

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly



worker



Momentum: Matt Wrack leads resistance to coup

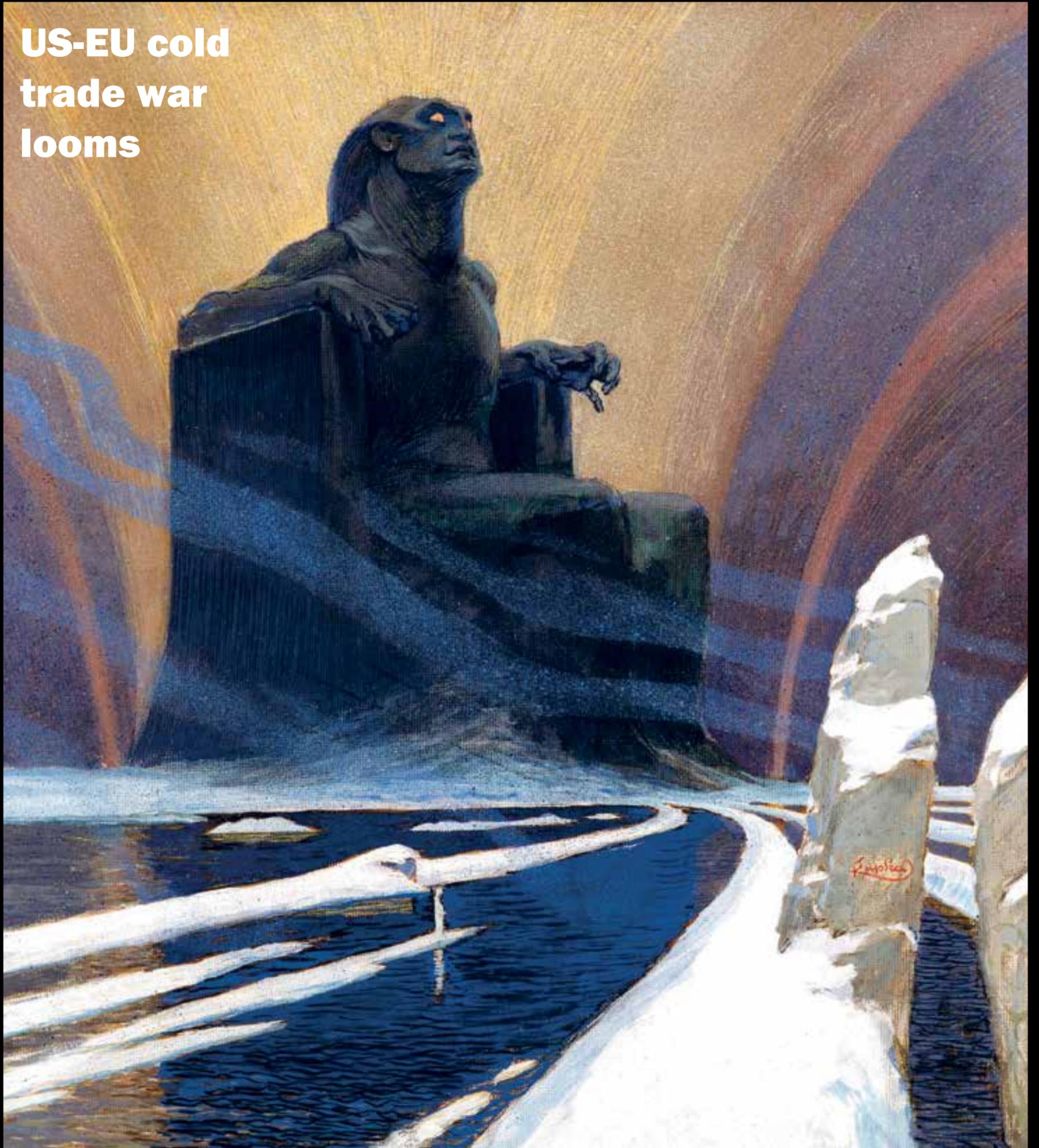
- Letters and debate
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No 1140 Thursday February 2 2017

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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US-EU cold trade war looms



LETTERS



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

Attack on left

A group of parliamentary deputies of the Freiheitliche Partei (FPÖ) around MP David Lasar has proposed an official inquiry in the Austrian parliament. In this inquiry, the deputies of the FPÖ - an extreme rightwing party, which got 20.5% at the last national election and is currently leading the polls - accuse the Austrian section of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency, as well as the leading organisation of Egyptian migrants, of "leftwing extremism", "anti-Semitism" and "radical Islamism". As a consequence, they ask the federal ministry of the interior to officially investigate the two organisations.

The FPÖ justifies its inquiry by referring to the anti-racist demonstration on November 26 2016 and the role which the contingent of the Austrian section - together with our allied migrant organisations - played there. As we reported at that time, Muslim migrants who participated in our contingent - which was the largest at the demonstration and had many migrants from Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Iran and other countries in its ranks - were physically attacked by hard-core pro-Zionist people from the Black Bloc (so-called 'Anti-Germans').

As concrete evidence for their smear, these rightwing deputies refer to our pro-Palestinian slogans at the demonstration (like "Freedom for Palestine" or "Israel and US are mocking human rights"), to Arabic slogans directed against the Egypt military dictatorship (concretely, Lasar is referring to the slogans, "Down with the military dictatorship" and "The people want to overthrow the regime"), as well as the use of the R4BIA symbol (in memory of the thousands who were killed demonstrating in Rabia Square on August 14 2013).

The rightwing extremists of the FPÖ, led by HC Strache, are well known for their militant Islamophobic and anti-refugee hate campaign. They also call for an increase in the monitoring and repression directed against revolutionary organisations and Muslim migrant forces. They have close relations to the Russian Putin regime and are fanatical supporters of Israel.

David Lasar, the initiator of the parliamentary inquiry, is a prominent member of the party. He is the official contact person for the Israeli state and has built many links to the extreme rightwing parties dominating the Israeli government. He is also a prominent member of the Zionist federation in Austria and tries to help his party in overcoming its historic image as anti-Semitic. It is symbolic for the reactionary character of the party, as well as Lasar himself, that in summer 2011 he personally went to Libya during the popular uprising to meet - in a show of solidarity with the reactionary dictatorship - Gaddafi's son.

With the victory of Trump, it is clear that extreme reactionary forces like the FPÖ feel encouraged to push for an increase in state repression against revolutionary organisations, as well as Muslim migrant forces. This parliamentary inquiry is only the latest and most significant attack which the Austrian section of the RCIT has experienced during the past few years. We are not surprised by these attacks, as we are raising our voice and are participating in many practical solidarity activities with various migrant organisations. It is a result of our unambiguous revolutionary opposition against imperialist wars and occupation, as well as against racism and Islamophobia. These latest events will only strengthen our determination.

We call on all progressive forces to show their solidarity with us by protesting against the rightwing parliamentary inquiry and to reject any legal measures by the Austrian state against the RCIT or the Egyptian migrant organisations.

Revolutionary Communist International Tendency
www.thecommunists.net

Inexcusable

Is it an inexcusable error of political judgment on the part of president Donald Trump, or simply a silly mistake, that he didn't include the UK on his list of 'banned' countries likely to be a source of terrorist individuals? The populations of those countries are now to be the subject of "extreme vetting".

OK, so we're not "predominantly Islamic", but we do have a certain Jack Straw both resident and prominent within our shores. Of course, he's the chap accused of being involved in a conspiracy with

MI6 and the CIA to commit acts of state terrorism; acts such as illegal kidnap, torture and criminal denial of basic human rights, specifically in relation to Abdul-Hakim Belhaj and his wife, Fatima Boudchar.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but surely Trump and his alt-rightist co-reptiles don't want Jack Straw or indeed any others of his kind, such as Tony Blair, wandering around freely in the USA and thus putting the lives of wholly innocent American citizens severely at risk.

Or am I unaware of some finer considerations, comrades? Am I missing some obscure point here? Ridiculous, I know, but possibly something connected to that other presidential 'executive order' simultaneously signed by Trump - the one about "rebuilding the military" with "new planes, new ships, tools and resources"?

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

LRC appeals

The following letters have been sent to the Labour Representation Committee:

"Dear LRC national committee comrades,

I wish to appeal against the disaffiliation from the Labour Representation Committee of the Irish Republican Prisoners Support Group.

The organisation has successfully moved motions in defence of the civil rights of republican prisoners for several years. These motions were passed with the support of John McDonnell and other leftwing MPs and only those most pro-imperialist groups and individuals opposed. Just this past weekend (January 27-30) we sent a delegation of nine members and supporters to Derry for the 45th anniversary of the state massacre of 14 innocent victims on a peaceful march in 1972. This followed the interdiction of internment in August 1971, the massive torture of republicans and the random killings in the Ballymurphy massacre - a series of incidents involving the killing of 11 civilians by the 1st Battalion, Parachute Regiment of the British Army in Ballymurphy, Belfast, during Operation Demetrius. The shootings have also been called 'Belfast Bloody Sunday' - a reference to the other massacre of civilians by the same battalion a few months later.

You can appreciate the families of these 25 victims and those seriously wounded in those months want justice. Who ordered these brutal killings and who covered it all up and when will anyone at all ever be held accountable for these state murders?

These are vital questions for the whole Labour movement and for the LRC, who claim to be its most politically conscious leftist leadership. Like laws against terror, which are ostensibly passed against the IRA or Islamic fundamentalist 'terrorists', they will soon be used against the labour movement itself, when it begins seriously to fight back against the appalling austerity imposed on us by the Tory-led capitalist system.

We therefore appeal to allow the IRPSG to affiliate again to the LRC and thereby raise its concerns with the wider labour movement, as we have successfully done so often in the past when we were affiliated."

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London WC1 3XX
Please include a donation

Gerry Downing

Secretary, IRPSG

Burns

Twenty-six people attended 'A sort of Burns night', organised by Wakefield Socialist History Group at the Red Shed on January 28 to discuss 'Robert Burns and other radical poets'.

As convener of Wakefield Socialist History Group, I argued that Robert Burns' poetry was the "product of Scottish enlightenment ideas in an age of political revolutions". Those two main political revolutions were first the American and then the French revolution. Burns himself had radical, republican views.

The second speaker (after haggis, neeps and tatties) was Bob Mitchell, a former councillor and former mayor of Wakefield. Bob spoke about, and read movingly from, the works of radical Irish poets, such as Oliver Goldsmith, Frances Allingham, Fanny Parnell, Jane Wilde and Eva Gore-Booth.

The final speaker was the Nottingham-based radical poet and author, Neil Fulwood. Neil's poetry has appeared in a wide range of publications and he read a very well-received selection.

The Wakefield Socialist History Group's next event is on Saturday March 11 at 1pm back at the Red Shed, when Granville Williams will be speaking about the Spanish civil war.

Alan Stewart

Wakefield Socialist History Group

Outraged

I would urge people on the left who are participating in the current struggles against the Trump administration (and I hope that includes everyone I know who is politically active) to think carefully about the words, slogans and analysis that we present.

I am outraged that Trump fired the acting attorney general because she stated she would not cooperate in defending his anti-Muslim executive order in court. I am not outraged about whether her replacement can sign warrants that allow the US government to spy on people. I have no interest in defending the US government, or in making it work better in any way, except to the extent that it benefits and gives power to working and poor people in the US and in the world.

I am outraged that Trump's EO is keeping people from re-entering the US who have lived here for years and decades. Not because 'we need their brains' or 'they are educated professionals', but because they are human beings who have rights, whether they work as brain surgeons or cleaning toilets.

I am outraged that Trump's EO will bar refugees from several predominantly Muslim countries because it is a bigoted, Islamophobic policy, and because international law requires that the nations of the world take responsibility for providing refuge to people displaced by wars. I am not outraged because US refugee policy is part of its 'war on terror', or because Trump's policies will 'hurt our image abroad'. The 'war on terror' is a permanent state of warfare by the most powerful state on earth against

any nation that fights back against domination by foreign capital. The US image internationally as a global bully is earned by its actions long before Trump took office.

I am outraged that Trump's EO may be used to detain or remove people who are lawfully present in the US. But I am equally outraged that immigration policy under Obama and under Bush treats millions of people who are not "lawfully present" as criminals subject to removal and deportation. These are people who came here because US economic and military policies have devastated their homelands. They work hard, contribute to their communities and establish homes for themselves and their families. I welcome them 100%, as much as I welcome refugees or people who are lawful permanent residents. I want amnesty and citizenship for every single one of them.

Peter Goselin
Connecticut

Vote Keable

Below is my election address for Momentum's national coordinating group, South East division, for which voting has just begun. I also support, with reservations, Jamie Green (also South East); Liz Yeats, Andy Thompson, Rida Vaquas and Phil Pope (Midlands, Wales, East and West); and Gary Wareing and Alan Runswick (North and Scotland).

"I deplore Lansman's undemocratic January 10 coup, and Momentum's imposed constitution, with its inbuilt NCG minority of members' representatives. I was a delegate to London regional committee, supporting a sovereign delegate conference - something we campaign for in Labour. Omov means voting in isolation, without collective discussion - a fake 'democracy' traditionally resisted by the left.

Creating a rival Momentum - without Corbyn's support, or Momentum's money, database and paid staff - is impractical and divisive. The left should organise within, to make Momentum effective, giving critical support to Corbyn, confronting the Labour right, organising for a left majority at Labour conference, and mandatory selection of Labour candidates.

Momentum's prime task is democratising and transforming Labour into a genuine party of the working class, winning all trade unions and all socialist groups to affiliate. Labour and the unions must become effective instruments of working class advance and international socialism - the temporary rule of the working class majority, in transition to a sustainable, classless world free from exploitation, oppression and war.

I am secretary of Labour Party Marxists (labourpartymarxists.org.uk), writing in LPM Broadsheet; a Unison branch delegate to Hammersmith CLP; and until December 2016 I was an editorial board member of LRC's *Labour Briefing*."

Stan Keable
Labour Party Marxists

Fighting fund

Great effort

Despite a great effort by lots of our supporters, we didn't get off to a good start in the first fighting fund of 2017. As regular readers will know, we need £1,750 each and every month, over and above what we receive in subscriptions, but the January fund finished on only £1,536.

An extra £330 came in over the last seven days - including a generous £75 cheque from comrade RG, another for £50 from comrade BT, and an extra £20 added to RD's subscription. There were seven standing orders, including a new one from OP, who, despite "studying hard for his GCSEs", still has time to read the *Weekly Worker*. Finally, there were three PayPal donations, with pride of place going to TS for her £25. She was among 3,126 people who read

us online last week, by the way.

Mind you, after just one day of February, £102 has already landed in the *Weekly Worker* bank account, thanks to 11 standing orders that come through on the first of each month, ranging from £5 to £20. But the really big hitters come in later in the month, so that's just the beginning.

Well, let's hope it is anyway! Seriously though, we could really do with a total that sees us crashing through that £1,750 barrier this month - even though it's the shortest one of the year! Four more weeks to get there, comrades! ●

Robbie Rix

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

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

TUSC

May elections to be contested

Pete McLaren, representative of individual members on the steering committee, reports on the January 28 conference

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition was set up in 2010. It is a federal coalition with representation on its national steering committee from the rail union, the RMT, the Socialist Party, the Socialist Workers Party, as well as individual members (independent socialists) and a number of leading trade unionists in a personal capacity.

Tusc often has its annual conference at this time of year in order to firm up arrangements for the May elections, and 2017 was no exception. However, a different question faced delegates this year: should Tusc stand this particular May, given the new situation created by Jeremy Corbyn's re-election as Labour leader? The Socialist Party had argued in the autumn that election preparations in England and Wales should be put on hold pending discussions with Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters about new possibilities that could now open up. However, the RMT could not agree. It reaffirmed the position agreed at its 2016 AGM, which recognised that there was "no mood to re-affiliate to the Labour Party" within the RMT and that the union would continue to support Tusc and back individual candidates in elections on a case-by-case basis - Tusc, Labour or others - who "support the union's key policies". The Socialist Party thus withdrew its proposal and the status quo prevailed.

Saturday's conference reopened these discussions, with the main morning and afternoon sessions about "Tusc's role now and the 2017 elections". The RMT opened the conference, with newly elected executive member Paul Reilly pointing to the financial and political support the union had given to both of Corbyn's leadership campaigns, whilst continuing to back candidates who supported RMT core policies, including nationalisation and opposition to public spending cuts.

Hannah Sell moved the main motion, from the Socialist Party,¹ which called on Tusc to reaffirm its support for Corbyn against the Labour right, whilst continuing with the more cautious approach adopted towards elections last year by ensuring Tusc did not stand against Labour councillors actively opposing cuts. Otherwise, Tusc must ensure that its electoral interventions were part of a serious campaign against cuts.

Hannah accepted it was a complex issue, but the key was to realise that Labour was "two parties in one". The Labour Party itself did not oppose austerity, and Labour councillors were implementing cuts. Whilst acknowledging the significance of Corbyn's victory, Tusc needed to enable anti-austerity candidates to stand. Opposing draconian public-spending

cuts at the ballot box, which Labour either supported or did nothing to oppose, would strengthen the struggle against such cuts, and thereby aid Corbyn's supporters, she argued.

The SWP's Charlie Kimber disagreed. Whilst accepting that the Labour Party remained a bourgeois workers' party, and was not the vehicle to transform society, we must work with Corbyn's supporters and, at this stage, not stand against Labour. He could not understand why the Socialist Party had changed its position from October. We needed to allow contradictions within Labour to develop further. Tusc could continue to campaign without standing, which would make it more difficult to relate to the Labour left. The re-election of Corbyn and the explosive growth of the Labour Party were significant, and we must relate to them.

Labour hasn't changed

The platform speakers were followed by an excellent discussion, with 25 contributions from the floor. Many spoke of the suffering caused by Labour councils - such as Newham, which had sacked its workers to re-employ them on inferior contracts; Haringey, which has massively privatised; Birmingham, where a Labour council is pushing through cuts; and Derby, where teaching assistants faced pay cuts from a Labour council.

Anti-cuts campaigners needed an electoral outlet, comrades argued. It was important to maintain Tusc's profile - the right wing still controlled Labour. New members have not been involved in the Labour Party and may start to look elsewhere. Momentum was moving increasingly to the right and did not offer a challenge to the Labour right or a home for many new members.

Others argued that if Labour did not support workers in struggle, the class would look elsewhere - and that is how the UK Independence Party gained votes. There was a need to oppose cuts, including Labour cuts. We cannot wait for Labour to get its act together. Corbyn was not consistently pursuing socialist policies - he was not supporting London tube workers, or Merseyside metro workers opposing driver-only trains.

SWP members opposing the motion pointed to the thousands joining the Labour Party. Tusc had already stood down in by-elections. We needed patience whilst events unfolded. The key is joint activity with Corbyn supporters, and standing in elections would hinder that.

I spoke from the floor, and suggested that the Labour Party under

Corbyn had not changed. Thousands may have joined, but few were active. Membership applications were not even being passed on to local party secretaries. Labour was not a socialist or even anti-austerity party, and last year's conference decision made it policy - and a party rule - for councillors not to oppose cuts or set 'no-cuts budgets'.

The platform speakers replied to the debate. Charlie Kimber was concerned about the cuts, but argued we should fight against them rather than standing at this point, given the hundreds of thousands joining Labour. Hannah Sell argued that there was a civil war inside the Labour Party, and Tusc standing candidates would help those supporting Corbyn. Sean Hoyle, RMT president, gave an impassioned speech arguing in favour of standing - "If you fight, you may lose; if you don't fight, you will always lose." People want change: it is up to us to make sure such change is progressive - not regressive, as in the case of Trump, he argued.

The motion was agreed overwhelmingly by the 200-plus delegates present, with just five votes against and no abstentions.

A lunchtime meeting of independent socialists agreed to elect Roger Charles to join Pete McLaren on the Tusc steering committee representing individual members, and to consider ways independents could be organised.

The final session of what was an uplifting and participatory conference saw Tusc national agent Clive Heemskerk outlining the coalition's anti-council cuts campaigning tasks. He described how different the political situation would be if Labour councils and councillors resisted cuts - but Corbyn was not calling for that. Tusc had explained how councillors could easily - legally - prevent cuts by using reserves and borrowing powers to set legal no-cuts budgets as a first step towards building a mass campaign to force the Tories to retreat. He concluded by stressing the importance of this May's elections as a way of building opposition, in particular, to the spending cuts, whilst not opposing confirmed anti-cuts Labour candidates.

Three of us from Rugby Tusc had travelled down to attend the conference, and we agreed on the way back that the debates had been comradely and stimulating. Our local experiences of Labour councillors implementing cuts, and refusing our requests to find ways to oppose them together, confirmed the overwhelming conference view that Labour had not changed in any significant way despite Jeremy's election as leader.

Notes

1. See www.tusc.org.uk/txt/394.pdf.

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday February 5, 5pm: '1956 and the CPGB opposition' - Paul Flewers introduces the new book of which he is co-editor. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk; and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday February 7, 6.45pm: 'An Australian Aboriginal foundation myth: the two Wawilak sisters'. Speaker: Chris Knight. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: <http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

No to Muslim ban

Saturday February 4, 11am: Anti-Trump protest. Assemble US embassy, 24 Grosvenor Square, London W1. Organised by People's Assembly and others: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Save the NHS

Saturday February 4, 11.45am: Demonstration. Assemble Framlington Place/Lovers Lane, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2. Against 'sustainability and transformation plans' and further cuts and privatisation. Organised by Keep Our NHS Public: <http://keepournhspublic.com>.

Crisis of capitalism

Saturday February 4, 12 noon: Debate, Langside Halls, 5 Langside Avenue, Glasgow G41. Featuring Hillel Ticktin and Michael Roberts. Organised by Labour Party Socialist Network: <http://socialistnetwork.org.uk>.

Stand Up To Racism

Saturday February 4, 12 noon: Trade union conference, NUT Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. Organised by Stand Up To Racism: www.standuptoracism.org.uk.

A people's history

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

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.

US imperialism - what now?

Saturday February 11, 1pm: Public meeting, Wesley St Peters Centre, Loughborough. Speakers: Thomas Unterrainer (writer and anti-war campaigner). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Fight to change Labour

Sunday February 12, 1pm: Launch of regional LRC group, John Lewis Community Hub, 2 Station Street, Grand Central, Birmingham B4. Organised by Labour Representation Committee: peterb.woodview@yahoo.co.uk.

Break the special relationship

Thursday February 16, 7pm: Public meeting, 5th Floor, Hamilton House, 80 Stokes Croft, Bristol BS1. Organised by Bristol Stop the War: www.facebook.com/BristolStopTheWar.

Shut down DSEI

Saturday February 18, 1.30pm: Planning meeting, Friends Meeting House, 173-177 Euston Road, London NW1. No to the Defence and Security Equipment International exhibition. Organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade: www.caat.org.uk.

A more dangerous world?

Tuesday February 21, 7pm: Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, Warwick Place, Cheltenham GL52. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.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>.

It's our NHS

Saturday March 4, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble Tavistock Square, London WC1, for march to parliament. Organised by It's Our NHS: www.ournhs.info.

We are many

Sunday March 12, 11am: Film screening, Bolivar Hall, 54 Grafton Way, London W1. Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: <http://socialistfilm.blogspot.co.uk>.

CPGB wills

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Standing on left reformist verities

AGGREGATE

Getting to grips with Trumpism

Peter Manson reports on the joint meeting of the CPGB and Labour Party Marxists

On January 29, CPGB and Labour Party Marxists members and supporters gathered for an aggregate meeting, which discussed, firstly, the new political situation following the inauguration of Donald Trump; and, secondly, the state of play in both the Labour Party and Momentum.

First up was Mike Macnair, who introduced the debate on Trump. He emphasised that the position he was about to outline - and had previously elaborated in the *Weekly Worker*¹ - was his own view and not that of the CPGB Provisional Central Committee.

Since World War II the US project had involved the integrity of capitalist states under its own hegemony, he said, and the question now arises as to whether Trump represents a break from that entire strategy. It had seemed possible that Trump's threats had been nothing but electoral campaign rhetoric, but he has, of course, already enacted, amongst other things, an executive order for the building of a wall on the US-Mexico border, and another to ban from the USA citizens of a number of Muslim-majority countries, and so we should think about the possibility of a "fundamental shift in the geopolitical orientation" of the United States.

Following the founding of what was then the European Economic Community, the position of the US had been to urge the United Kingdom to become a member, precisely in order to veto European defence and political cooperation which could threaten US interests. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the US regarded international institutions as weapons to keep in check Germany and France, and prevent them moving towards a unified Europe that would pose a threat to US hegemony.

However, in comrade Macnair's view, the eurozone crisis has "irretrievably wrecked the European Union as a whole" and ensured that a united Europe has been removed from the agenda for the next couple of decades. There can no longer be any thought of a common European defence force, which means that the US can now "comfortably dispense with the old strategy" - a factor which could justify the US establishment going along with Trump.

While comrade Macnair regarded Trump's anti-Muslim moves as "purely ideological", he thought that the promotion of Israel to help impose 'order' on the Middle East and the break with the old free trade policies were consistent with a possible new orientation. Of course, the situation remains unpredictable - Trump could still be "forced into orthodoxy".

Nevertheless, as Trump himself most certainly represents an increased threat of military action against Iran (if only on the part of the US proxy, Israel, rather than America itself), comrade Macnair reported that the PCC believed it would now be wrong to wind down the Hands Off the People of Iran campaign, as had previously been the intention.

Debate

I was the first to contribute to the debate from the floor. For me there was a problem with the proposition that Trump could represent a rational shift in US strategy - or he had somehow "stumbled upon" what was in the interests of US imperialism. I tended to agree with the common perception that Trump was a maverick - the first elected president in living memory who was *not* part of the US establishment. While comrade Macnair had stated that his anti-Muslim policy was "purely ideological", surely



But then what?

we should view this as part of a package, none of which was in the interests of US capital. We should expect the establishment to move against him, sooner rather than later.

Following on from this, Jack Conrad asked what serious section of US capital had been pushing for this new strategic line. He quoted the Socialist Workers Party's Alex Callinicos, who had said: "We don't like Trump, but neither do the bosses." In fact the message of the whole establishment - taken up by Women Against Trump, etc - was anti-racist, anti-sexist and pro-establishment. In the US the anti-Trump protests were virtually a Democratic Party operation.

Contrary to Mike Macnair then, comrade Conrad did not believe that Trump represented some kind of establishment strategic rethink. Trump was more a reaction to the fact that in the US, as elsewhere, the working class was "refusing to be ruled in the old way", while the bourgeoisie "cannot rule in the old way" (the missing ingredient was, of the course, the absence of a revolutionary party).

Rather than major sections of capital throwing their weight behind Trump, a "more likely scenario" was a concerted effort to get rid of him: impeachment, treason trials, even assassination. Meanwhile the danger for the left was in backing a *ruling class* anti-Trump movement - a movement which wanted to *strengthen*, not destroy, current international institutions.

A non-CPGB/LPM guest, Lawrence Parker, did, however, express support for comrade Macnair's thesis - he had sketched out a way in which the ruling class *could* use Trump, said comrade Parker. However, he could "think of an awful lot of people US capital would rather have leading a strategic turn".

Another guest, Chris Gray, wondered if there was some kind of parallel with Winston Churchill, who had posed the need for a new

direction for British imperialism after World War II. He also wondered whether Trump might attempt to pass an "enabling act" allowing him to "rule by decree". For her part, Carla Roberts thought the US establishment was unlikely to go for a coup of some kind. She drew a comparison with the UK - there was no real effort to try to stop Brexit: rather an attempt to make it work.

In response to myself and Jack Conrad, comrade Macnair pointed out that geopolitical turns do not usually happen after a lot of prior signalling. In this case, the US establishment had been "flailing around" - and "then Trump gets in". So it was a case of either (a) try and get rid of him (although vice-president Mike Pence was regarded as even worse); or (b) "use Trump to try something new". It was hardly a case of a "cunning plan", but there was no clear alternative strategy to replace one that was "dying".

Comrade Farzad Kamangar agreed that capital had no long-term strategy: it was short-termist by nature. However, a section of capital *was* supporting Trump and, given that he had the support of billionaires, who was going to impeach him? We should not forget either that a large section of the US population actually believes in Trump-type politics. Also, while the US president can eventually be challenged and removed, in the meantime he has great power. Comrade Kamangar pointed to two issues that could prove to be Trump's undoing: firstly, Russia - she thought the Republican Party would move against him to prevent a new US-Russia alliance; and, secondly, the economy - if there was a crash, then impeachment, etc would come into play.

Comrade Phil Kent thought that, just as there was no going back to the pre-Trump era, it was quite possible that on this side of the Atlantic the EU would fall apart. There was even the prospect

of a "hot war" with China, which would have a huge effect on world trade. For his part, comrade Simon Wells stated that to some extent Trump was merely following the popular mood; he also pointed out that share prices were actually going up.

Coming back in, comrade Conrad agreed that capital was of necessity short-termist - which is why it needs a state machine. But capital and the state were not the same thing and Trump is an example of "the state getting out of control". He was a "rogue element" who did not require spin doctors: he wrote his own inaugural speech, for instance.

Replying to the debate, comrade Macnair reiterated that we are living in conditions of extreme uncertainty: it was possible that Trump could be disposed of or actually contained. But it was also possible that the state bureaucracy could use Trump to impose a new strategy. Everything was "up in the air".

Labour

Introducing the afternoon session, Jack Conrad talked about Jeremy Corbyn's underlying strategy of uniting the Parliamentary Labour Party so as to win a general election. Of course, there was no question of Corbyn campaigning on matters of "high politics": his was an "inbred economism" that focused on "bread and butter issues".

However, Labour was way behind in the opinion polls and could suffer a defeat of "1931 proportions" in the expected early general election. That would undoubtedly produce a wave of demoralisation amongst the pro-Corbyn left. Which was why it was essential to adopt the correct strategic orientation: we should oppose the notion that 'any Labour government is better than a Tory government' and look to the combativity and consciousness of the working class. Our aim must be to transform Labour into a mass

movement for socialism: a united front of a special kind.

Turning to Momentum, comrade Conrad stated that it would be a good thing if it were to campaign to be accepted as a Labour affiliate: that would open up possibilities for the rest of the left. However, it was unlikely that Momentum would actually do so. In reality Corbyn never had a plan for the new grouping. So Momentum was set up with a branch structure and a facade of democracy, but it did not fit in with Corbyn's plans when sections of its membership thought their main task was to defeat the PLP right. Things would get out of hand if Momentum were allowed to organise on the basis of genuine democracy - which was why we had Jon Lansman's coup. It was not a question of 'If only Jeremy knew'. He *does* know and he *authorised* the coup.

Comrade Conrad stated that the initial PCC response to this had been incorrect. We had thought that the Momentum national committee should constitute itself as the new leadership, which would have resulted in a split. But it became clear almost immediately that there was no mood for such a fight - the left is fragmented, with no clear strategy. However, Labour Party Marxists called for the left to stay in Momentum and agreed to stand comrade Stan Keable for the Lansman-created national coordinating group. He was standing not to give the Lansman version of 'democracy' any legitimacy, but to *expose* it.

Comrade Conrad ended by stating that it was easy to focus *only* on the Labour Party. But, of course, we must not lose sight of what is needed more than anything - a Communist Party. He thought that perhaps it was time for a new joint initiative with others on the left in connection to this.

First up in the ensuing debate was comrade Keable, who reported from the previous day's meeting of the (now officially disbanded) Momentum national committee. About eighteen out of the original 60 members were present, plus around 30 observers. Comrade Keable said that it had been the "first and only NC meeting with any political discussion!" The mood for compromise was clear, he said, from the positive reaction to the idea of a meeting between NC representatives, and Jon Lansman "under the auspices of John McDonnell", which a comrade present had suggested was a possibility.

LPM's Carla Roberts, who was also at the NC meeting, said that some people seriously believed that Corbyn and McDonnell were "very unhappy" with the actions of comrade Lansman! She also pointed out that the NC could still organise a conference based on elected delegates from local groups.

There was some debate as to why LPM was contesting the NCG elections in only one of the three Momentum regions: comrade Vernon Price in particular thought that it would have been useful to put forward LPM propaganda everywhere (it was not a question of winning the election, of course). In his reply, comrade Conrad said that that would not have been a bad idea, but LPM only took the decision to contest at the last minute, when it became clear that there would be no Momentum split and it was right to stay and fight within the official structure ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. 'The new president and the new global order' *Weekly Worker* January 26.

MOMENTUM

Fight back - but for what?

The left in Momentum is organising a 'networking conference' on March 11, writes **Carla Roberts**

Nineteen national committee members and 25 observers attended the meeting of the officially disbanded Momentum leadership on January 28 - which is not bad, considering that everybody there was basically sticking two fingers up to Momentum founder Jon Lansman. His long-expected coup on January 10 did away with all democratic decision-making structures in Momentum, including of course, the national committee.

The organisers had received a few apologies, so the meeting was supported by about half of all NC members - there had been around 60 members in attendance at its last meeting on December 3 (which included people sent from affiliated organisations approved by Lansman, as well as 'representatives' elected online via 'one member, one vote' to hastily created positions). The December 3 meeting, of course, was the trigger for the Lansman coup: despite his best efforts to stuff it with allies, he was outvoted on all major issues - crucially, the NC decided to organise Momentum's first ever conference on a delegate basis.

Lansman knew that such a democratic conference would have insisted on ending his own one-man rule. Local groups were preparing motions to democratise Momentum and no doubt there would have been a couple seeking to take control of the company set up by Lansman that owns the database and all the income. Plus, we could probably have expected a number of motions critical of Jeremy Corbyn's current political trajectory.

So Lansman simply pulled the plug. No conference, no potential embarrassment and certainly no coherent challenge to his dictatorial rule over the organisation. Needless to say, the 'How we win' event he was planning instead would have been a mere rally, without motions. It did not break anybody's heart when it was cancelled 'because of the by-elections'. Of course, there is *always* an important by-election *somewhere*, so we are doubtful if this particular gathering will ever see the light of day.

Around 40 branches have so far adopted statements and motions opposing the coup and the imposition of the new, anti-democratic constitution, with only seven supporting it.

Apparently, there are over 150 Momentum branches, but it is doubtful if a majority of these are active. The tone of criticism in their statements varies, as can be expected, with some branches declaring that they would not recognise the new constitution, while others merely regretting the way it was imposed.

This was reflected on January 28. Most comrades agreed that there is nothing that can be done about the constitution. It cannot be changed, though there are some question marks over exactly how some bits will be imposed - and when. The rules on barring non-Labour Party members from Momentum, for example, seem to have been written so that they can be used if and when required (for example, in order to keep Jill Mountford of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty out of high office). New Momentum company owner Christine Shawcroft has meanwhile assured members that "there will be no expulsions". We shall see.

No split

About a quarter of the participants at the NC meeting argued (sometimes more coherently, sometimes less) that the committee should continue to organise the conference cancelled by Lansman. In reality of course, this would amount to a split. Among them were anti-Zionist campaigner Tony Greenstein (who accused the "old left" of offering "nothing but a council of despair"), Delia Mattis from the London region of Momentum, a comrade from Red Flag and a few others. Apparently, "local groups can function just fine" without the national organisation, according to one comrade. It is true, of course, that no membership dues find their way back to branches, there have been no real national campaigns and most definitely no support from centre. (In the run-up to the coup, Lansman initiated some quick changes, designed to make team Momentum look awfully busy, with varying levels of success.)

But it has become clear in the last couple of weeks that there is no widespread appetite for such a split.

And it has to be said that the January 28 participants in favour of that option did not really present a viable way forward: split and then ... do what, exactly? And with whom? As these comrades did not propose a motion and were calling for different

things at different times, their arguments basically ran into the sand.

The majority - amongst both NC members and observers - were against a split, however. It was most strongly opposed by the handful of AWL members and supporters in the room. Their motion was slightly less combative than another motion presented by Alan Runswick, delegate from the North West region (when it still existed), though both were eventually passed.

The AWL motion, for example, argued that the call for a "national networking conference" is "not the 'founding conference' that was planned for February and which was cancelled by the coup and, while it may establish some connections or forum structures, it is not to set up a rival organisation to Momentum".

And, while Alan too argued for a "national meeting of local groups", he proposed in his motion that the NC should "agree to support the conference planned by the conference arrangements committee" - ie, the conference that was cancelled by the coup.

But, thanks to some pretty impressive chairing by Matt Wrack (leader of the Fire Brigades Union), the AWL motion was taken and agreed first, which basically took the sting out of this or that formulation of Alan's motion. For example, while discussing the AWL-inspired motion, the meeting decided - instead of electing a new steering committee, as planned - to set up a "coordinating group" to consist of the remaining members of the officially abolished steering and conference arrangements committees, plus representatives to be coopted from unrepresented regions. So, by the time we got to Alan's motion, the conference "planned by the conference arrangements committee" had turned from the one abolished by Jon Lansman into the new (and clearly different) networking gathering agreed for March 11.

As an aside, both motions are equally deluded in one respect: both call for branches to elect and send *delegates* to the March gathering. Yes, 40 branches have issued motions and statements critical of the coup. But it is another matter altogether for a branch to elect and send official representatives to what will undoubtedly be presented by the right within Momentum as a 'rival', 'illegitimate' conference. Both motions seriously overestimate how many branches would be prepared to go that far. For example, Leeds, York, Manchester

and Sheffield have a strong rightwing and would probably not send delegates. March 11 could end up a very small meeting indeed if the organisers do not rethink this and allow pro-democracy minorities in hostile branches to attend in an official capacity (and not just as observers).

A suggestion by the Red Flag comrade to add a clause to call for a boycott of the NCG elections was defeated with only her vote in favour. Quite a few NC members had actually argued *in favour* of such a boycott (among them Jackie Walker, Suzanne Gannon and Nick Wrack), but they also recognised that "some good comrades here have decided to stand" and they did not want to exclude them. Stan Keable of Labour Party Marxists was actually the only candidate present at the meeting (as an observer), though the AWL has also fielded a few candidates.

Wishful thinking

The final clause in the AWL motion was going a bit far for most comrades and was deleted: "We call on the structures created by the coup to recognise the elected national committee of Momentum and to enable the two parallel structures to come together". That seemed like pointless wishful thinking. However, it was replaced with a no less pointless suggestion that we should send "a deputation" to meet Jon Lansman under the auspices of John McDonnell.

This suggestion had come about after an observer reported that he had run into the shadow chancellor; McDonnell had told him that he was "not happy" about the coup and that in his opinion Jon Lansman and Matt Wrack should get together to talk things through. And, yes, he would be glad to have this message passed on to others in Momentum. Let us ignore the fact that McDonnell did not contact comrade Wrack about this suggestion or that a similar meeting had already taken place after the unofficial November 5 NC meeting rejected Lansman's previous coup attempt. Another comrade suggested in the pub afterwards that Corbyn was being "held hostage" by Jon Lansman, who had

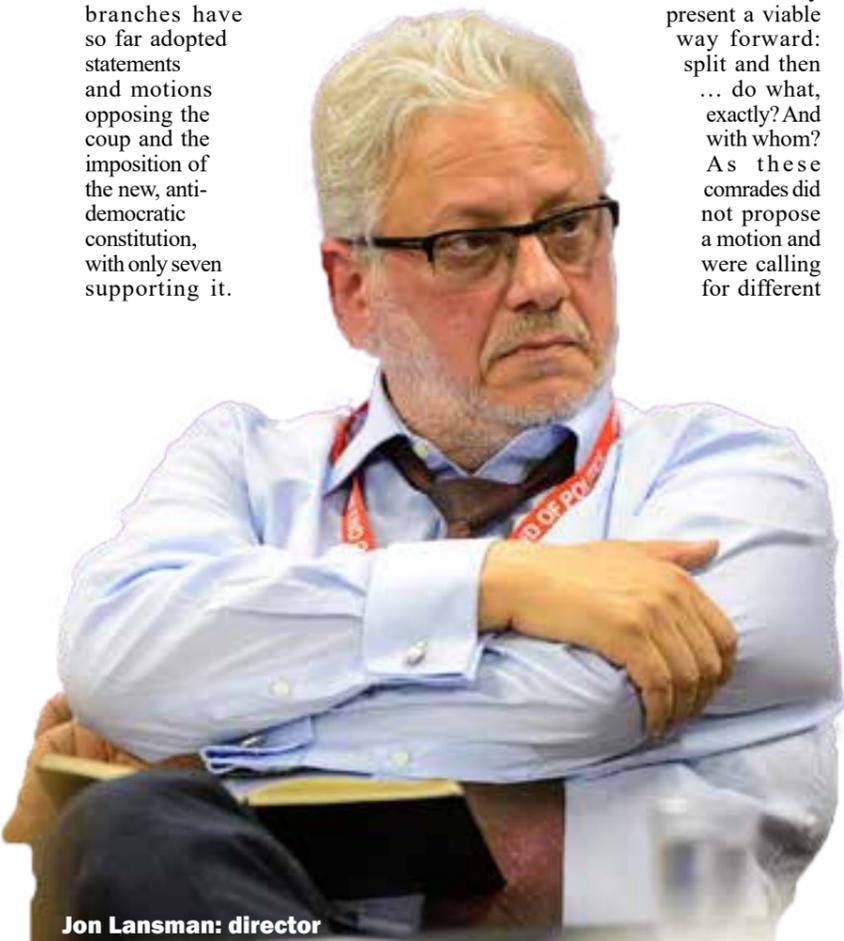
threatened to walk off with the 200,000 contacts in his database if Corbyn did not let him do with Momentum as he pleases. This seems rather hard to believe. Momentum has suffered from a lack of democracy from day one. While the precise details of the organisational structure might not have been planned out very well by Corbyn and Lansman, it is clearly not in the interest of the Labour leader to have an organisation, which is associated so closely with him, that has the potential to embarrass him - be it with the call for mandatory reselection of MPs, the fight for the free movement of people or campaigning against weapons of mass destruction in the form of Trident.

The Lansman coup was clearly designed to demobilise and depoliticise Momentum members. It is part and parcel of Corbyn's seriously flawed strategy of appeasing the right in the Labour Party. It is no coincidence that Lansman abolished Momentum democracy *on the same day* as Jeremy Corbyn gave (a version of) his infamous Peterborough speech. Don't rock the boat. Keep Tom Watson and the right as sweet as possible for as long as possible.

This makes it all the more important that the Labour left does not give up this important fight to take on the right and, crucially, transform the Labour Party. This fight is not about Corbyn, Angela Rayner, Clive Lewis or whoever else might next lead the Labour Party - it is the fight to make the Labour Party into a real party of the whole class.

While there was nodding all round when Labour Party Marxists supporters argued for such a political orientation at the NC meeting, the AWL seemed to want to push the organisation towards "campaigning". It proposed the setting up of "working groups" on the NHS, migrants rights and "expulsions/suspensions". In our view, these suggestions range from the pointless (why would we campaign separately on the NHS, when the Labour Party and Momentum are already organising their own NHS 'days of action'?) to the downright cynical: the AWL has, of course, already set up its own campaign, Stop the Labour Purge, and indeed it suggested in its written submission to NC members that we should "encourage local groups to host a speaker from Stop the Labour Purge".

There was little appetite at the NC for these suggestions and they ended up falling off the agenda. Let us hope they will not be resurrected for March 11 ●



Jon Lansman: director



Matt Wrack: rebel

MOMENTUM

Zionism cannot be appeased

Jon Lansman's coup was an act of desperation. No credibility should be given to his imposed constitution, argues **Tony Greenstein**

The recent Al Jazeera series of programmes, *The lobby*,¹ proved one thing above all: Israeli state organisations are up to their necks in the campaign to destabilise the Labour Party. Before his hurried exit from Britain, Shai Masot, senior political officer at the Israeli embassy, although not an accredited diplomat, had immersed himself in domestic politics. In addition to trying to take down the deputy foreign secretary, Alan Duncan, via a 'scandal', he had also been introducing 'Robin' - Al Jazeera's undercover reporter - as the new chairperson of Young Labour Friends of Israel.

The foreign and commonwealth office has kept remarkably quiet about Masot's status in Britain and on what basis he was a resident. Coupled with the eagerness of the government not to conduct an inquiry into the activities of Masot and the Israeli embassy, one can only assume that Masot's activities were carried out under the knowing gaze and approval of British intelligence and the foreign office. Craig Murray, the former ambassador to Uzbekistan, has convincingly demonstrated that Masot's entire status and position in this country suggests a high degree of complicity by the British state in Israel's political operations in this country.²

In the second of four programmes in the series we saw how a false allegation of anti-Semitism was manufactured from start to finish by LFI and its chairperson, Joan Ryan MP. Ryan, who is not Jewish and whose only claim to fame is having claimed a record amount of expenses two years running, passed herself off as an expert in what she called 'anti-Semitic tropes'. Any suggestion that LFI was powerful or rich was itself 'anti-Semitic', because accusations of being rich and powerful are stereotypes that have been levelled against Jews. Leaving aside the fact that LFI is not a person, the fact is that it is a rich organisation endowed with powerful people. It is powerful enough to intimidate Jeremy Corbyn into speaking at its fringe meetings at Labour Party conference for the past two years, when previously he would not have been seen dead in their company.

Because the evidence that the LFI is an extension of the Israeli state is indisputable, I have organised an open letter, signed to date by 111 members of the Labour Party, calling on Corbyn to break his links with LFI.³ The Zionist lobby in this country has been in the forefront of the campaign to oust Corbyn as leader. It is difficult to understand the logic that causes Corbyn and advisors such as Seamus Milne and Jon Lansman to believe that speaking at LFI fringe meetings is of any possible benefit. Corbyn has nothing whatsoever to gain from associating with this bunch of racists and New Labour supporters.

Zionist leaders in LFI have nothing but

contempt for Corbyn and all that he represents. Rebecca Simon, vice-chair of LFI, has said of him: "No-one wants to vote for a leader they think is rubbish. And he is rubbish - never mind about the Israel stuff: he is just not a credible opposition."⁴ Al Jazeera captured the reaction of Jeremy Newmark of the Jewish Labour Movement after Corbyn had spoken at the LFI meeting: "I can kind of live with that for the time being. It will get us through another year." It is as if Corbyn is on probation and these agents of the Israeli state are his probation officer. As John F Kennedy once remarked, those who try to ride a tiger usually end up inside its belly.

It is for this reason that I have organised a petition asking people to support the demand that Corbyn break his links with LFI and that the Labour Party does likewise.⁵

LFI operates in tandem with the Jewish Labour Movement, which is an affiliated socialist society of the Labour Party. Poale Zion, which changed its name to the JLM in 2004, was the forerunner of the Israeli Labor Party (Mapai). It has been affiliated to the British Labour Party since 1920. This is testimony to Labour's long, inglorious record of support for British imperialism. From 1917 onwards, when the Labour Party issued a document called the War Aims Memorandum, it has been complicit in the crimes of the British empire. The establishment of a Zionist settler-colonial state in Palestine, whose purpose was to guard the strategic route to India, was supported both by Conservative and Liberal imperialists, such as Winston Churchill and Lloyd George, as well as Ramsay MacDonald.

Jackie Walker

Throughout 2016 Jackie Walker, the black-Jewish vice-chair of Momentum, came under sustained attack from the Zionist movement as a whole and the Jewish Labour Movement and LFI in particular. Despite her long record of anti-racist work, she was in the Zionists' eyes a target because she openly declared that she was an anti-Zionist.

In May 2016 Jackie was first suspended from the Labour Party because of quotes taken from a private Facebook exchange on slavery, in which she said that "Many Jews (my ancestors too) were [among] the chief financiers of the sugar and slave trade." If she had been issuing this as a public statement she would have included the word 'among' in this sentence to make it clear that she was not attributing the slave trade to Jews alone.

However, the meaning of what she was saying was quite clear: viz, that because of her mixed African and Jewish parentage, one half of her ancestors were complicit in the enslavement of the other half. This, of course, has been twisted by the Zionists into alleging that Jackie believes that Jews were responsible for the slave trade.

The reaction from Jon Lansman of Momentum and his supporters such as Owen Jones was initially to defend Jackie against this obvious frame-up. After all, they knew Jackie as an anti-racist, not as an anti-Semite. Lansman himself penned an article 'A frenzied witch-hunt is not the way to combat anti-Semitism or any form of racism'.⁶ But, of course, combating anti-Semitism was not the purpose of the Zionist attacks. It was anti-Zionism that was their target. Jackie was reinstated after an investigation hearing, but the Zionists refused to accept her acquittal and instead waged a campaign of vilification against her.

Led by Jeremy Newmark of the JLM, they waged an unremitting campaign to demonise Jackie. When she spoke early in September with John McDonnell at an LRC fringe meeting at the TUC conference in Brighton, Newmark went into overdrive. McDonnell, who had been invited to address a JLM rally against 'anti-Semitism' at the Labour conference later that month, was put under pressure to disown Jackie, which he refused to do. Newmark was quoted in the *Jewish Chronicle* as stating that McDonnell "must explain his defence of Walker, which is inconsistent with his call for zero tolerance. This raises serious questions. Our members expect him to explain himself."⁷

It was clear to me then that the Zionists were mounting a campaign to have Jackie Walker resuspended. On September 17, over a week before Labour Party conference, I posted a blog article, 'The Jewish Labour Movement and its political lynching of Jackie Walker', in which I wrote:

Jackie was reinstated after an investigation, but the Zionists have refused to accept her acquittal and have waged a campaign of vilification against her ever since ... The Jewish Labour Movement ... has run a disgraceful, race-baiting campaign against Jackie.⁸

I wrote an open letter to McDonnell asking him not to speak on the platform of a racist organisation.

At the Labour Party conference, in defiance of the recommendations of the Chakrabarti report, the Jewish Labour Movement set up a 'training session' on anti-Semitism. Jackie Walker attended and her remarks were secretly recorded (ironically another secret recording - by Al Jazeera - has produced furious protests by the Zionists about breach of privacy!). Comments Jackie made about the way Holocaust Memorial Day is used selectively to commemorate certain holocausts but not others, about the hyping up of fears of anti-Semitic attacks on Jewish schools and about the lack of a definition of anti-Semitism were mangled together to produce new charges of anti-Semitism.⁹

This time, however, Lansman, Owen Jones et al, who no doubt had been subject to considerable pressure from Newmark and the Zionists, abandoned Jackie Walker. In an article in *The Independent*, Lansman was quoted as saying:

I spoke to Jeremy Newmark of the Jewish Labour Movement this morning. He's very upset and I can understand that - I work closely with Jeremy. I've been meeting with Jewish organisations to talk ... I've been outspoken. I was very, very unhappy ... We have a democratic process. So we'd have to put it to the steering [committee].¹⁰

The Independent commented on the basis of these remarks and Lansman's briefings: "It is now, however, widely expected Momentum will remove Ms Walker from her post on Monday following a meeting of the steering committee." In early October by a vote of seven to four, Jackie Walker was indeed removed as vice-chair of Momentum. Quite disgracefully, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty's Jill Mountford and Mike Chessum (an ally) voted alongside Lansman (before, of course, he turned on them).

Both Lansman's comment above and a conversation I had with him demonstrate that he believed that the false anti-Semitism campaign could be dealt with by private talks between himself and the Zionists. Lansman believed that the

Zionists were sincere in their opposition to anti-Semitism rather than being solely motivated by Zionism. Lansman, who believes he is a clever political operator, thought that by throwing Jackie to the wolves he would take the wind out of the Zionists' sails. He followed up this treachery by getting the ex-socialist and Socialist Alliance activist, Andy Newman, who runs the Socialist Unity blog,¹¹ to pen an article on Lansman's *Left Futures* site.¹²

Jackie and another black anti-racist activist, Marc Wadsworth, are due to have their investigation meetings this week. These will be a precursor to meetings of the national constitutional committee, which will no doubt expel them, since it has a rightwing majority. But this brings me to Momentum.

After the coup

To date Momentum has not fought the anti-Semitism witch-hunt, because Lansman and his coterie have tried to reach an agreement with the Zionists. To Lansman, Zionism is a *bona fide* political current rather than a racist settler-colonial movement. In *Left Futures* he defended the Nakba, the Zionist ethnic cleansing of 1948.¹³ He also argued that the left should not be talking about Zionism at all.¹⁴ Lansman argued: "There is every justification for talking about the rights of Palestinians ... and for criticising the actions and policies of the Israeli government, but there is no defence for anti-Semitism." Yes, that is true, but it is comparing chalk and cheese. Talk about anti-Semitism in the context of defending Palestinian rights is completely irrelevant, unless you believe that anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism are interchangeable.

We now face the situation whereby Lansman has abolished all the democratic structures of Momentum - in particular the national committee, the conference arrangements committee and the steering committee. In its place he has proposed a national coordinating group (NCG), whose power is unknown, other than that it is only intended to meet four times a year and on which the actual members of Momentum will elect 12 out of 28 places. Liberation strands will not be represented, but police commissioners and MPs will be!

Lansman has also imposed, by way of a six-four vote at the steering committee, a constitution that no-one had ever seen before it was emailed to members of the SC. Despite all the talk of 'one member, one vote', the constitution stipulates that 1,000 signatures are required just to make a proposal to the NCG and 2,000 votes to override a negative decision. Also included are Tory anti-trade union-style clauses whereby 30% of the membership must vote in favour of a proposal for it to become policy.

It should be clear to all except the dimmest members of the left that Lansman is fighting to ensure that Momentum will not be subject to any democratic control. Momentum's sole purpose is to be a stage army, to be brought into action if Corbyn faces another threat to his leadership - a prospect that may not be long in coming.

Given this, the attitude of the AWL is little short of crazy. Despite the new rule that members of Momentum must be members of the Labour Party, thus meaning that those who are expelled from Labour will also be expelled from Momentum, the AWL, with its maximal talk of socialism and its timidity in practice, is crying that we must not engineer a 'split'. Instead we should have a conference of Momentum groups, but, in the words of the motion which

they supported at last Saturday's national committee, such a conference "is not an alternative to national Momentum". It is merely an attempt to keep local groups together.

What Lansman is proposing is that Momentum will not exist as a democratic socialist group, but a 'command and control' structure with a self-appointed leadership, which consults the members and calls them into action when required. This is utter defeatism. Those who talk loudly of socialism and revolution cower in the face of a bureaucrat who cannot even win the vote on the national committee. Although Lansman probably does not appreciate it, Momentum, which represents a movement in the Labour Party, cannot be turned on and off like a tap. Treat the members like pawns in a database and they will soon dissipate.

Up and down the country Momentum groups have rejected Lansman's constitution. True, there are a few areas, such as Sheffield, where there are some Lansman supporters, but they are a tiny minority. Liverpool Momentum voted overwhelmingly to oppose Lansman's coup and Brighton and Hove voted by 33-4 to oppose the coup on the unanimous recommendation of our steering committee.

There is no excuse to give the NCG any credibility and it is to be regretted that some anti-coup candidates have stood for this body.

It seems that revolutionary groups are sometimes afraid of their own rhetoric. Now is the time to build a genuine, mass-based socialist organisation in the Labour Party and I hope that Labour Party Marxists reverse their current position. Lansman's defenestration of Momentum and his open contempt for its 150 local groups should be met by unremitting opposition. In his hands there will be a continuation of the policy of appeasing the right. It is no wonder that even that disgusting representative of Blairite politics, John McTernan, has praised Lansman's behaviour. So too has Tom Watson. What further evidence is required that, far from submitting to Lansman's coup, we should be opposing it unremittingly?

The black representatives on Momentum's steering committee and many of the independent members have shown a far greater understanding of what needs to be done than the AWL and LPM ●

Notes

1. www.aljazeera.com/investigations/thelobby.
2. www.craigmurray.org.uk/archives/2017/01/the-lobby.
3. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1cTg4sNUXGdFFbWAlAEmt-v5kXGnVvKk9T00LW8lGwK/edit>.
4. www.thejc.com/node/151786 Jewish Chronicle 30.12.1.
5. www.change.org/p/jeremy-corbryn-mp-break-the-links-between-the-labour-party-the-labour-friends-of-israel?recruiter=77941034&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=share_for_starters_page&utm_term=deslg-google-no_msg.
6. www.leftfutures.org/2016/05/a-frenzied-witch-hunt-is-not-the-way-to-combat-antisemitism-or-any-form-of-racism.
7. www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/anger-as-jeremy-corbryn-supporters-invited-to-speak-at-jewish-labour-event-1.53052.
8. <http://azvsas.blogspot.co.uk/2016/09/the-jewish-labour-movement-and-its.html>.
9. See 'The lynching of Jackie Walker': www.opendemocracy.net/tony-greenstein/lynching-of-jackie-walker.
10. www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/momentum-labour-jon-lansman-jeremy-corbryn-leadership-challenge-a7339916.html.
11. <http://socialistunity.com>.
12. www.leftfutures.org/2016/09/jackie-walkers-position-is-untenable-she-should-go.
13. www.leftfutures.org/2016/05/labour-and-the-jews-from-ethnic-cleansing-to-truth-and-reconciliation.
14. www.leftfutures.org/2016/05/why-the-left-must-stop-talking-about-zionism.



Tony Greenstein: boycott

EUROPE

Economic cold war looms

Theresa May wants to cuddle up to Trump, writes Eddie Ford, but EU leaders are horrified

As previously commented upon in this publication, the ascendancy of Donald J Trump could see the overturning of the established world order and its various institutions. The certainties most of us have taken for granted are vanishing in the face of a maverick US president who wants to put "America first", which seems to mean radically reshaping or even ripping up long-established institutions and a global strategy that has been in place for 70 years.

This is most clearly seen over the question of Europe, the European Union and Brexit - and maybe Frexit too: polls are indicating that Marine Le Pen will make it to the presidential run-off in a few months' time; and, of course, she has promised to hold a referendum on EU membership if she wins (which is far from impossible). Previous to Trump, US policy was essentially to integrate - as best it could - capitalist states under complex institutional umbrellas, the near perfect example being the European Communities/EU. The US insisted, almost with menaces, that Britain joined the EC/EU - using it as a proxy agent to block Franco-German aspirations for greater European unification. In this way, the US administration could thwart a potential political and military rival. Also, obviously, the EC/EU acted as a counterweight to the Soviet Union - the US's main rival in this period.

But all this fundamentally changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and then, perhaps more importantly still, the 2008 financial crash and the euro crisis, when Germany basically abdicated leadership and showed that it was unable to bring about further European integration - it prioritised protecting the interests of creditors (and German banks). As a consequence, Germany and European institutions are now deeply distrusted, if not loathed, in southern European and the other debtor countries. For example, Greece was told on January 30 by the International Monetary Fund that it must agree an austerity deal with its creditors within the next three weeks or risk being plunged back into another "explosive" debt crisis that could see the country crashing out of the EU.¹ We could still get Grexit before Brexit.

Anyhow, Trump is now questioning the relevance or importance of the EU (ditto Nato): what is it for and do we need it? This has immediate implications for Brexit. As argued in the *Weekly Worker*, under the old geopolitical order, 'president Clinton' or whoever would have summarily told the new British prime minister to forget this Brexit nonsense and stay within the EU in order to keep playing Britain's vital strategic role of frustrating moves to a United States of Europe. Remember the 'special relationship'.

Yet with Trump the very opposite is happening. He has openly welcomed Brexit as a "great thing" (because the EU is "basically a vehicle for Germany"²), cheerfully predicted that other countries would follow Britain's example in quitting the club and had a love-in with May at last week's press conference - 'chivalrously' holding hands with the prime minister whilst walking along the White House colonnade.³ You do not have to be Nigel Farage to think that Brexit and the rise of Donald Trump could mark the beginning of the end for the EU project.

Threat

Alarmed EU leaders have hit out at Trump - they certainly do not want to hold his hand. On January 31, Donald Tusk - president of the European Council



Donald Tusk: US is now a threat

and former Polish prime minister - warned about the "dangerous" challenges facing the bloc, such as the "worrying" statements emanating from Washington, which seem to "put into question the last 70 years of American foreign policy".⁴ He also cited other "threats" to the EU, like an increasingly "assertive" China, Russia's "aggressive policy towards Ukraine and its neighbours", radical Islam, a rise in "anti-EU nationalism" and the "state of mind of the pro-European elites".

Elsewhere in his strongly worded letter to EU leaders ahead of a summit in Malta on February 3, Tusk urged the EU to take "spectacular steps" to stay together and take "advantage" of Trump's isolationism to boost trade with other countries - which would involve "intensifying our talks with interested partners, while defending our interests at the same time". The EU, he argued, should not abandon its role as a "trade superpower, which is open to others", whilst "protecting its own citizens and businesses, and remembering that free trade means fair trade". He went on to say that Europe should also "firmly defend the international order based on the rule of law", as "we cannot surrender to those who want to weaken or invalidate the Transatlantic bond", without which "global order and peace cannot survive".⁵ Rather, concluded Tusk rather optimistically, EU leaders must "change the collective emotions and revive the aspiration to raise European integration to the next level" - including increased cooperation on defence and security.

Even more bluntly, if anything, Guy Verhofstadt, ex-prime minister of Belgium and now the EU parliament's Brexit negotiator - an unenviable job - dramatically declared at the Chatham House think-tank on January 30 that Trump represents a "third threat" to the EU, along with Vladimir Putin and Islamic extremism.⁶ According to Verhofstadt, Putin is trying to "undermine the EU from inside" with cyber-attacks and "financing far-right" political forces like Geert Wilders in the Netherlands and Le Pen in France. And now Donald Trump has "joined" these parties from across the Atlantic - he has talked "favourably" of other countries wanting to break away from the EU and is "hoping" for European disintegration. He also singled out the "enormous influence" of Steve Bannon, the Breitbart News founder who is now chief strategist to the president and

was recently promoted to enhanced positions in the US national security council. He and other advisors are "determined" to break up the EU, and are apparently "working" to stage exit referendums in Germany and France. Verhofstadt added that the US president's call to organise Europe around national identity was playing with fire in a continent where "30 million people have died because of pogroms and ethnic cleansing".

Like Tusk though, the former Belgium premier succumbed to a rush of optimism - he remarked that Brexit, while a "disaster", was also a "golden opportunity" for the EU to remake itself and negotiate not only a "new partnership" between the EU and Britain, but also, more importantly, to "get our act together" inside the EU. For him, Brexit should act as a spur for even closer union between the European states - he compared Europe's tardy response to the financial crisis with the US's massive programme of bank clean-ups, infrastructure spending and quantitative easing. He also urged Europe to start thinking about Nato "not as an alliance of a number of member-states, but an alliance of 'pillars' - and that is the only way for Europe to make a more effective contribution".

On a similar theme, Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission, called on Europe to turn its back on "isolationism, inequality and national egotism" - yes, you, Trump - and emphasised how "we cannot entrust our own security to others": ie, the United States. Therefore the Commission, he commented, has proposed an agenda for a "common security and defence policy", which should help member-states work together "more effectively" in procurement and other matters - he pointed out that in the EU there are 154 different types of weapons systems, but only 27 in the US. Also concerned by the Trump phenomenon, Francois Hollande urged Europe to stand up to Donald Trump at last week's 'club med' summit of southern European leaders in Lisbon.⁶ When Trump promotes the break-up of the EU, adopts protectionist trade measures or refuses to admit refugees, then Europe "must respond" in a vigorous manner to such "extremism" - the outgoing French president wanting the continent to remain a "space for liberty and democracy". When it comes to trade, Hollande believed that protectionism

was not part of "the European genome" - it is an American virus.

At the actual summit, the leaders called for "greater economic convergence" within the EU to promote growth and employment - according to the statement they issued, "weakening Europe is not an option". Instead, "we need to develop a robust trade policy based on fair exchange, the promotion of our standards and the safeguarding of our way of life". It was a matter of urgency that the EU responded to new challenges in regard to defence and security - a goal that required reforming economic and monetary union, so that the euro zone could "fulfil its original role". Time to reboot the project.

Not mincing his words either, Italy's deputy foreign minister, Mario Giro, has warned that the UK - by drifting further into the orbit of the US - and the EU are heading into an "economic cold war" over Brexit that could wreak havoc on the continent: the coming "battle of interests" over economic matters could have terrible consequences for the western world as a whole. If so, declared Giro, it would be a "disgrace" to enter into a "new era of hard competition on big money questions involving companies" - Europe does not need "these kinds of tensions at this time of a geopolitical Jurassic Park". However, Giro declined to name specific concerns or what kind of economic interests he was referring to exactly, merely remarking that the "financial world is repositioning itself". Sounding even gloomier, the French presidential hopeful, Emmanuel Macron - standing under the banner of his very own En Marche! organisation - observed that Britain had always "lived in equilibrium with Europe", but now risked "becoming a vassal state" of the US. Britain's divorce from the EU could be very messy and painful indeed.

Grossly

Showing no sign of accommodation or compromise, the new US administration has gone on the offensive against its critics - especially Germany. Peter Navarro, head of Trump's new National Trade Council, told the *Financial Times* that the euro was like an "implicit Deutsche Mark", whose "grossly" low valuation gave Germany an unfair advantage over its main trading partners, enabling it to 'exploit' the US and its EU partners (January 31). So poor old US imperialism is a victim of unscrupulous currency manipulation - something repeated by

Trump at a meeting with pharmaceutical bosses on January 31, when he accused Japan and China of using monetary policy to pursue "devaluation" in the past to gain a steal over the US. In the words of Trump, "they play the money market, they play the devaluation market, while we sit here like a bunch of dummies".

Navarro's comments are likely to trigger alarm in Europe's largest economy, demonstrating a growing willingness by the Trump administration to antagonise EU leaders and especially the German chancellor. In another radical departure from previous US policy, Navarro also called Germany one of the main hurdles to a US trade deal with the EU and reiterated that talks with the bloc over the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership were well and truly dead. Just get used to it. The German structural imbalance in trade with the rest of the EU and the US, he said, "underscores the economic heterogeneity" within the EU - ergo, TTIP is a "multilateral deal in bilateral dress". Anyway, Navarro continued, "Brexit killed TTIP on both sides of the Atlantic even before the election of Donald Trump", given that Britain had been one of the pact's leading advocates.

As we all know, Trump vastly prefers - or says he does - bilateral trade deals rather than the broad, multilateral accords pursued by Barack Obama. As evidence, the new president last week withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Interestingly, Navarro also announced that one of the administration's trade priorities was unwinding and repatriating the international supply chains on which many US multinational companies rely, taking aim at one of the key planks of the modern global economy. Explaining, Navarro maintained that it does the American economy "no long-term good to only keep the big box factories, where we are now assembling 'American' products that are composed primarily of foreign components" - when what the US needs to be doing is "manufacture those components in a robust domestic supply chain that will spur job and wage growth."

Responding to Navarro's comments at a joint press conference in Stockholm with Stefan Lofven, Sweden's prime minister, Angela Merkel said - not entirely convincingly - that she could not influence the euro, as Germany has always "supported an independent European central bank".

Clearly, the election of Trump has fundamentally changed the rules of the game. Donald Trump might decide that it is not in the national interests of the US to keep stationing its troops in faraway Europe or financially prop up an "obsolete" Nato - or might conclude that the EU has ceased to serve any useful purpose. Just let Europe hang out to dry and do whatever deals necessary with the Kremlin to counter the combined threats from China and jihadism. America first, America first ●

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Notes

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CULTURE

Berger and Stalinism

John Berger had a complex and contradictory relationship with the world communist movement of the 1950s and 1960s, writes Lawrence Parker

Artist, art theorist, writer and presenter John Berger passed away at the start of the year. The *Weekly Worker* has already published an obituary¹ and I do not propose to repeat what has been written there. Also, I have only read a fraction of Berger's output, so I am not a qualified judge of the totality of his literary and artistic achievement.

I came across Berger in one of his earlier guises, when I was investigating the Communist Party of Great Britain's evolving attitude to culture in the post-war period.² While this subject is an interesting one overall, some of the research materials for this topic, buried in old CPGB journals, are, particularly in the 1950s, rather dry in tone. I cannot emphasise to readers what a complete joy it has been, on many a cold winter evening in the British Library, to find Berger's engaging and combative prose in the annals of British communism, shining out like beams from a lighthouse. This is a modest attempt to resurrect a small portion of Berger's thinking in the 1950s and 1960s, when his engagement with the communist movement was at its height.

I have used the title 'Berger and Stalinism' very deliberately. But Berger was not a Stalinist. Indeed, by the late 1960s he had evolved towards a position somewhat akin to Trotskyism on the Soviet Union. I use 'Stalinism' in this specific instance to denote that much of what Berger wrote in the communist press was coming to terms with the impact of the Stalin period on the movement and on artistic production.

CPGB front

Berger was never a formal member of the CPGB: rather he was a close associate of it and its front, the Artists International Association (AIA), until the latter disappeared in 1953.³ Berger, making a name for himself with art criticism in the *New Statesman*, was also active in the Geneva Club, a discussion group that appears to have overlapped with communist circles. In his words:

I worked closely with people who were members, I sometimes spoke at public meetings on Communist Party platforms and I wrote a lot for their press, but I was never a member. It was assumed that I was and whenever I was accused of being a member I never denied it, because that did not seem the important thing to do.⁴

There was still a small group of artists and art writers associated with the CPGB by the 1950s (including Em Brooks, Cliff Rowe, Paul Hogarth, Reg Turner, Gerald Marks, Ray Watkinson and Barbara Niven), formed into the Communist Party Artists' Group, which by 1955 had launched its own journal, *Realism*. Reg Turner subsequently argued that the AIA's political artists had "stimulated" Berger: "We bought out the ideas and Berger found a lot of force and power in them, and perhaps gave them better expression than we were capable of ourselves..."⁵ There is some truth in this observation, given that, although Berger was quite careful not to oppose abstraction and movements such as abstract expressionism in general (rather he opposed them in terms of their *particular* artworks and expressions), "the arguments he used... always invite us to choose between two kinds of painting - one turned towards reality, the other in retreat from it".⁶ So Berger was an advocate of a realist approach in art and of its re-insertion into the social world at large - a stance

that ensured his closeness to the CPGB.

However, the communist approach to the arts after World War II was complicated by the impact of Zhdanovism. The ideas of Andrei Zhdanov, Stalin's leading cultural 'commissar' in the Soviet Union until his death in 1948, meant imposing a crude characterisation of cultural objects on the basis of class or of a progressive/reactionary binary code; a kind of self-enforced paranoia in regards to 'bourgeois' ideas; and an anti-formalist stance that meant undermining the specificities of cultural production in favour of 'socialist realism', which in practice meant that the party and its diktat had a privileged place in any 'reality' portrayed. Thus, 'realism', or what we might better call realist practice - the drawing of relationships to the real - was weighed down with a heap of extraneous political baggage.

One has to exercise some care here. The problem with Zhdanovism was its *crudity* - there were still concepts within it that were worth salvaging. Take the characterisation of artworks in terms of a class designation. Painter Cliff Rowe, later to view Stalinism as "fascism imposed on a socialist state"⁷, remarked on what he saw as the persuasive nature of art theories emanating from the Soviet Union:

They were unanswerable historically. If one looked at art history from a class point of view it was very easy to see that paintings represented distinct points of view.⁸

Arguably, Berger did resurrect some of the violence (if not the crudity) of the Zhdanov world view in *Ways of seeing* by portraying treasured and mystified art objects as mediated through more base concerns of class ownership and property. The problem with these judgements in a Soviet context is that they could only be sustained by recourse to a berserk idealism that felt compelled to erase contradictions and thus any rational relationship to reality. 'Official communism' had a profound problem with realist approaches to artistic production in the 1950s and it was this lacuna that Berger probed, along with other members of the CP Artists' Group, after the death of Stalin.

Berger had also come under the influence of Marxist art historian Frederick Antal (1887-1954), author of *Florentine painting and its social background* (1948); and was also inspired by the Marxist art critics Ernst Fischer (1899-1972) and Max Raphael (1889-1952) - *The success and failure of Picasso* (1965) was dedicated to the latter two. Space precludes a discussion of these theorists' work, but, suffice to say, Berger was absorbing art criticism that had significantly shot beyond the scope of the more dogmatic and philistine impulses of Soviet art theory.

Problematic

After the death of JV Stalin in 1953, Zhdanov's theories and their interpretation became a more problematic form of intellectual currency in the CPGB. An example is an article by Thomas Russell, 'Soviet culture and criticism', from July 1954, which defended Zhdanov in the context of recent critical Soviet articles on the subject. He said:

This is no movement against Zhdanov, but precisely an attack on those who, because they misunderstood the essence of Zhdanov's statement, succeeded in killing the spirit. They have elevated a few slavishly copied but isolated phrases of Zhdanov into a kind of gospel which the most mediocre can



John Berger in 1966

obey, but which an artist of talent will use as no more than an indication of the way forward.⁹

This was then applied specifically as a criticism to the work of the CPGB:

We in Britain have often been at fault along these lines when the question of a Soviet formulation has arisen. Many of us have been too ready to accept the points made without a careful and comprehensive examination, and without applying them properly.¹⁰

This type of reasoning was also present in the highest ranks of the CPGB. Russell quotes Emile Burns, chair of the CPGB's national cultural committee, speaking at the party's national congress of 1954: "It is wrong... for any comrade in discussing such scientific and cultural questions to take a rigid line of trying to impose some particular views on his colleagues..."¹¹

Berger was engaged in a similar process of emptying out the artistic categories that had been in circulation in the communist movement in preceding decades. An article meaningfully entitled 'Definitions?' from October 1954 was pitched in terms of the "crisis of contemporary western art" and its "total

failure to communicate except to a few specialists".¹² This orthodox communist beginning broadened out into a more combative tone: "... anybody who is prepared to think rather than just repeat slogans is bound to admit that there are difficulties to be met with in developing socialist-realist art: the art that, by historical logic, will eventually bring order to this chaos."¹³ But, rather than present socialist realism as a finished logic, Berger argued:

We are *forging* an aesthetic to meet a situation. Previously, because our historical knowledge was denied our predecessors, the situation forged the aesthetic.¹⁴

Berger also considered terms such as 'formalist', 'naturalist' and 'realist': "Each one of these labels can in fact be valid. But often their application is too automatic and over-rigid."¹⁵ However, by 1955, in a contribution to a CP Artists' Group monthly discussion meeting, he was questioning the pursuit of socialist realism under capitalism. According to art historian Ray Watkinson, who was writing about the meeting in question,

... he [Berger] inclined to the view

that... what realism has always achieved, and the task it must continue to perform, is one of criticism. It does not merely mirror: it selects, it comments; and *critical* realism is what we shall produce, what can be produced, under capitalism.¹⁶

Watkinson seemed uncomfortable that this formulation implied that the practice of socialist realism had involved a lack of criticism, arguing that in the Soviet Union "the critical function of realism continues under socialism".¹⁷

This was still a fairly oblique and respectful critique from Berger - others in the CP Artists' Group were prepared to be much more forceful in 1955. Thus the painter, Gerald Marks, bitterly complained of "drab lefts" defending socialist realism. He pictured himself as belonging to a group "who have become sick of socialist realism in subject matter, carefully smeared in a naturalistic sentimental manner, a so-called pictorial art lacking in formal excitement and organisation, illustrative and passionless".¹⁸

As with Watkinson's response to Berger above, such statements were not being left unchecked by those souls uncomfortable with this developing critique of Soviet artistic (or non-artistic) nostrums. Artist Barbara Niven (at this point working for the *Daily Worker*) suggested that Marks was evoking the stance of "another small band of cognoscenti standing against the mass of philistines".¹⁹ Also, and perhaps more pertinently to the wider debate that Berger was percolating, she was keen to stress that an "artist's search for realism" should preclude a dismissive attitude to those who had "turned from the private world of a small clique"²⁰ - in other words, those painters who had at least accepted the standpoint of the communists at this juncture.

Crisis

By 1956, when the crisis in the world communist movement had deepened as a result of Khrushchev's speech to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956 (which had denounced Stalin's criminal role in the mass purges of the 1930s and criticised the cult of personality surrounding his former leader), so had Berger's own criticisms.²¹

In a noticeably sharper tone that reflected some of the previous political pressures on communist artists in Britain, he wrote:

The vast majority of the most talented British artists would be prepared to produce posters protesting against the H-bomb... But none of them is prepared to listen to dogmatic lecturing about how and what they should paint for the rest of the year. In the past, their reasonable fear of this has lost us their cooperation - anyway as painters - on the occasions when we badly needed it.²²

Berger also continued his earlier stress on the necessity for British socialist painters to forge their own style (rather than pick up Soviet hand-me-downs) with a "maximum tolerance towards individual experiments" and an appreciation that "the final nature and style of this tradition is unknown to all of us".²³

'Formalism', in Soviet post-war parlance, was a sin in suggesting, for example, that painters working in modernist modes had interposed their own subjectivity onto their artwork in place of a realistic depiction (which was usually premised on a much narrower

political standpoint). Soviet thinking was suspicious of such works, because the bureaucracy was desperate to convey a pseudo-objectivity, in the midst of the regime's fantasy projections about its 'planned' economy. Berger undercut this argument by making the point that: "It is axiomatic that all art is a formalisation."²⁴ Therefore it was simply illiterate to critique artworks on the basis of 'formalism' - even the most sterile portraits of Lenin and Stalin in the style of socialist realism had some notion of form in them. Criticising a *work of art* for 'formalism' was thus merely critiquing it for being a *work of art*. Therefore, even in contexts such as the small CPGB and its even smaller group of artists, art was a source of suspicion for the party bureaucracy because of its formalisation; because it was art.

Berger also queried the products of socialist realism. Rather than socialist heroes that could engage and inspire an audience, he strongly suggested that what in fact had been achieved were socialist *idols*:

The idol is so superficially desirable, spectacular, witty, happy, that he or she merely supplies a context for fantasy and therefore, instead of inspiring, lulls. The idol is based on the appearance of *perfection*, but never on the striving towards it.²⁵

There then followed a debate in *The Marxist Quarterly* in which Berger was on the receiving end of some orthodox tropes. Ray Watkinson (who seemed to be positioning himself as Berger's interlocutor) suggested that Berger had "indulged in much special pleading" for artists and "very little clear thinking".²⁶ 'AMD' continued this theme, stating that to "claim a special place for an artist in the party is to perpetuate his position in class society" and thus the symptom of a "class outlook".²⁷ 'Polybius', however, backed up much of Berger's argument, seeing an "ossification" of Soviet painting and a "sinking back into the outmoded anecdotalism of the 19th century"; the errors of lumping together western art as "wholly reactionary"; and an over-reliance on the rhetoric of 'realism', "a mark in one way or another of all art, worthy of the name".²⁸

Critique

In these obscure exchanges, Berger and others were coming close to unveiling the *meaningless* nature of Soviet art instruction and its various assumptions. But Berger was talking to his *comrades* about a shared, partisan endeavour of promoting and critiquing art that strove towards a picture of reality and drew upon political relationships. When this shared endeavour collapsed, this opened up the space for a deeper critique of the 'official communist' movement that took shape in Berger's famous *The success and failure of Picasso* (1965).

According to Lynda Morris's and Robert Radford's history of the AIA, the years 1952-56 had seen communist artists and thinkers not just fatally wounded by the movement's deep crisis after the death of Stalin, but also further damaged by a connection between realism and radicalism being lost and replaced by "formal criteria of 'good painting' and a commercial identity".²⁹ 'Realism' thus became simply a matter of fashion. Dyer amplifies this point, suggesting that this change meant that by the end of the 1950s "nothing remained of the realist movement that Berger had championed for almost 10 years".³⁰ The losing of this battle was effectively the closure of any CPGB attempt (at least in terms of its leadership) to shape the art world in line with its preferences, or any particular art practice such as socialist realism.

I do not have space here to sketch out Berger's full argument in his 1965 work, but he portrayed Picasso as in decline from his great achievements of the cubist period and as essentially being fed a succession of insular and self-absorbed myths about his genius

by his courtiers (Picasso is Picasso, is Picasso). Picasso's work thus became emptied of meaningful content. His joining of the French Communist Party in 1944 did have the potential for Picasso to find his community and thus reforge his artistic outlook. This is indeed what Picasso hoped; he wanted to come out of 'exile'. However, Berger argued that Picasso asked the communist movement for bread, but "without any doubt what they offered him was a stone".³¹ He added:

In fact the communists treated him as everybody else had done. That is to say, they separated the man from his work. They honoured the former and equivocated about the latter.³²

In the Soviet Union, Berger argued that Picasso's name was used for propaganda purposes, while his work - which in the illiterate scree of post-war Soviet art theory was a repository of 'decadent formalism' - was never shown or properly discussed, thus becoming unmentionable. In terms of western Europe, Berger said:

Because of Soviet insistence at that time on a universal cultural orthodoxy, communist critics and artists in western Europe who approved of Picasso's work spent their energy trying to stretch the orthodox vocabulary to cover as many paintings as possible. It wasn't, now, that his art was unmentionable, but that it could only be mentioned in conventionalised terms. Gradually a disguise for Picasso was stitched together out of words. His spirit as an artist was celebrated in terms so basic and so 'human' that they could cause no offence to anybody, and these terms, these clichés, became, instead of the paintings themselves, the currency of exchange on the subject of Picasso amongst the European communist left. Such clichés also precluded analysis or criticism.³³

This has been quoted at length because it exemplifies the default position of the world communist movement after the Khrushchev revelations and its crisis of 1956 had mortally wounded the artistic standpoint that stood upon the foundations of Stalinism. By the mid-1960s, aesthetic preferences for socialist realism had been displaced with:

... the Communist Party, during the fight for and under socialism, does not see its task as being to direct what should be written, painted or composed - either in terms of subject or of style; it does not see its role as laying down laws governing literary and artistic creation.³⁴

There is nothing wrong with any political movement looking to direct and influence artists *per se* - that will probably be the lot of any social group that cares deeply about artistic practice and has a partisan attitude. The problem occurs when that becomes, as the CPGB's critics noted, a sectarian practice that cannot embrace diversity and debate. But, through its later abstention on subject and style matters, the CPGB was stitching together another threadbare disguise for art (a universal equivalent) in its suggestion that one art form was simply as good as any other. It thus reran what the world communist movement had done to Picasso: it partially disengaged and offered artists a stone.

This provoked an opposition of sorts. *Artery*, an unofficial CPGB arts magazine initiated by party art students, appeared in 1971 - an attempt to fuse the politics of the *British road to socialism* with a broadly pro-Soviet socialist realism. In August 1972, Betty Reid had to report that "many of the most active people" in the CPGB's specialist groups and journals were "totally in disagreement" with the party's new/old thinking in 'Questions of ideology and culture'.³⁵ Significantly, Reid did not list any specific group of artists associated with the CPGB other than the samizdat, *Artery*. By

relinquishing its previous sectarian attitude to the arts, the CPGB then reaped a harvest of not having that much to say specifically on the subject. Berger had also opposed some of the CPGB leadership's other opportunist gambits in the 1960s, such as changing the name of the *Daily Worker* to the *Morning Star* in 1966. A 'Mike Berger' from Geneva said that there was no chance of the paper increasing its political audience "by pursuing the illusion that we can transform it into a 'popular' or 'family' paper".³⁶

Some of the shift in the CPGB's attitude to the arts can be seen in the review of *The success and failure of Picasso* by Barbara Niven in *Marxism Today*.

Back in 1955, Niven, as we have seen, attempted to pull back other members of the CP Artists' Group from confronting the consequences of Zhdanovism. In 1966, rather than attempt to defend the world movement and the French Communist Party from Berger's critique of their misuse and abuse of Picasso, Niven agreed that it was a tragedy, albeit with a smidgeon of defensiveness:

For the revolutionary imagination of the French Communist Party to have been capable of such a full reversal of understanding in the visual arts in particular - the slowest of the arts in which to be able to comprehend the new - would perhaps have been impossible even in that year of huge new political and cultural possibilities for communists and the left in France. Yet in essence I feel and accept the tragic failure to seize the new impact. I feel it both ways.³⁷

'Trotskyism'

Despite the deepening of his criticism in this period and the fact that a shared pursuit of realist approaches had dwindled, Berger was still exhibiting a partisan attitude to the CPGB. The letter to the *Daily Worker* cited above notably referred to "our paper".³⁸

This sense was also present in the book on Picasso. Berger wrote:

On the face of it, it might seem unreasonable to hope that the mere act of joining a political party could resolve the contradictions of a lifetime. But it *is* reasonable to expect that a communist party is unlike any other. It is more than a political party. It is a school of philosophy, an army, an agent of a future; at its noblest it is a fraternity.³⁹

However, this was instantly qualified: "Communist parties have helped to create artists - and, tragically, have also destroyed artists."⁴⁰

In line with this developing critique of the communist movement's relationship to art, Berger had also developed a critical attitude to the Soviet Union. By 1969, this was somewhat akin to Trotskyism, or at least to that of Isaac Deutscher, whom Berger quoted approvingly in a book of that year - *Art and revolution: Ernst Neizvestny and the role of the artist in the USSR*.⁴¹ Deutscher's emphasis was generally on the Janus-like character of Stalinism: a politically primitive bureaucracy, set above the working class and relying on crude forms of violence, that was, in his eyes, also able to institute a modern, planned economy and a route out of economic backwardness.

It was through these spectacles that Berger also viewed the Soviet Union:

The national egoism of Stalin's policy was transmuted into personal egoism within the vast, all-powerful bureaucracy which was established to exact and organise the superhuman national effort necessary to construct within the borders of the USSR what amounted to an alternative world. This bureaucracy still remains. The revolutionary initiative of the people

was curbed and diminished by the withholding of information and the discouragement of all discussion ... This initiative has not yet been won back.⁴²

But there was a strange facet to Berger's seeming development towards a form of Trotskyism, albeit one prepared to defend elements of Soviet reality and what Berger saw as its positive role in the anti-imperialist struggle. He showed a marked enthusiasm for the writings of Rajani Palme Dutt (1896-1974) in *Labour Monthly*. Dutt, editor of the journal, is the CPGB leader most often identified with unthinking obedience to the Soviet Union and, in fact, his authority was fatally undermined in the party after the events of 1956.

Berger did not hail Dutt for his unrepentant Stalinism: rather for his prophetic analytical powers. This is how Berger put it as late as 1984 in relation to Britain's development after World War II:

Well, let's go back to the 1940s, to *Labour Monthly*. Palme Dutt ... foresaw, it seems to me, in large outline, everything that has happened: the economic evolution, the economic collapse - everything. He was very prophetic. He had a great influence on me, so that nothing that has happened in Britain has surprised me ...⁴³

This influence was obviously genuine and had some emotional force behind it. In 1966, Berger hailed Dutt, on his 70th birthday, as "one of the great political analysts and polemicists of our time".⁴⁴ In 1961, Berger had remembered his first discovery of *Labour Monthly*, aged 15:

Labour Monthly was unlike anything else I had ever read. I can see myself now reading it in bed. It was sober, yet at the same time exciting. It spoke with authority and yet was opposed to all the authority [that] I had come to hate ... Before I fell asleep I used to feel that I understood the world. RPD was the only teacher to whom I was prepared to listen.⁴⁵

The problem with hailing Dutt for his positive, analytical side and not for his status as a Stalinist monotone is that by doing so Berger has to pose the analytical Dutt against the bureaucrat Dutt, and I suspect that this division would have had little or no purchase with RPD. He would have seen his analytical power as being at one with the dark powers in the Soviet Union that he had sworn fealty to in the name of the - mutilated and famished - revolution.

This allegiance to Dutt is an oddity of intellectual history, but perhaps less surprising when you consider the following statement from Berger:

Until the moment that the Soviet Union gained nuclear parity [with the US] ... whatever your doubts, I felt you had to be *for* the Soviet Union. There was a straight choice to be made. Khrushchev's revelations and so on were very important, but the whole situation changed when that catastrophic inequality changed.⁴⁶

One suspects that Dutt would have been comfortable with some of the cold war (my enemy's enemy is my friend) assumptions made here, although he would not have qualified his support for the Soviet Union on the issue of nuclear parity.

Berger's advocacy of Dutt's positive side is typical of his treatment of the world communist movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Despite his varied criticisms, as we have seen, he referred to its noblest ideals and, indeed, it was his movement also. Berger wrote as its partisan, even after a shared endeavour in promoting realist art collapsed.

And there's the rub. The sober truth is that the post-war world communist movement was a tawdry and sickly environment that blackened the ideals

of liberty, equality and fraternity. It was actually relative outsiders such as Berger who were the beating heart of this movement and not compromised figures like Dutt.

But becoming the heart of such a compromised entity risks reconciling others to their environment. For example, Berger's writing illuminated the CPGB's limited debates on art in the 1950s in a manner that few others could have aspired to. There are some parallels with the later career of Georg Lukács and his relationship with 'actually existing socialism'.

When Terry Eagleton wrote that under Stalinism Lukács "became the Idea that entered upon real, alienated existence - the heart of a heartless world, the soul of soulless conditions, and indeed, at base, the opium of the people",⁴⁷ these words could have easily been applied to the late, great, John Berger in the 1950s and 1960s ●

Notes

1. 'As good as his word' *Weekly Worker* January 12.
2. Some of this work is on display in L Parker, 'Arts and minds: reconsidering the Caudwell controversy' *Socialist History* No47, London 2015, pp45-63.
3. The AIA was founded in 1933.
4. G Dyer, 'Ways of witnessing - interview with John Berger' *Marxism Today* December 1984.
5. Cited in L Morris and R Radford *The story of the Artists International Association 1933-53* Oxford 1983, p89.
6. G Dyer *Ways of telling: the work of John Berger* London 1986, p15.
7. Cited in L Morris and R Radford *op cit* p90.
8. *Ibid* p9.
9. T Russell, 'Soviet culture and criticism' *The Marxist Quarterly* Vol 1, No3, July 1954.
10. *Ibid*.
11. Cited in *ibid*.
12. J Berger, 'Definitions?' *Communist Party Artists' Group Bulletin* October 1954.
13. *Ibid*.
14. *Ibid*.
15. *Ibid*.
16. R Watkinson, 'Three men in search of realism' *Realism: the journal of the Artists' Group of the Communist Party* No 1, June 1955, my emphasis.
17. *Ibid*.
18. G Marks, 'Renato Guttuso at the Leicester Galleries' in *ibid*. Guttuso (1912-87) was an Italian communist painter who was appreciated by Berger, because he had "fully accepted the discoveries of the modern masters such as Cézanne, Van Gogh, Léger and Picasso" (J Berger, 'The necessity for uncertainty' *The Marxist Quarterly* Vol 3, No 3, July 1956.
19. *Realism: the journal of the Artists' Group of the Communist Party* No2, August-September 1955.
20. *Ibid*.
21. Berger was an early supporter of *The Reasoner*, an inner-party oppositional journal founded by EP Thompson and John Saville in 1956 - see P Flewers and J McIlroy (eds) *1956: John Saville, EP Thompson and 'The Reasoner'* London 2016, p27.
22. J Berger, 'The necessity for uncertainty' *op cit*.
23. *Ibid*.
24. *Ibid*.
25. *Ibid*.
26. 'Discussion' *The Marxist Quarterly* Vol 3, No 4, October 1956.
27. *Ibid*.
28. 'Discussion' *The Marxist Quarterly* Vol 4, No 1, January 1957. Berger replied to the debate in the same issue.
29. L Morris and R Radford *op cit* p90.
30. G Dyer *Ways of telling: the work of John Berger* London 1986, p23.
31. J Berger *The success and failure of Picasso* London 1965, p175.
32. *Ibid*.
33. *Ibid* p176.
34. 'Questions of ideology and culture: statement from the executive committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain ... for discussion' *Marxism Today* May 1967.
35. B Reid, 'Specialist groups, journals and associated questions', CPGB archive CP/CENT/CULT/04/09.
36. *Daily Worker* February 18 1966. Parts of the CPGB's left had contributed to this debate in a similar vein to Berger. See, for example, Sid French *Daily Worker* February 11 1966. Jimmy Reid (*Daily Worker* February 14 1966) replied to French on behalf of the CPGB leadership.
37. B Niven, 'John Berger: success and failure of Picasso' *Marxism Today* January 1966.
38. *Daily Worker* February 18 1966.
39. J Berger *The success and failure of Picasso* London 1965, pp173-74.
40. *Ibid* p174.
41. J Berger *Art and revolution: Ernst Neizvestny and the role of the artist in the USSR* London 1969, p158.
42. *Ibid* p159.
43. G Dyer 'Ways of witnessing - interview with John Berger' *Marxism Today* December 1984.
44. 'Greeting from friends in Britain' *Labour Monthly* July 1966.
45. J Berger, 'Myself when young' *Labour Monthly* July 1961.
46. G Dyer 'Ways of witnessing - interview with John Berger' *Marxism Today* December 1984.
47. T Eagleton *Walter Benjamin or towards a revolutionary criticism* London 2009, p84.

THEORY

Filling the gaps

Rex Dunn continues his exploration of Karl Marx's concept of the human

In the first article in this series, I described Marx's essentialism in relation to his concept of the human, and considered its scope and application.¹ In the light of that, I think that there are six problems which Marxists need to address and in this article I will deal with three of them.

1. History is a process, barring accidents

The October revolution of 1917 was a subjective necessity to kick-start the process of transition from capitalism to socialism. It occurred at the right time (in the midst of the first imperialist world war, whereby millions of workers were slaughtering each other on the battlefields of Europe), but in the wrong place - backward Russia, instead of an advanced, industrialised country (eg, Germany).

First came the counterrevolution from without - ie, imperialist intervention - which led to the isolation of the revolution from the world working class. In order to defend the first revolution in history which had actually overthrown capitalism, despite the cultural backwardness of the country, the Bolsheviks were forced to resort to an 'iron dictatorship'.

This set up a negative dialectic. In Germany, the social democrats were able to contain the masses within a reformist framework. This in turn forced the infant German Communist Party to resort to acts of voluntarism: ie, it relied on a violent, putschist strategy, in the hopes that this would spark the German revolution. Instead, it had the opposite effect: it led to the final defeat of the revolution in 1923.

As for the situation in Soviet Russia, the events in Germany led to the defeat of Trotsky and the Left Opposition by the Stalin faction: ie, the counterrevolution from within. It laid the basis for the strategy of 'socialism in one country', the antithesis of world revolution. But after 60 years or so of slave labour, forced collectivisation, man-made famine, show trials, mass executions, etc, the working class everywhere has still to recover from its poisonous legacy.²

2. Instrumentalism: means-end necessity

Humanity needs to develop the forces and relations of production, while taking into account the needs of the rest of nature.

Here we must be prepared to consider the philosophical arguments of that arch-enemy of orthodox Marxism, Theodor Adorno, co-leader of the post-war Frankfurt school. Rather than criticise his rational pessimism and one-sided preoccupation with the superstructure, let us pause to consider Adorno's concerns about the intelligentsia's *ambivalent* relationship with the enlightenment tradition: eg, the bourgeois positivist's idea that man has the right to subordinate and exploit his fellow humans, for the sake of increasing production, as well as dominating nature: viz, *instrumentalism*.

Contrast this to Marx, who points out that wage-slavery is the basis for the alienation of the worker - an alienation "born of that very domination". In the absence of a countervailing force, this then becomes the basis of self-alienation (false consciousness) throughout society. Adorno was right to dismiss the



How can wage slaves liberate themselves?

Stalinist bureaucracy, precisely because it relied on an instrumentalist mentality, exemplified in the superexploitation of the workers, as well as the domination of nature - albeit in the name of 'socialist construction', regardless of the human and environmental cost. It was no different from capitalism. Therefore he was right to argue that the problem of instrumentalism has not gone away.

On the other hand, his rational pessimism would lead to an idealist separation of base and superstructure, which becomes increasingly characterised by sweeping generalisations. In *Negative dialectics*, for example, he says that Marx's invitation to "change the world" in his *Theses on Feuerbach* has "miscarried". There is "no universal history that leads from savagery to humanitarianism"; only "one which leads from the slingshot to the megaton bomb ... Freedom can be defined only in negative terms, as it always corresponds to specific forms of unfreedom."³

But what if the revolution had occurred in a developed country, where the workers constituted the majority of society and where the possibility existed to use existing technology at the service of humanity - not a backward country, where a bureaucracy, on the basis of the socialised property relations, was able to assert its authority (by means of the gulag and the firing squad) and where it creamed off the surplus for itself and the state apparatus? In other words, the self-serving Stalinist bureaucracy, which had regressed back to a nationalist ideology (autarky, as in the five-year plans), had no intention of dismantling the existing division of labour, because it provided the most efficient basis for primitive accumulation. Such an instrumentalist approach to developing the productive forces was, of course, inimical to both the workers and the environment (as with capitalism in the 19th century or China today).

Adorno would go on to abandon dialectical and historical materialism - ie, the dialectic of base/superstructure - because, as an aesthetician, he became increasingly concerned with events in the cultural realm (namely, a culture

industry which threatened to swamp authentic art, etc). Therefore he failed to appreciate the fact that Stalinism not only betrayed the revolution: it also let capitalism regain its world hegemony. This ensured that, post-1945, the door was now opened even wider for the rise of the *société de consommation* and the culture industry.

Be that as it may, he is right to argue that, as things stand, instrumentalism is deeply ingrained in the human psyche. However, "it does not offer a blueprint for the future", but responds to "the darkening of the world" brought about by fascism, Stalinism and the growth of the "administered society", in which "false needs are met, not real ones" - via advertising, the culture industry, etc.⁴

3. The gaps in Marx

The gaps in Marx do not help. As I stated in the first article, of Marx's four impediments to consciousness - private property, alienated labour, commodity fetishism and the hierarchic division of labour - the last of these is crucial to overcoming the other three, given its mind-crippling effects for the worker (both yesterday and today). This explains why the masses are unable to develop communist mass consciousness spontaneously.

István Mészáros is one of a handful of Marxists who is willing to address this problem - not just historically, but also concretely. In *The power of ideology* (1989), he explains that the characteristic feature of the ruling ideology which prevails during the declining phase of a mode of production is that there is "no alternative", despite the growing crisis of the system. Although Marxism argues the opposite, it will not succeed unless its "socialist project strives for a 'positive social revolution', in the course of which the associated individuals can 'change from top to bottom the conditions of their industrial and political existence, and consequently their whole manner of being' (Marx)":⁵

For Marx, capitalism was private-property capitalism and, where it seems to lose its strictly private-enterprise nature, as in state industries and even joint-stock companies, he saw it as

a partial abolition of the capitalist mode of production within that mode of production: a sign of the decay of the capitalist system.⁶

But "in the face of the massive power of capital's increasing concentration and centralisation, the countervailing political force of labour must be on an equally large scale, if it is to have any chance of success against its adversary".⁷

History shows us that the creation of a "countervailing political force of labour on an equally large scale" poses a huge problem for Marxists, since this cannot be imposed from above. It is integrally related to another equally important question: viz, the need to work out a strategy to overcome the existing division of labour, so as to ensure that the masses develop the required communist consciousness - not just for the revolutionary moment, but in a form which can be sustained for more than one generation; otherwise the social revolution will fail. But, given the fact that Marx does not provide such a strategy, finding an adequate *material mediation* has dogged revolutionary Marxists ever since.

Mészáros illuminates the problem of the gaps in Marx by looking at his account of *The civil war in France* (1871). Written from London in considerable ignorance of what was really happening in Paris, this amounts to an optimistic evaluation of the commune as a "revolution against the bourgeois state".

Of course, we have the luxury of hindsight - unlike Marx himself when he wrote his famous address. Nevertheless, it is essential that we compare the dream with reality. On the one hand, the communards demonstrated that, in order to succeed in the first instance, the proletarian revolution must overthrow the centralised state power, including its apparatus of a standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy and judiciary, because these are based on the "hierarchic division of labour". On the other hand, in reality, the associated individuals did not possess the consciousness of the need to "change

from top to bottom the conditions of their industrial and political existence, and consequently their whole manner of being". They did not understand the historical import of their own achievements.

Therefore, firstly, they allowed the standing army to retreat to Versailles. Secondly, they failed to confiscate the "great financial companies and contractors of Paris", who were guilty of "colossal robberies against its citizens". Thirdly, they were unable to win over the rest of France to their cause; including the other great cities, such as Lyons and Marseilles, and especially the peasantry, who had to bear the brunt of the Prussian indemnity.⁸

One reason for this was the fact that the leadership of the commune was divided between supporters of the International Working Men's Association, anarchists and radicals. Moreover, the working class in the other cities of France were not at the same level of consciousness as the communards.

Yet in the first draft of *The civil war in France*, in 'The character of the commune', Marx ascribes to the working class "the full consciousness of their historic mission": The working class "knows it has to pass through different phases of the class struggle" and must "replace the economic conditions of class labour by conditions of free and cooperative labour", etc.⁹

Nevertheless, Marx was right to praise the commune's *actual* achievement - however heroic, albeit limited and short-lived - as the prototype for a revolutionary government of the future; as "the form at last discovered" for the emancipation of the proletariat. Thus he concludes his address with these resounding words:

Working men's Paris, with its commune, will be forever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class. Its exterminators' history has already nailed to that eternal pillory from which all the prayers of their priests will not avail to redeem them.¹⁰

What we fight for

Later in *What is to be done?* (1903), and other works, Lenin tries to fill the gaps in Marx with his theory of the vanguard party. But, as we have seen, backward Russia was isolated from the workers in the advanced capitalist countries. The longer this situation continued, the counterrevolution was bound to triumph, because the iron dictatorship that was necessary to defend the revolution also laid the material foundation for the victory of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Arguably it would become the most monstrous regime in history. As a result, it has left a poisonous legacy, both for the left and the masses. Therefore today Marxism struggles to survive, in both theory and practice.

The failure of the social revolution in the 20th century unleashed the forces of global capitalism on a far greater scale than that envisaged by Marx. He had already “put the question of the transition to socialism on the historical agenda in a hostile global context”. Therefore the “tentative first steps in the direction ... of the state’s withering away could not be seriously contemplated for a moment, in view of the prevailing relation of forces heavily dominated by the capitalist ‘dominant peoples’”.¹¹ Certainly this restricts the opportunities for a successful revolution engineered by a single country, as the defeat of the Chilean revolution in the 1973 shows; also the degeneration of the Cuban revolution (one hesitates to mention the tragedy of the Vietnamese revolution: two million people died - but not for socialism!).

The experience of the post-war ‘mixed economy’, based on the nationalisation of ailing industries, albeit under the control of the state, produced the same forms of hierarchical management as in the private sector, which was in the process of “transnational integration”, which does not make the producers any more “associated producer” than they were before. Finally, “in the face of the massive power of capital’s increasing concentration and centralisation”, a “countervailing political force of labour ... on an equally large scale if it is to have any chance of success” has not materialised.¹²

The Lukácsian dilemma

The gaps in Marx also lead us into the dilemma which Lukács found himself in, as a result of his own experience as a revolutionary Marxist in the period of downturn for the world revolution (1919-21). In 1919 he supported a *voluntarist* strategy, based on the assumption of “imputed class-consciousness”, whereby the workers were expected to move directly from “unmediated consciousness of the commodity” to the “(mediated) interests of the class that have been arrived at through experience and theoretical knowledge”¹³ (which relates, in turn, to the problem of the division of labour, as outlined earlier). Thus the Hungarian workers’ state was short-lived, ending in bloody defeat.

Forty-odd years later, in his preface to the 1967 edition of *History and class-consciousness*, Lukács admits that, in 1919

I was unable ... to progress beyond the notion of ‘imputed class-consciousness’. By this I meant the same thing as Lenin in *What is to be done?*, when he maintained that socialist class-consciousness would differ from the spontaneously emerging trade union consciousness, in that it would be implanted in the workers “from outside”: ie, “from outside the economic struggle and the sphere of the relations between workers and employers”.¹⁴

But, less than five years later, in 1923, he does a *volte face* and writes *History and class-consciousness*: ie, he rejects the strategy of the vanguard party, because it

leads to voluntaristic actions on behalf of the class, which are counterproductive. He now turns to Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism, as outlined in *Capital* volume 1, albeit under capitalism in its mature form (but on the cusp of decline): viz, a society in which the commodity form is “dominant, permeating every expression of life”, compared to capitalism in its immature form, wherein the commodity “only makes an episodic appearance”, which is essentially one of quality.¹⁵

By 1925, contra to “vulgar materialist communists” and the “bourgeois positivists”, he felt the need to reject the idea that “technology was the principle that objectively governed progress in the development of the forces of production”, because, on the basis of first-hand experience, this can also lead to “historical fatalism, to the elimination of man and of social activity”, as expressed in *History and class-consciousness*.¹⁶ In other words, for the time being, Lukács anticipates Adorno’s idea of the inherent danger of instrumentalism in *Dialectic of enlightenment* (1947), wherein “universal savagery does not lead to humanitarianism” via technology, etc.

The problem for Lukács is that, firstly, he misunderstands what Lenin (quoted above) means. Lenin does not put forward a notion of “imputed” class-consciousness in *What is to be done?* Rather he puts forward the idea that there is no such thing and so, in the first instance, socialist consciousness has to be introduced from “outside” the economic struggle. Given the existing division of labour, communist consciousness can only be attained by the intelligentsia, who are able to develop a theoretical understanding of reality, which must go beyond outward appearances, as well as having a world view. Only in this sense does communist consciousness come from the “outside”. But then it has to be introduced to workers from *inside* the economic struggle itself, albeit in the form of a democratic organisation, which sets out both to supersede the “immediate interests of the individual” with “the mediated interests of the class that has been arrived at through experience and knowledge”, and to dismantle the existing division of labour: ie, by a vanguard, comprising advanced workers and intellectuals, both in theory and practice.

Secondly, Lukács would later go on to reconcile himself with the Stalinist bureaucracy, which perpetuated the undemocratic nature of the party, along with the existing division of labour. The left has been bedevilled by this ever since, which today becomes even more problematical, given its isolation and reduction to a few small, squabbling groups, which are unable to overcome their sectarian differences and so unite their meagre forces into something more substantial.

Lukács chose to shelter under a boulder, which, as he soon realised, could suddenly move and crush all those who crouch there - unless, lizard-like, you are able to escape in the nick of time and live to fight another day. To his credit, in the 1950s, the lizard did criticise the boulder, when it moved against his native Hungary:

When the Hungarian revolt erupted in 1956, Lukács, [whilst being brutally objective about] the chances of success of an essentially spontaneous uprising, did not hesitate to cast his lot with the cause of the insurgent workers and students. Participating in the Nagy government, in which he presciently warned against withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, he was seized by Russian troops ...¹⁷

Somehow the lizard escaped! But the man who hated modernism also attacked Adorno and his friends in the Frankfurt school, who had “taken up residence in the Grand Hotel Abyss ... a beautiful hotel, equipped with every comfort”, including second Viennese school entertainments

designed to “heighten the enjoyment of the subtle comforts offered”.¹⁸ Thus the tragedy of the 20th century ground on.

With the benefit of historical hindsight, which neither Lukács or Adorno possessed (then or later), once again, the real tragedy was the *accident* of the revolution itself: ie, it should have happened in Germany or Britain, which had the right conditions to take it forward.

Here I need to develop an earlier point concerning the failure of the social revolution: the betrayals of Stalinism. ‘Socialism in one country’ meant revolutions must go to the wall in the name of ‘peaceful coexistence’ with imperialism. Therefore, in the post-war world, the door was pushed wide open for the rise of the *société de consommation*, including new forms of mass entertainment or the “culture industry” (as Adorno describes it). Its foundations had been already laid in pre-war America. But the process was now given an enormous boost by the emergence of large private corporations, able to make use of new technologies to develop and market ever more sophisticated - albeit standardised - forms of mass entertainment as a means to manufacture false needs. On the one hand, the culture industry is the beneficiary of Marx’s fourth impediment (which is key): the fact that the masses already suffer from the bourgeois division of labour, which is “mind-crippling”, combined with the fact that they are so tired and stultified by the system - hence their insatiable need for distraction. A marked contrast to communist society. On the other hand, at the same time, the culture industry reinforces this division. Thus we now have a *fifth* impediment to communist consciousness.

Building on Lukács’s theory of reification and Adorno’s theory of the culture industry, Debord introduces his theory of the “society of the spectacle”: “The spectacle ... is the very heart of society’s real unreality”: concretely “news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment”, which serves as total justification for the “conditions and aims of the system”, 24/7.¹⁹ But in the midst of all this there was May 1968.

May 1968 turning point?

The *événements* were an example of “positive dialectics”, yet Adorno never saw it coming! The post-war boom had created full employment, wage rises (snapping at the heels of rising prices) and expanded higher education, along with the ‘culture industry’, etc. Yet it was the ‘children of Marx and Coca-Cola’ who started it all.

The students began with a demand for education reforms, but ended up imagining what freedom might be like in a different kind of society; they fought the riot police in the streets. Then millions of workers started the biggest general strike in history, and not just over wages: thousands of them also occupied their factories and raised political demands as well. Together workers and students began to discuss what kind of future they wanted. But within weeks the revolt ended almost as quickly as it had begun.

But surely this explodes my main argument concerning Marx’s *four* impediments, as outlined in the *Economic and philosophic manuscripts* (commodity fetishism and division of labour), along with a ‘fifth’ impediment: ie, reification reinforced by the mass media/entertainment industry? Not so. The latter *did* play a role in 1968, albeit in conjunction with the counterrevolutionary role of Stalinism: ie, the Parti Communiste Français. Faced with an incipient revolution, it decided that ‘now was not the time’. Therefore it entered into a counterrevolutionary pact with the French state: in return for the promise of immediate improvements

in wages for the workers, the party used its influence in the trade unions to call off the general strike, as well as end the factory occupations. At the same time, it denounced the revolutionary students as ‘anarchists’.

This strategy had the desired effect: ie, the PCF was able to split the rank and file away from the vanguard workers and stop the tiny revolutionary left from gaining further influence. Once the workers agreed to return to work, the students had no option but to end their revolt. Thus the “society of the spectacle” was able to resume its work: to epitomise “the prevailing mode of social life”.²⁰

Later this historic defeat was rationalised by Louis Althusser, erstwhile Marxist philosopher and supporter of the PCF. According to his structuralist (undialectical) theory of ideology, men do not make their own history; rather they are constructed by ideology: “Both the ideological and the theoretical are redefined as practices which produce particular products” and so they are “as much material forces as are the economic or political practices”.²¹ Therefore Althusser overturns Marx’s base/superstructure model.

At the same time, this disconnect between Althusser’s theoretical imperatives (the ‘enlightened Marxist theoretician’, on the one hand, and the ‘ensnared proletariat’, on the other) and “lived experience” produced a “critical reversal”, or the rise of post-structuralism. In philosophical terms, the latter may be characterised as a Nietzschean rejection of the enlightenment and “repressive reason”, in favour of the “the logics of disintegration”. Therefore, Jacques Derrida argues that “stable conceptions of meaning, subjectivity and identity” have to be dismantled, whereas the ex-Trotskyite, Jean-François Lyotard, introduces the “politics of desire”, wherein he toys with the idea of the “libidinal economy” (for whom?)²²

Post-structuralism also encouraged the rise of postmodernism - or the idea that the new mass media has opened up a new epoch for art, albeit one which privileges conception over aesthetic labour at the expense of form. Thus, by means of false consciousness, backed up by the art institution and the market, art ceases to be art: ie, the free play of man’s physical and mental faculties, whose driving force is the human desire for freedom and fulfilment.²³

In the final article in this series, I will discuss the remaining three problems that I believe Marxists need to address in relation to Marx’s essentialism and his concept of the human ● www.rexdunn.co.uk

Notes

1. ‘Marx’s concept of the human’ *Weekly Worker* January 26.
2. See the introduction to the essay section on my website, which provides a more expanded and nuanced account: rex.dunn@rexdunn.co.uk.
3. T Adorno *Dictionary of critical theory* London 2001.
4. *Ibid*.
5. I Mészáros *The power of ideology* London 1989, p259.
6. *Ibid* p271.
7. *Ibid* p272.
8. K Marx *The civil war in France* Cambridge 1996, pp163-207.
9. *Ibid* London 1996, p532.
10. K Marx *The civil war in France: address of the general council of the International Working Men’s Association* Mew York 1983, p522.
11. I Mészáros *op cit* p270.
12. *Ibid* pp 271-72.
13. G Lukács *History and class-consciousness: reification and the consciousness of the proletariat* London 1990, p173 (my emphasis).
14. G Lukács *op cit* preface to 1967 edition, ppviii-ix.
15. *Op cit* p84.
16. *Op cit* preface, pxxxiii.
17. I Mészáros *The power of ideology* London 1989, p119.
18. *Ibid* p95.
19. G Debord *Society of the spectacle* (1967), thesis 6: www.marxists.org/reference/archive/debord/society.htm.
20. *Ibid* p13.
21. T Lovell *Pictures of reality* London 1983, p31.
22. P Dews *Logics of disintegration* London 1990, pp128-29, pix.
23. S Morawski *Marx and Engels on literature and art* New York 1977, pp38-39.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly worker

**Constitutional
coup - even an
unconstitutional
coup**

Don't shit where you eat

Theresa May is only one of many people put in an awkward position by Donald Trump's travel bans, argues **Paul Demarty**

As I write, there is still a formal invitation from the British government to Donald Trump for his first state visit. Theresa May has batted away a series of increasingly urgent demands that it be withdrawn - first of all in Turkey, and then again in a joint press conference with taoiseach Enda Kenny.

The proximate cause of all this is, of course, Trump's 'Muslim ban' - to be precise, a travel ban for all foreign nationals originating from seven named countries with majority-Muslim populations, initially including even legal permanent residents of the United States.

Trump first mooted the idea in December 2015, calling for a "complete and total shutdown" of Muslim immigration to America. It became one of the many policies that caused a great scandal - the sort of scandal that would have led to its retraction even by a rightwing professional politician, but was instead doubled down on again and again, and rather began to merge into all the others. He did this so many times, and it seems odd to remember that each time he was roasted in the media and stood his ground, the great and the good seemed genuinely to expect that the condemnation would work, but now its failure is spectacularly and chillingly complete.

The implementation of this policy - initially barring visitors from Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen - is now in train. Your humble correspondent cannot recall ever seeing an American president's actions condemned so universally, in every corner of the media, by prime ministers and presidents the world over ... with one or two notable exceptions. The world howled - but May was the British bulldog that could manage only the merest yap. At PMQ she called the travel ban "divisive".

Ironically, this puts her in the same camp as the Kremlin, which has likewise remained circumspect, attempting to balance a potential thaw in relations with the United States under its new commander in chief with the immediate military alliances it operates in the Middle East. For May, the difficulty is perhaps the other way round: in Ireland, she spoke of that "special relationship", and would only point out that the "UK takes a different approach" to the question by way of 'criticism'. With article 50 looming, and uncertain times ahead, she needs that 'special relationship' to survive the Trump era's transvaluation of all geopolitical values.

There is the additional matter that she has so far been successful in taking ownership of the Brexit vote, and hardening the British tone of negotiation, especially on immigration. The point is to ensure that the Tories are the ones to benefit from that vote, and not rightist challengers like the UK Independence Party. Now would be a poor time to have an attack of the bleeding hearts.

There is one fly in that ointment - Nigel Farage. The latter has used Brexit to propel himself into the firmament, as (alas!) a kind of rootless cosmopolitan exemplar of all national



Trump versus the old world order

chauvinism, popping up in Washington for November's excitement, and gaining earlier access to the president-elect than any British official. Patrick Wintour, on *The Guardian* website, claims that it was *this* that led to the hasty offer of a state visit - according to his 'cabinet source', "The queen is the key here. She's not a secret weapon, she's the biggest public weapon you have. Nigel Farage can't get [Trump] in front of the queen."¹

Backlash

As often in the last few months, we find ourselves asking in earnest a question that, before November, would have been laughably naive: to wit, was the government's decision to extend a courtesy to the president of the United States of America an error of judgment? There remain very good reasons to keep on the sunny side of the Oval Office - The Donald, as we remember with mounting trepidation, does after all have his finger on The Button. Yet the story of the transition period, and even more of the first days of *Pax Trumpicana*, is of a violent autoimmune reaction on the part of the global elite.

Again: when was the last time disapproval of the White House was

so deafeningly unanimous? We read, day to day, of dismal approval ratings; of policies causing 'panic', 'chaos'; of racism and misogyny at the very summit of world politics; of climate change denial, shady alt-right advisors, Russian spycraft ... It reminds us almost of the relentless barrage of establishment opprobrium that greeted Jeremy Corbyn's election to the leadership of the Labour Party, except with an increasingly shrill note of desperation, with the stakes so very much higher.

The bottom line is: the possibility of a constitutional coup, an impeachment or suchlike, or even an *un*constitutional coup, cannot be ruled out. Elements of the military brass brief against their commander in chief, anonymously. The CIA is considered an enemy, apparently accurately - *the CIA!* The thought of toppling Trump must have occurred to many a well-placed individual, who could at least give it a go; the question is more one of risk. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will tell you, with some relief, that coups can go disastrously wrong.

There is a more insidious issue at work here, which is the particular relationship Trumpism has with its political predecessors. A few people

looked at that list of countries caught up in the travel ban, and thought it all sounded familiar; and familiar it was. The exact same countries were excluded, by executive order, from the US visa waiver programme by Barack Obama, almost exactly contemporaneously with Trump's vow to "figure out what the hell is going on". Perhaps today, Obama would not ban the same countries - he did, after all, pursue to his domestic-political cost a thaw in relations with Iran - but it is undeniable that he set them up, for Donald to knock 'em down.

The list, moreover, has other striking commonalities - Glenn Greenwald pointed out that "five of the seven ... were ones bombed by Obama, while the other two (Iran and Sudan) were punished with heavy sanctions".² Indeed, "bombed by Obama" is rather a weak way to put it for the five: all have been reduced by US foreign policy and/or military intervention over the last three decades, to varying degrees, to failed states.

Greenwald and countless others point out that the combined population of all seven countries are responsible for exactly zero terrorist attacks on US soil (9/11 was perpetrated by Saudis, the

Boston bombing by Chechens, and more or less everything else by natural-born Americans of various religious and political stripes); but frankly that is a *surprising* fact, for there must be no end of the displaced and bereaved on a twisted but understandable quest for vengeance in these ravaged lands. Trump treats them no worse (so far ...) than his predecessors; he simply dispenses with the 'humanitarian' doublethink, and openly avows himself a defender of "America first".

The same applies, it seems, across the full range of America's dirty little secrets. Whereas past presidents exalted the nation's immigrant heritage, while reducing illegal Chicano migrants to a superexploitable underclass to the great benefit of a certain sort of tycoon (including one Donald J Trump), the current resident of the White House demands a wall and promises to make Mexico pay for it. While previous presidents forced neoliberalism and free trade on others, at the same time as spending their own way out of crises, Trump advocates nationalist, Keynesian protectionism for everyone, with lofty internationalist virtue.

Trump's tragedy is that the doublethink of his predecessors is *objective* - that is, it is an effect of stubborn reality over them, not an expression of their own will. Imposing free trade on the rest of the world, while reserving protectionism for oneself, is the hallmark of all dominant capitalist states since the initial rise of that form of society. The lies are *necessary* to the smooth functioning of the world order.

Yet lies they remain; and there grows the risk of cynicism at their relentlessness. Those who today lament the credulity with which Trump's utterly fantastical assertions are met in some quarters (for example, the idea that thousands of Muslims in New Jersey cheered as they watched the Twin Towers fall) are almost invariably the people who insist that neoliberal free trade is the rising tide that lifts all boats; meanwhile, the Rustbelt rusts.

If there is a moral to this story, it is this: don't shit where you eat ●

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Notes

- www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jan/31/how-nigel-farage-taunts-prompted-hasty-offer-of-trump-state-visit.
- https://theintercept.com/2017/01/28/trumps-muslim-ban-is-culmination-of-war-on-terrorism-but-still-uniquely-shameful.

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