equated with Trotsky at all. Trotskyism, in general, is merely the works and actions of Trotsky frozen into dogma. In fact, perhaps the only thing that Trotskyism really achieved was to keep the name and writings of Trotsky open to future generations (an unambiguously good thing).

From talking to activists from the left of the 'official' CPGB in its last three decades who had become involved in *The Leninist* and other similar groupings it is clear to me that this line of demarcation had some force: there was a relative openness to Trotsky as a historical figure (many of the calumnies of the 1930s had been replaced by simple curiosity), but Trotskyism was seen to be extremely flawed, weighed down with fixed categories and with 'party' regimes even worse than that of the old CPGB. This went beyond sceptical thoughts about the behaviour of Healyites.

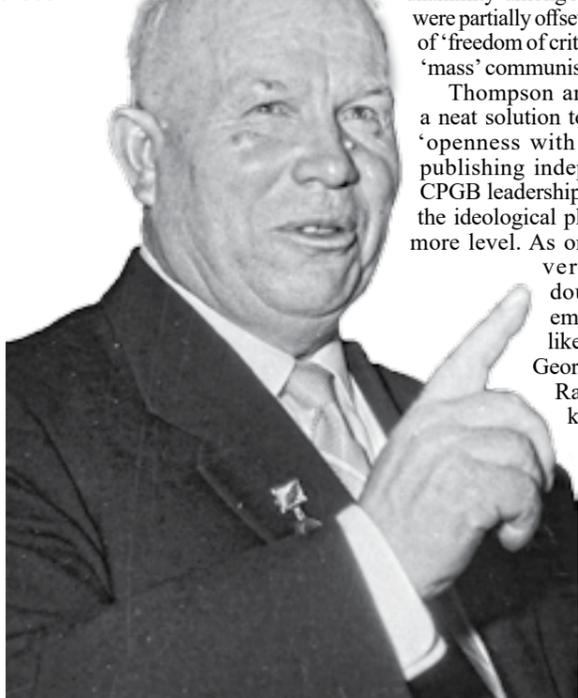
Sometimes this point is not well understood by modern-day Trotskyists. Critical members of the crisis-ridden CPGB in the 1950s, 1960s and later did not look on British Trotskyism as any kind of lifejacket. but, perhaps unconsciously, as another marker of crisis ●

Lawrence Parker

Notes

1. CPB executive committee *Report of work to the 54th Congress* November 2016.
2. J Callaghan *Rajani Palme Dutt: a study in British Stalinism* London 1993, p264.
3. L Parker, 'Arts and minds: reconsidering the Caudwell controversy' *Socialist History* No47, London 2015, pp45-63.
4. L Parker, 'Opposition in slow motion: the CPGB's "anti-revisionists" in the 1960s and 1970s' in E Smith and M Worley (eds) *Against the grain: the British far left from 1956* Manchester 2014, pp98-114.

Nikita Khrushchev: unleashed a storm



1956 and the CPGB opposition

London Communist Forum

Sunday February 5, 5pm

Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1

Paul Flowers introduces the new book, *1956: John Saville, EP Thompson and 'The Reasoner'*, of which he is co-editor

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

Apples and pears

James Ensor exhibition, Royal Academy of Arts, ends January 29

Robert Rauschenberg exhibition, Tate Modern, ends April 2

I am going to argue that the work of two artists - the Belgian, James Ensor, and the American, Robert Rauschenberg - currently being exhibited at the Royal Academy and Tate Modern respectively, is part of the same apple (ie, art), which, at least in general terms, is in an advanced state of decay or already dead. So it is not a case of trying to compare apples with pears!

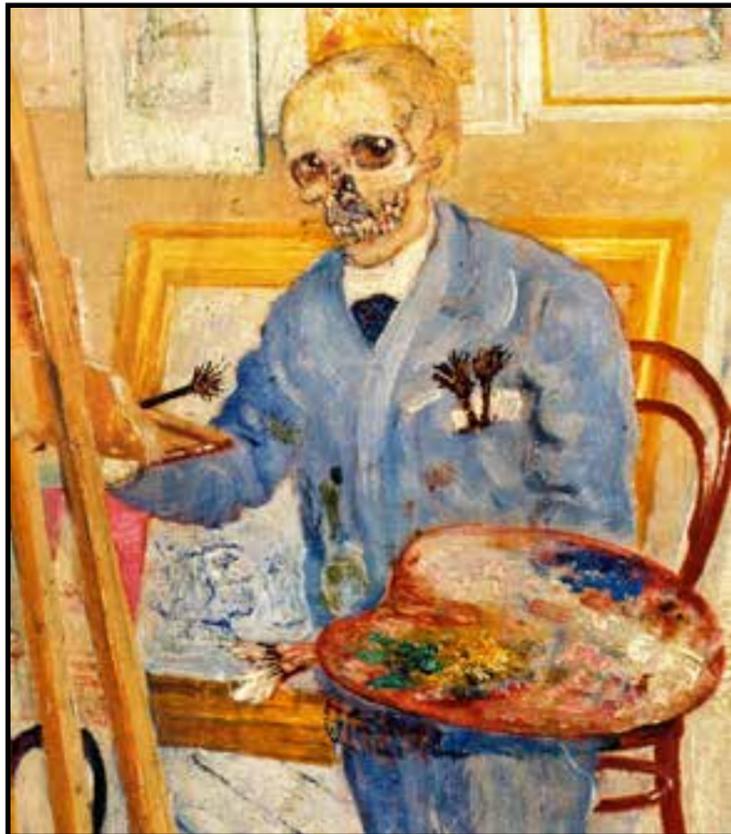
Those who argue the latter would point out the obvious fact that these two artists lived at different times, in different countries, under different circumstances and influences. Of course, this is true. Yet both have this much in common: they produced art objects (although Rauschenberg also resorted to multi-media as well as performance art). These were bought and sold to unknown consumers via the art market. Therefore the work of both, regardless of quality, were turned into commodities. Eventually they ended up in private collections or in a public art gallery. At the same time, their work has been written about by art critics and historians. In this sense, art is an entity; it therefore has a history.

Ensor did most of his work in the 1890s. But he lived for another four decades and died in 1949, one year after Rauschenberg started working. The anarchist, Ensor, would later accept the title of baron from the regime which he once despised. But he started out as a member of a European symbolist movement, which emerged in the late 19th century. His paintings were also inspired by a tradition going back to Bruegel and Bosch, via Delacroix. He wanted to objectify his own subjectivity as the author of a piece of work, in order to satirise society and especially the establishment. He has a definite style based around his use of grotesque images, such as masks and skeletons, and carnival themes.

Perhaps Ensor's best known work is his large painting called *Christ's entry into Brussels* (1889 - not shown in this exhibition). Apart from Christ himself, in unmistakable gold, the other striking feature about this painting is a large, blood-red banner with the words, "Long live socialism" on it. Arguably, this is Ensor's answer to Delacroix's *Liberty leading the people* - although he is also alluding to the notion that Belgium's Christian establishment would have treated Christ in the same way that he was by the Pharisees.

Equally impressive is his *Skeletons fighting for the body of the hanged man*, painted a few years later. Here we have a combination of Boschian horror and absurdity. But at the same time it introduces elements from everyday life, such as the second-hand look of the clothes worn by the skeletons, whereas the hanged man's coat looks like something worn by a ward doctor; the bare floorboards remind one of an old school room. The hanged man also wears a sign around his neck, which says "Civet" (which might suggest that he has produced a similar odour to that of a wild cat, as a consequence of his barbaric execution: ie, legalised murder?). On the other hand, his staring eyes are a vivid blue, which is disturbing to the viewer.

As the art critic, TJ Clark, says, "No theatre of cruelty has ever been provided with a less glamorous stage."¹ In other words, Ensor paints with feeling, as well as skill. One really needs to see his work first hand,



James Ensor, 'The skeleton painter' (c1896)

in order to appreciate its power.

Exploited

Unlike Ensor, Rauschenberg produced work for nearly six decades. Whereas Ensor accepted honours from the very establishment which he claimed to despise, Rauschenberg was exploited by art dealers and the New York art establishment on more than one occasion. As his friend, the late Robert Hughes, relates in his film *The Mona Lisa curse* (2010), during the 1970s, an art dealer bought one of Rauschenberg's pop-art paintings for a few hundred dollars and then sold it for nearly a quarter of a million. (This was prior to the art boom of the 1980s, so the figures might seem modest by comparison; but the mark-up is not!)

Twenty years later the New York art world turned its back on Rauschenberg, despite the fact that (a) he had started to produce screen prints before Andy Warhol got the same idea; and (b) he was also a founder member of the pop art movement. Perhaps this rejection had something to do with the fact that during the 1980s he abandoned the New York art scene for the island paradise of Captiva off the Florida coast. At the same time, he began to focus on social and environmental issues. For example, he sold much of his own work to fund a humanitarian project, based on cultural exchange between people in 11 different countries. Although it was a mere gesture, he said it was intended to "stop some of the stupidities that are controlling us".²

But what does nearly six decades of work amount to? In retrospect, Rauschenberg appears to have been a restless soul, shifting from one project to another. Perhaps he was motivated by innovation for its own sake, which sometimes borders on nihilism *vis-à-vis* the art object; ostensibly to minimise authorship, elevate the role of chance (via found objects) or for the sake of collaboration with other artists. But, by so doing, he contributed to the de-aestheticisation of the art object, by promoting the cognitive approach

at the expense of the affective; hence his predilection for conceptualism. (Arguably his experiment with collaborative performance art does not compensate for this.)

In the 1950s Rauschenberg was able to acquire his own studio in New York. There he produced his *White and Black Paintings*, to be followed later by his *Elemental Sculptures*. According to the critic, Hal Foster,

The Whites appear pristine, empty, flat and serial; the Blacks rough, full, encrusted and singular ... [They] insist on objecthood ... After two *White Paintings* were exhibited in 1953, [the composer John] Cage offered this litany: "No subject/No image/No taste/No object/No beauty/No message/No talent/No technique (no why)/No idea/No intention/No art/No feeling/No black/No white (no and) ..."³

Yet later Cage himself would indulge in the same sort of conceit. I refer, of course to his 'celebrated' work *4'53"* (ie, four minutes, 53 seconds), a piece composed for piano, which requires the performer to sit in silence - "nothing is played for that exact duration".

As for Rauschenberg's *Elemental Sculptures*, one example consists of an old quilt, which he has painted over, making it look like a representation of a bed. It was slammed by the media of the time (1955) and rejected by the masses; which defeated his purpose: ie, to make art more 'inclusive'. Foster goes on to say that they are "not charged *trouvailles* [lucky finds] in the manner of the surrealists; but neither are they cynical ready-mades in the mode of Duchamp; they resist the surrender of post-war sculpture to the logic of the sexual fetish or the commodity fetish". On the other hand, Rauschenberg's goat entering a tyre is alleged by some critics to be a homoerotic image (?). Foster concludes that the *Elementals* "reception was largely hostile; for the most part Rauschenberg was understood as neo-Dada and neo-Dada as anti-art."⁴

This is a reasonable criticism. But Foster is determined to impose a postmodern intellectual gloss to the question of ready-mades anyway, opining that, *à la* Duchamp - and Rauschenberg's own efforts - this is not intended to be anti-art. Rather it points to "the complication of authorship through strategies of chance and collaboration"⁵! (How so? Surely it depends on the intention and the skill of the artist - as long as we do not buy into this postmodern nonsense!)

So much for the "neo-avant garde as represented by Rauschenberg and friends", who are "no simple repetition of the models of the historical avant garde" (Foster) - although there is barely a mention of the Russian avant garde, apart from Malevich. Thus the question arises, given Rauschenberg's downgrading of the art object, based on the unity of form and content, does one really need to see such work in a gallery? This is because he often relies on the materiality of the work itself and nothing more. That is the problem with conceptual art: it has minimal emotional impact. Thus, unlike Ensor's, his work does not really have to be seen to be appreciated.

In this sense, he was a victim of his time and place. New York did not become the centre of the art world in the 1950s. Rather it became the centre for the rapid decay of art. As Hughes says at the end of his 2010 film, "When Rauschenberg died in 2008, this coincided with the death of art itself. Every formal choice he made came from meeting the world head-on" (eg, his famous pop-art collage of topical images, ranging from spacemen juxtaposed with the dead president Kennedy).

According to Hughes, his work was

dense with meaning [Surely not all of it - maybe sometimes he was just joking?]; not just a vacuous exercise in picture-making meant to catch the eye of the men who run Sotherby's or Christies ... [rather] born of experience, not the market. Today's art mirrors and criticises decadence. Not so - it's just decadence, period. Contemporary art [citing Damien Hirst and Warhol before him] has no critical function. The art world is part of the problem; because it copies our money-driven, celebrity-obsessed culture with the same obedience to the mass media, which is always jostling for our attention. But art should make us feel more clearly and more intelligently. It should give us more coherent sensations than otherwise we would have had ... This is what the market cult is killing ... If art can't tell us about the world, what good is it? Monetised art = the death of art.⁵

Although Rauschenberg is to be applauded for turning his back on all this, he did not always live up to his friend's idea of what art is all about. And, like all art, both good and bad, his work ends up as a commodity - its value is determined by the price tag that goes with it.

Perhaps Rauschenberg was a better person than he was an artist ●

Rex Dunn

Notes

1. *London Review of Books* December 1 2016.
2. Alistair Sooke *Pop art pioneer* BBC2, December 10 2016.
3. *London Review of Books* December 1 2016. These extracts are taken from an essay in the catalogue of the Rauschenberg exhibition at the Tate Modern.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Robert Hughes, from his film, *The Mona Lisa curse*.

■ 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

Boycotts and resignations are mistaken

Stay and fight the battle of ideas

Despite widespread outrage over the Lansman coup, there is little appetite to split Momentum, says **Carla Roberts** of Labour Party Marxists

Momentum branches, groups and committees up and down the country have come out openly against the Lansman coup of January 10. Labour Party Marxists is publishing statements and motions as and when they are being released.¹

Not surprisingly, most Momentum activists are utterly appalled by the crass way in which the February 18 conference has been rendered impotent, all democratic decision-making bodies have been abolished and a new anti-democratic constitution imposed by Jon Lansman and his allies. But, as can be expected, there is huge confusion on how to best move forward.

On January 13, the (abolished) conference arrangements committee released a statement (with the three Lansman allies on the committee not voting), according to which: "The CAC takes its direction from Momentum's national committee, as per the original remit we were given. Until that body meets and informs us our role has changed, we will continue working towards Momentum's first conference."

A provisional date of March 11 for "the postponed conference" has been mooted. The statement rigidly sticks to the CAC's initial brief, according to which the committee will accept only "one motion" from each branch and "one motion or constitutional amendment" from each region. The committee "advises" that the national committee should meet, as previously planned, on January 28 in London.

Clearly, the CAC statement was written shortly after the coup, when people were still very sore and very angry. And at the time many were probably up for the kind of action they are actually proposing here: a split. Of course, within Momentum, it is simply impossible to wrest power out of Lansman's hands - that was the case before the coup and is now even more so. He set up the various companies that control Momentum's finances and its huge database. And, crucially, he has got the support of Jeremy Corbyn.

However, it has become quite clear in recent days that very few Momentum members, let alone branches, are up for that kind of fight. And it would be a massive undertaking: anybody splitting would be hugely disadvantaged and would have to start again from ground zero. Without the money, contacts and the database.

The CAC seems to have changed its mind, too. It looks more and more likely that the January 28 meeting will become not so much a meeting of the (abolished) NC, but the kind of event that the Alliance for Workers' Liberty is pushing for: a "local groups network" within Momentum.²

Fearful of a split, AWL members have been keen to tone down statements in branches and it is interesting that the left minority of the steering committee (which comprises AWL member Jill Mountford, AWL supporter Michael Chessum, Fire Brigades Union president Matt Wrack and Jackie Walker) has gone very quiet too, although apparently it continues to meet.³

The biggest problem for the opposition is its lack of a clear political alternative.



Voting for anything ... but Lansman will always win

The CAC was searching for some middle ground with Lansman. Its preferred constitution - drafted by Nick Wrack and Matt Wrack - had all the problems of Lansman's: referendums, direct election of officers and mimicking student unions, trade unions and the Labour Party itself.

Given the absence of a well-organised and politically principled left, the idea of challenging the Lansman coup head-on was never realistic. But that does not mean we should give up the fight for the hearts and minds of Momentum's 20,000 or the 200,000 on its database. True, quite a number of people - for example, Nick Wrack - have talked about resigning or have already left Momentum. This level of frustration and impatience is understandable, but also short-sighted.

There have been huge democratic deficits within Momentum right from the start. Ever since Corbyn collected enough nominations to stand in the leadership election, he and his allies had to play catch-up. They had no idea what to do with the tens of thousands of people enthused by his campaign who wanted to get more involved. Momentum was badly thought-out and badly executed.

One thing is for sure, however: it was never the intention of Jon Lansman to allow Momentum to become a democratic organisation that would allow members to decide on its constitution or policies. That was obvious right from the start.

After all, such an organisation could easily embarrass Jeremy Corbyn by publishing statements that were not to the liking of the Labour right. For example, calling for the mandatory selection of parliamentary candidates (which was of course, until very recently, the position of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, of which Corbyn is a

member) would scupper the illusion of a 'peace settlement' within the party.

But any organisation that cannot trust its membership is unlikely to be able to mobilise them ... even as spear carriers. The danger is that Momentum will soon become little more than an empty husk. But for now, Labour Party Marxists will continue to work in Momentum while any life in it remains. We will do so with a view to spreading our vision of what Labour needs to be.

Demands for boycotting Momentum - crucially the February 18 'conference' organised by team Lansman and the elections to the new 'national coordination group' (NCG) are mistaken. There is no reason to impose isolation upon ourselves. Indeed we should use every opportunity, every avenue to spread the ideas of Marxism. True, Momentum's new constitution is a travesty of democracy. But the same can be said of the United Kingdom constitution, with its hereditary head of state, unelected second chamber and 'first past the post' elections to the lower house, which leave minority parties massively underrepresented. Nevertheless, it is right to stand in parliamentary contests.

Of course, the left should organise and debate the road ahead - first on January 28 and then March 11 (perhaps). That can involve electing delegates from Momentum branches. But there should also be a conscious effort to involve the groups and fractions committed to working in the Labour Party: the Labour Representation Committee, Red Labour, *The Clarion*, *Red Flag*, Labour Party Socialist Network, *Socialist Appeal* and, of course, Labour Party Marxists.

Such a conference should establish a Momentum opposition and a politically

representative steering committee. Obviously there can be no hope of winning a majority on Momentum's NCG. Jon Lansman has ensured that he will enjoy a permanent stranglehold: a maximum of 12 people on this body (which will have between 27 and 34 members) will be elected by Momentum members - the rest being filled by unions, affiliates, MPs and other "elected representatives".

And it is far from certain that the 12 will be made up of leftwingers - for example, Lee Jasper is one of the 17 who has already thrown his hat into the ring.⁴ Ken Livingstone's race relations quango chief has the undeniable advantage of having name recognition. Ditto Paul Mason or Owen Jones, should they decide to stand or be persuaded by Lansman and Corbyn to do so.

In any case, the Momentum opposition can link up branches, organise joint action and fight for more space for leftwing ideas in Momentum.

To be a member or not?

There is some dispute over the status of all those left Momentum members who have been expelled from the Labour Party for political reasons: Nick Wrack, for example, Tony Greenstein and a whole lot of members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

The key point in the constitution, point 5.8, states that "Any member who does not join the Labour Party by July 1 2017, or ceases to be a member of the Labour Party, or acts inconsistently with Labour Party membership, may be deemed to have resigned."⁵

Labour NEC member Christine Shawcroft - Jon Lansman's successor as director of the company Momentum Data Services Ltd, which controls the vast database of the organisation - assures us on Facebook that this

does *not* mean expulsions. 5.8 says if anyone ceases to be a member of the party they *may* be deemed to have resigned. Not *will*, but *may* ... Even if we were to take action under 5.8, the member will have a right of appeal under 5.10. So there is no witch-hunt, no expulsions (well, only under very unusual circumstances, we hope).

Some hope. "Christine speaks with forked tongue", writes Jackie Walker on Facebook. She is right. The new rules are actually very clear:

- Those expelled by the LP for political reasons can appeal to the Momentum NCG to be allowed to remain/become members of Momentum" (rule 5.10⁶).

- But even if those are allowed to become Momentum members, they will not be allowed to take up elected positions, either on the national coordinating committee (rule 6.2⁷) or in local groups (rule 12.7⁸).

The current formulation, centring on the word "may", means that we will basically have to wait and see how *actively* those expelled by Labour for political reasons will be hounded out of Momentum. The Momentum office has assured members that they will do no such thing. That begs the question as to why these rules have been put in the constitution in the first place.

They are not there to prepare Momentum for affiliation to the Labour Party, as has been claimed. Members of affiliated organisations - eg, trade unions and socialist societies - do not need to be members of the Labour Party. Instead, they are entitled to become "affiliated members" of Labour.

No, these rules are clearly there to get rid of troublemakers from the left, as and when the need arises. It is never a good sign when rules are written in a way that leaves them open to interpretation. Needless to say, the interpreting will not be done by anybody appealing to the kangaroo court run by the NCG, but the "judges".

And if you have indeed managed to convince the judges that you are worthy of Momentum membership, you might still be thrown out for being "a member of an organisation disallowed by the NCG"⁹ •

Notes

1. <http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk/momentum-branches-protest-against-the-coup>.
2. www.workersliberty.org/node/27459.
3. *Ibid*.
4. <https://order-order.com/2017/01/18/male-shortlist-momentum-internal-elections>.
5. <https://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/momentum/pages/939/attachments/original/1484079394/momentum-constitution.pdf?1484079394>.
6. "Where a member may be deemed to have resigned in accordance with rules 5.7, 5.8 or 5.9 there will be a right to be heard by the NCG or a delegated panel before a final decision is made."
7. "The NCG shall consist of Momentum members who confirm (and can provide evidence on request) that they are current Labour Party members."
8. "Anyone who stands for office, such as chair or secretary, in a group or network shall be a member of the Labour Party and in the event that they cease to be a member of the Labour Party within their term of office, they are deemed to have resigned such office."
9. Point 5.1.ii in the constitution.

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