

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly worker



**1917: Menshevik Central
Worker Group calls for
overthrow of Romanovs**

- Letters and debate
- Trump's legal battles
- Dystopian futures
- New Iranian sanctions

No 1141 Thursday February 9 2017

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

£1/€1.10



Will France
be next?

LETTERS



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

CLPD regrets?

Jon Lansman's role as a key figure in the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy must surely be in question now, after his January 10 anti-democratic coup in Momentum - as well as his failure to champion, during his time in charge of Momentum, one of the CLPD's key demands: the mandatory selection of parliamentary (and other) candidates.

The imposed new constitution of Momentum abolishing at a stroke the national committee, regional committees and conference, imposed a so-called 'one member, one vote' constitution without daring to submit the constitution itself to 'one member, one vote' approval. Imposing this so called "digital democracy" was backed by six votes, by email, without face-to-face discussion, of an illegitimate steering committee. Changing it now requires not only 50% of those voting in an online ballot, but a positive vote by 30% of the membership - the kind of threshold desired by Tories and Labour rightwingers to make trade unions ineffective.

The coup has outraged democrats in Momentum. The abolished national committee refuses to be abolished, and has elected a coordinating group to work between meetings. The abolished conference arrangements committee refuses to be abolished, and is pressing ahead with a March 11 "Grassroots Momentum" networking conference of local groups. Many candidates, myself included, standing for election under the imposed constitution to Lansman's national coordinating group, are campaigning on anti-constitution platforms. The Labour Representation Committee and Red Labour have rejected, in disgust, the offer of places in Momentum as affiliated organisations.

But what of the CLPD? Labour Party Marxists has submitted the following motion to the CLPD AGM, to be held on Saturday February 25 at Friends Meeting House, Euston (11.15am start).

"Noting that the CLPD is invited to affiliate to Momentum, this AGM reaffirms that the CLPD remains committed to campaign for the democratisation of the Labour Party, including mandatory selection of parliamentary candidates.

"The democratisation of Labour is not furthered by undemocratic behaviour in Momentum. This AGM regrets the curtailment of normal democratic procedures in Momentum."

Come along and support the motion. If you have not renewed your CLPD membership for 2017, you can do so online at www.clpd.org.uk. "Membership is open to all members of the Labour Party, and we welcome affiliation from all labour movement organisations."

Stan Keable

Labour Party Marxists

Misbehavin'

A post keeps popping up on my Facebook news feed urging me to vote for the slate of candidates promoting a 'United Momentum' in the elections for Momentum's national coordinating group.

So far I've managed not to comment that what they really want us to vote for is a 'well behaved Momentum'. But I'm not sure how much longer I can resist - I'm not that big an advocate of 'well behaved' politics.

Barbara Campbell

Stockton-on-Tees

Labour cuts

It is bad enough that the Tories on Warwickshire County Council have pushed through their £67 million cuts package, as they did at their meeting last Thursday, but we are furious that

they could only get these massive cuts agreed by having the full support of all 22 Labour councillors. The cuts announced are a direct result of a compromise budget agreed between Tory and Labour councillors.

Labour's excuse for this is that they were able to take out "some of the more vicious cuts the Conservatives were proposing". Councillor June Tandy, head of the Labour group, went on to say: "We are proud that we have the courage not simply to vote along party lines, but to look toward better services for Warwickshire people."

It is inconceivable that a Labour politician can express pride at voting through cuts on this scale. The founders of the Labour Party would turn in their graves to hear such words.

Pete McLaren
Rugby Tusc

Bad omens

Jeremy Corbyn became the focus for working class resistance to austerity by accident. However, the radicalisation around him - including the mass rallies and the big spike in people joining the Labour Party to support him against the right - has been a positive sign and the radical Corbyn wave has not yet been defeated, although it is starting to recede.

The movement has to learn the lessons from the partial setbacks that have occurred, and that are coming. I say 'partial', because I see mass left radicalisation as a growing feature of the next period. An adequate international socialist party will begin to emerge from the battles that are to come. Either the Labour Party will split or it will dwindle as a mass force. In its present form, it has little or nothing to offer working class people.

The growth of reactionary nationalism, epitomised by Trump and by Brexit, is both a warning and a spur to action. Those in the labour movement who propose that the way forward is through an accommodation with the reactionary Brexit project of the Tories and its anti-migrant scapegoating must be fought and removed from positions of power within the labour movement. We need a democratic socialist movement that can take on and defeat the move to the right by the ruling class.

Will Corbyn rise to that task and promote such a movement? The omens don't look good, given recent events in Momentum and the anti-democratic coup. The socialist left needs to democratically organise itself in order both to put pressure on Corbyn not to politically capitulate to the right, and to get across the socialist message of international working class unity against austerity, social inequality and the drive to war.

Sandy McBurney
Glasgow

Don't go soft

Soft Brexit will be the real disaster for Labour. Can you imagine continued membership of the European single market - all those fees to pay, but no say on the leading bodies of the European Union? Worst Brexit ever! 'Tariff-free access to the ESM' is not a slogan that is going to win hearts and minds for Labour. No, no.

There are only two games in town: far-right Brexit, by which Britain becomes an offshore tax haven for the super-rich, full of unemployed, homeless slaves - a sort of fascist nightmare; or socialist Brexit, by which a regime of full employment is established, a national bank with a monopoly of credit and the mega-profits and property of the giant corporations and superrich are made the property of all.

Socialist Brexit would seek a new European settlement that does not treat the working class like migrating cattle or tethered donkeys in sink communities. The worst possible thing for Labour will be to get sucked into an unpopular front

for soft Brexit with the likes of the Lib Dems, the Greens, pro-EU Tories, Bob Geldof, Richard Branson and corporate capitalism.

Ask Hillary Clinton how 90s neoliberal throwbacks get on electorally against the proto-fascists. They don't. They don't want to. Fundamentally, Britain voted for Brexit because British capitalism is moribund and dead, and cannot any longer compete in Britain, let alone in the ESM. 'Remain' was never an option, so the only logical response if we don't want to end up in the capitalist version of North Korea is socialist Brexit. Don't let all this crap about triggering article 50 be just a cover for capitulating to the wretched EU and soft Brexit.

David Ellis
Leeds

Article 50

Professor AC Grayling told his audience at the recent Putney Debates that he had been opposed to Scottish independence in 2014, but he was now in favour of it. What had changed his mind was Brexit. He says "a mere 37% of the gerrymandered electorate voted 'leave'." He blamed this on Cameron, who "lazily and thoughtlessly allowed the referendum to be poorly organised" by excluding young people and EU citizens living and paying taxes in the UK. He concluded "had they voted in the EU referendum, the result would have been markedly the other way. Their exclusion was gerrymandering."

This week the issue is the triggering of article 50 to start negotiations. Corbyn is in a no-win situation - damned if he does and damned if he doesn't. This is generally how Corbo gets a bad press, whatever he does, every day of the week. On article 50 he really is between a rock and a hard place. What should he do?

Hard Brexit is the hardest anti-working class policy not only for UK workers, but for workers in the EU. Hard Brexit must be fought tooth and nail, the only question is how? First, the working class is seriously divided and that must be recognised and taken into account. Second, hard anti-working class Brexit will not be defeated in parliament. Nobody should have any illusions in the House of Commons or Lords.

The Commons is out of touch and will prove once again to be a pliant tool of the crown. Nobody should have any faith or belief that the Commons can or will defeat anti-working class Brexit. If there is endorsement or rejection of the dodgy and corrupt deal Her Majesty's government will come up with, it is far better to put it to the people. Who should vote on the Tory deal? Trust the people or trust MPs? It is no contest. There should be a referendum on the final deal. Let the case be made, tested and contested in the workplaces, on the streets and in our communities.

The real battle over Brexit will have to take place outside parliament. This phoney struggle between MPs and parties inside parliament is only useful in so far as it educates working class people about the true state of affairs and what is to be done to by the working class movement to unite and mobilise direct action.

Corbyn has done one thing correctly. He has put the Parliamentary Labour Party behind the idea of a democratic mandate on article 50. The question is, what is a democratic mandate? Is it a British unionist or UK mandate? Is it a mandate from local constituents? Is it a mandate from the people of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales? The latter is the only democratic mandate that Corbyn should accept. It is the only option if you are prepared to do battle outside parliament.

The people of Scotland and Northern Ireland (and the rest of Ireland) have voted to remain in the EU. The people in England and Wales voted to leave. These votes are a nail in the coffin of the UK. All people around the world

who have been victims of British imperialism will rightly be happy about that. Brexit is about a revamp of British imperialism, more firmly dependent on and subservient to the United States and the newly elected King Donald the First.

The PLP has split between British unionists, who will be voting under their three-line whip to trigger article 50, and localists who take their mandate from their constituencies. It would be political suicide if every Labour MP voted along the lines of their constituency. It would split the Labour Party even more deeply than the Tories have been divided over Europe.

If we were standing in Corbyn's shoes, what should we do? Or, to put it another way, what would a revolutionary democrat do in the face of this dilemma? In the first case Corbyn should instruct his Scottish MPs to vote against article 50, taking their mandate from the Scottish people. This is what the Scottish National Party has done. He should instruct his English and Welsh MPs to vote for triggering EU negotiations. If he did this, he would send out a signal the people outside parliament how the battle is going to go.

On the other hand, a revolutionary democrat would recognise the right of nations to self-determination and the sovereignty of the people. Conservative Tories, liberal unionists and conservative communists have one overriding principle in the preservation of the British crown and British union. Defending the Great British nation instead of ending it as quickly as possible is nothing other than reactionary stupidity. In the post-Brexit world the British union is heading backwards towards the British Union of Fascists.

Corbyn's socialism is rooted in liberal democracy, not revolutionary democracy. He is right to attend to issues of the 'will of the people' and a democratic mandate, not least because of the divisions in the working class. But he has no more recognised the democratic rights of the Scottish or Irish people than Theresa May. May, a hard-line unionist and anti-working class Brexiteer, has already declared she will drive her tanks all over Scotland and Northern Ireland. Corbyn is now tying himself into that with fatal consequences.

Steve Freeman
Left Unity and Rise

Uphaval

Reading Mike Macnair's thoughtful piece on United States foreign policy under Donald Trump ('The new president and

the new global order', January 26) brought to my mind something that Mike said to me last summer: that those hoping for a genuine British exit from the EU, as opposed to a fudged deal, would need to bank upon the victory of Marine Le Pen in the French presidential election this coming spring.

I am convinced that the French presidential election, were Le Pen to be elected, would be a turning point not merely in French, or even just in European, but in global affairs. She has made it clear that unless the EU becomes no more than an informal arrangement amongst sovereign states - that is, more or less dissolves itself - she will campaign for France to leave. She already intends to pull France out of the euro, which would cause severe problems for the economy of Europe.

The EU can cope with Britain's departure, as it was always semi-detached. France was a founder-member of what is now the EU - it is central to it; were France to leave, this would completely destabilise it. The course would be set for the disintegration of the EU in a flurry of rightwing nationalism - a course beset with uncertainty and the danger of the revival of national rivalries amongst the European powers.

Were this to occur, then the realisation of Trump's dream of a disintegrated EU would mean that the US ruling class would need to adopt his particular version of an 'America first' policy. Mike points in his article to the close relationship between the EU and Nato in respect of the establishment and subsequent exercising of US power in Europe: could Nato exist as an institution if Europe fell apart into a gaggle of nation-states that were potentially or even actually rivals? The US would then need to relate in a multilateral manner to the nation-states of Europe, and would probably have to step in, perhaps with Russian help, were their rivalries to get out of hand. This would almost certainly further destabilise an already unstable continent.

Most authorities feel that Le Pen is unlikely to win the election, and I tend to agree with them. If she loses, then the US ruling class can breathe rather more freely, bourgeois opposition to Trump can take off in earnest and the British capitalist class can seek its preferred 'least worse' option of a fudged deal with the EU. Nevertheless, a victory on her part is not impossible: after all, who two or three years back would have thought it possible that Britain would vote to leave the EU and that Trump

Fighting fund

Chipping in

Approaching a *Weekly Worker* seller at Saturday's anti-Trump demo in London, a certain anonymous comrade offered a donation to our paper - with the proviso that we didn't mention even his initials in this column, as he thought they were "too obvious". Work that one out! Anyway, thanks very much for the £20 note, comrade.

However, the demo wasn't particularly fertile ground - we only raised around £500 in total. But, of course, on top of that we have received quite a few donations from other sources. There were 10 standing orders - that most reliable source of regular income - ranging from £10 to the £30 received from SW and CG. Also worth a mention were GD's £25 and DV's £20, while that prolific donor, comrade BK, came up with one of his regular bank transfers, this time for £25.

Then there were three PayPal

contributions - thank you in particular, NT, for a tremendous £50 - while LM sent us a handy £25 cheque and CT threw in an extra tenner when renewing his subscription.

All that took the total received over the last seven days to £838, and the running total for February to £940. Yes, I know we're only just over a week into the month, but we will still need to raise the *full* £1,750. So no room for complacency - how about a few more of you internet readers chipping in via our PayPal facility?

Speaking of which, the number of online readers has been creeping up again recently - last week there were 3,402 of them. If you're one of them, you know what I'd like you to do! ●

Robbie Rix

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

ACTION

would become US president?

The ruling classes all around the world will be preparing for this eventuality; on our side, we who want a socialist alternative to both the status quo and a world determined by Le Pen and Trump must consider how we should respond, were she to win the election and thereby trigger the biggest upheaval in world geopolitics since the end of World War II.

Paul Flewers
London

Fancy that

Some of the commentaries around House of Commons speaker John Bercow's remarks about Donald Trump are interesting.

On the one hand, liberals are delighted that 'our great institutions' are reflecting 'British values' (vomit) and applauding Bercow. On the other hand, the ultra-left are sneering that a bourgeois politician is doing the job the working class should be doing and warning of parliamentary cretinism.

In reality, both are wrong. Bercow's actions are not devoid of context. Who can doubt that they are directly influenced by the enormous wave of anti-Trump sentiment and the massive demos of recent weeks? In this sense, the working class is doing *exactly* what it should do: forcing bourgeois institutions to bow to its will. Fancy that: protesting, kicking off, etc, actually does work, eh?

It's now entirely possible that the planned state visit will not take place after all. Well done to all concerned. Now, if we could only apply the same fury and will to the matters of food banks, poverty pay, the NHS, the housing crisis, and so on.

Harry Paterson
Nottingham

Felicia's fight

As International Women's Day (March 8) celebrates all that is great and good about the 'fairer sex' and 80 years since the start of the Spanish Civil War, it would be timely to remember one woman from England whose lust for liberty would see her fight against fascism and pay the ultimate sacrifice for doing so.

Felicia Browne was born into a well-to-do family on February 18 1904 in Surrey. The talented girl had a flare for art and at the age of just 16 enrolled in art college. In 1928 Felicia went to Berlin, where she traded in her paint brushes and canvas for a brief dalliance with metalwork and stonemasonry. She was in Berlin to witness the growth of Nazism and, instead of cowering away from the dark cloud of the swastika, Felicia took it on and was an active member in anti-fascist activities in Berlin, including street fights with Hitler devotees.

Perhaps it was her active role in the anti-fascist movement in Berlin that saw her leave the city sooner than she preferred. She left it in such a hurry, she even left behind her art tools, but her activism did not wane and when she returned to her home soil she joined the Communist Party of Great Britain.

Felicia had witnessed at first hand the rise of Nazism and the spread of fascism, so she flung herself wholeheartedly into the fight to stop it. She took part and organised protest marches, because, as she saw it, it was up to the ordinary working class to rise up against fascism, as those in Downing Street were merely ignoring it. She continued with her art, but it took on a more leftwing perspective and she became an art contributor to the *Left Review*.

In July 1936 Felicia went on a driving holiday through France with her friend, the journalist and photographer Dr Edith Bone. Their vacation saw them journey from Paris down south and over the Pyrenees, where Barcelona was marked as their final destination of the holiday, but at the heart of this decision, of course, was Felicia's leftwing politics.

The two holidaying ladies arrived in Barcelona in time for the People's Olympiad - a socialist opponent to

the 1936 Berlin Olympics, which saw swaths of swastikas and a beaming Hitler overseeing it all. Unfortunately, the People's Olympiad didn't get a chance to go ahead, as a coup by the fascist general Franco against the republican government occurred.

Many athletes and tourists either fled or found themselves stranded, but many more, including Felicia, chose to stay and fight it out with the Francoists. She joined a Marxist militia and for a time was stationed in Barcelona, where she did patrol duty. As the war escalated, she wanted to be in the thick of the action and undertook weapons training before going to the front.

Felicia did not find it easy to enlist in a combat group. She had to fight gender discrimination in order to win her place to fight the fascists. Every time she tried to join a militia at the front lines, she was dissuaded by those in charge: men! But she held out, wore them down and eventually won them over with her with gusty attitude. "I can fight as well as any man," she sternly informed them.

Felicia saw action on the Zaragoza front, where on August 25 she joined a small group of 10 on a dangerous mission. They drove to Tardienta town by car before walking 12 kilometres to a rail line used by Francoists. Their aim was to blow it up. All went well in the way of placing the dynamite without arousing any suspicion, but, little did they know, they were being watched by a troop of Francoists nearby. Making their way back from the railway line over the unruly Spanish terrain, Felicia and her comrades came across a downed plane. They recognised the dead pilot as one of their own and, as they were burying him, 40 fascist soldiers ambushed them.

In the ensuing firefight, one of Felicia's comrades, an Italian, was shot. As she tended to his wounds, the ambushers unleashed a hail of machine gun fire on them, to which Felicia and her Italian comrade succumbed. In order to make a quick getaway, Felicia's comrades were unable to bring hers or the Italian's body with them, but they managed to gather some of their belongings and from the 32-year-old Felicia they took a sketch book.

Felicia's sketchbook managed to make its way back to England, where its contents made up part of a memorial exhibition in London in October 1936. They were then sold by the Artists International Association, with proceeds going towards Spanish relief. No doubt, the lady killed in defence of the Spanish republic would have approved of her art aiding the cause for which she gave her life.

Pauline Murphy
email

Art and truth

The late John Berger praised certain artists, as well discussing the great issues of realism and formalism - artists such as Cézanne and Léger; the sculptor, Ossip Zadkine; the Mexican muralists; and the photo-montage maker, John Heartfield.

In the 1950s, when Berger was a young art critic, abstraction - particularly abstract expressionism - was the dominant style in the art market, along with the figuration of Henry Moore and Francis Bacon. But Berger wasn't hostile to formal awareness as such. Neither the artists he admired nor his mentors, like Ernst Fischer and Max Raphael, championed naturalism as the only thing worth doing. Berger - British-born but committed early to 'Europe' - wrote approvingly too of Cubism, while his writing style owed much to Paris existentialism and phenomenology. He would often start with a statement, but go on to description, pinpointing his interaction with a work and not just the ideology behind it.

"I am not anti-abstract," he wrote in 1952. "I get considerable pleasure from those works in which real considerations lie behind each decision about colour and shape. The trouble is

that the pleasure is incomplete."

He often wrote about drawing - as an activity in itself and during essays on painters like Watteau or Rubens. Drawing for him was a metaphor: looking at things, searching out lines, making choices, relating a part to the whole; but this was only the start.

"A style," he wrote, "can never be criticised as such; it can only be criticised in relation to what the artist is intending to communicate." What we take away from the work is "the artist's way of looking at the world" and Berger asks: "Why does it give us pleasure? Because, I believe, it increases our awareness of our own potentiality."

Even a Goya sketch of an elderly woman gives us her indomitable character and can provoke questions about how we live our lives or treat the aged. It isn't a slogan, but it is an insight into more than the artist's own feelings, just as a Cézanne is more than an arrangement of snazzy colours. An artist like Jackson Pollock, though, had isolated himself in the cell of his own emotions and his paintings are like the marks "made on the inside walls of his mind".

On the other hand, the sculptor Zadkine made a modernist war memorial in Rotterdam that addresses the town's experience of being bombed in World War II ('Problems of socialist art', 1959). Zadkine's large metal figure draws on cubism to portray a wounded body that is both bent in agony and rising in resistance. This many-sidedness of the figure, Berger argues, attests to the whole complex experience, which the town inhabitants were proud to have recognised: "The figure represents a city and the sculpture is of bronze and so the wound, which is in fact a hole right through the body, is seen in terms of the twisted metal of a burnt-out building."

In his 1960 Pollock essay, Berger avows that "the constant problem for the western artist is to find themes for their art which can connect them with their public. (And by theme I do not mean a subject as such, but the developing significance found in a subject.)" This significance is the content of the artist's work and connects us to a way of seeing that can enrich our own.

In Berger's own paintings, books, screenplays and TV programmes, his content was found in neglected subject matter. His 1975 book, *A seventh man*, with pictures by photographer Jean Mohr, examined the importance of migrant workers to Europe before even Salman Rushdie mentioned them as a symbol of modernity. Some years later, Berger would remark about his more recent works of fiction that "a story is a rescuing operation".

He believed in evaluation: when he thought a work had failed, it was because it had failed to engage with the world. Take the example of the photo-montage pieces by the German, 'John Heartfield', in the 1930s. Heartfield was not a 'fine artist', but an acute political satirist using bits of photos to make a new picture like a cartoon. But Berger showed that Heartfield produced indifferent work, when, instead of ridiculing something precise like the Nazi slogan, 'Guns before butter', he had tried to embody an abstraction, like 'Viva the Popular Front'. By 1969, when this essay, 'The political uses of photo-montage', was published, Berger was all too aware that this failure of effect was particularly a danger for the committed artist, either because they had given into party diktat or moral pressure.

It was because he was a realist that the late John Berger didn't reject the discoveries of modernist art or the use of any medium or the value of collaboration, whether between practitioners or with the audience. Art was not "a weapon", but a process of attention. "The truth," he wrote, "is always first discovered in open space."

Mike Belbin
email

London Communist Forum

Sunday February 12, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Study of Ralph Miliband's *Parliamentary socialism*. This meeting: chapter 10 ('The sickness of Labourism'), section 1: 'From defeat to paralysis'. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk; and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday February 14, 6.45pm: 'The first Americans: archaeological and ethnohistorical perspectives'. Speaker: Alicia Colson. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: <http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

US imperialism - what now?

Saturday February 11, 1pm: Public meeting, Rosebery St. Peter's Community Centre, Storer Road Loughborough, LE11. 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.

Trump summit

Saturday February 18, 10am to 5pm: National meeting of anti-Trump activists, Friends Meeting House, 173-177 Euston Road, London NW1. Organised by People's Assembly: www.facebook.com/ThePeoplesAssembly.

Trump not welcome

Monday February 20, 5.30pm: Rally against state visit, Grey's Monument, Grey Street, Newcastle upon Tyne. Organised by Newcastle Unites: www.facebook.com/NewcastleUnites.

The candidate

Monday February 20, 7pm: Public meeting, Isabel Blackman Centre, Winding Street entrance, Hastings TN34. Author Alex Nunns introduces his new book about Jeremy Corbyn. Organised by Momentum Hastings: www.facebook.com/MomentumHGS.

Stand up to Trump

Tuesday February 21, 6pm: Coordinating meeting for the north-east campaign, Broadacre House, Market Street, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1. Organised by Newcastle Unites: www.facebook.com/NewcastleUnites.

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>.

Alternatives to austerity

Saturday February 25, 2pm: Debate, room 3, Liverpool Central Library, William Brown Street, Liverpool L3. David Lowes and Paul B Smith on 'Labour movement alternatives'. Organised by North West Socialist Theory Study Group: 07952 944318.

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.

Close Guantanamo

Wednesday March 8, 1pm: Protest, Parliament Square, Westminster, London SW1. Organised by Guantanamo Justice Campaign: <http://londonguantanamocampaign.blogspot.co.uk>.

We are many

Sunday March 12, 11am: Film screening, Bolivar Hall, 54 Grafton Way, London W1. Remember the 2003 anti-war mobilisation. Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: <http://socialistfilm.blogspot.co.uk>.

CPGB wills

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

EUROPE

Will France be next?

As the ruling circles take in the election of a right-populist US president, Paul Demarty looks at the rightwing threat within Europe



A journalist holds up a poster of Putin, Le Pen and Trump before the Russian president's news conference

The history of the United States of America is more linked to that of France than any other country apart from England.

It was, after all, French military assistance that proved so indispensable to the US Patriots, as they fought their first revolutionary war; and the same Patriots' example was of no small significance in France's own revolution a couple of decades later. French radicals maintained a trans-Atlantic interest, and it was upon the urge to celebrate the Union's victory over the slave south in 1865 that the USA gained its great icon, the statue of Lady Liberty that lifts her lamp by the golden door in New York harbour. Proving that history rhymes, it was only six years after that that the Parisian workers gave the world its first, doomed, desperate glimpse of proletarian power.

To highlight, as we do above, the revolutionary aspect of this conjoined history is a little ironic, of course. If a French Americophile (or an American Jacobin) had been cryogenically frozen in 1870 and woken yesterday, more than the technological changes would present a shocking aspect, for it seems that, far from egging each other on to heroic sacrifices in the service of human progress, the Americans and French are presently engaged in chasing each other into the arms of nihilistic reaction.

As is traditional, America has won the race, delivering Donald Trump to the Oval Office - the toupéed tribune of the huddled masses of white America. The outstanding question is whether France will follow suit directly: this spring, Marine le Pen of the Front National will be among many contenders for the presidency, and the question is not so much if she will make it to the run-off vote, but who will be her opponent - and, consequently, whether that opponent will save the establishment's blushes.

The odds are, in theory, against her. The run-off system tends to favour candidates in the political mainstream; the great recent demonstration of this

was Jacques Chirac's victory against le Pen's father, Jean-Marie, in 2002; the latter snuck into the second round to general horror, and the French left resolved to "vote for the crook, not the fascist". Things are a little different this time; Marine is not her father, and has completed the long-term project of transforming the FN from its fascist roots to a right-populist outlook, shedding le Pen *père* along the way. The socialists are in disarray in the run-up, and not the aftermath, of the vote, with incumbent president François Hollande roughly as popular as he leaves office as Nicolae Ceauşescu was in Romania in 1989.

The stage might be set for a much closer-run version of 2002, then - except that the candidate of the 'official' French right, François Fillon, has suddenly been cast into intense scandal, with allegations that he illegally paid salaries to his family members for jobs they were not actually doing (and then that he found his wife a job at the *Revue des Deux Mondes* by offering the latter journal's proprietor the *légion d'honneur*). Chirac may have been a crook preferable to a fascist, but his known misdeeds were long behind him, as he sought his second term in the Elysée Palace; only the most inveterate muckrakers would have borne them in mind then. Fillon's impropriety is new, his response has been abysmal, and it is all just about the worst look possible in the age of anti-establishment populism.

So the great white hope for the French establishment is now the plasticky technocrat, Emmanuel Macron, who served a bloodthirsty couple of years as Hollande's finance minister before launching his own political party and bid for power. Strikingly, Macron has never faced election to *anything* before now; his CV shows him not paying his dues in some municipal administration, but collecting fat cheques from Rothschilds. The polls currently have him on course to defeat le Pen in the second round; unfortunately for him, life is so damnably full of surprises.

What his candidacy tells us, such as it is, is that the capitalist establishment is starting to fight back in response to the dramatic setbacks it faced at the hands of nationalism last year. It may seem unimaginably daft for someone like Macron, whose economic reforms were unpopular enough to be forced through by way of presidential decree, to pose as a populist - him, of all people! Yet he is doing his best to make it work, casting the two François as representatives of a complacent elite, and himself as an outsider. He has managed to get large crowds to listen to him, after the fashion of Donald Trump, with whom he shares a relative paucity of political experience, a Bonapartist approach to supporters and little else.

Such a thing becomes explicable when we consider that there is a difference between a political establishment at the nadir of its complacency and that same establishment under grave threat. The French case is exemplary, when we take a wider view of the European Union. This time last year, things really were not looking too bad. The worst of the euro zone crisis was (hopefully) over; the Greek left had been crushed; Brexit was unlikely, but in any case survivable. The British vote rocked the boat, but the American one holed it beneath the waterline; Trump is a representative of that lunatic fringe of the American right that considers Europe a not a bulwark of American power, but a fetter on it.

Le Pen's victory this year would have been an existential crisis for the EU, whatever had happened last year; but last year has made the thing far more likely. So it is that, while the core capitalist countries have spent the years since the acute phase of the financial crisis ended sleepwalking smugly from one week to the next, they are now ready to take their stand: Eurocrats and mainstream politicians now denounce Trump, excoriate those like him in their own backyards, and pose as the last bastion of civilisation against the hordes

of irrationalist hatemongers, barely distinguishable from the 'radical Islamic terrorists' they so despise. So it is that the masters of the universe may reinvent themselves, however temporarily, as underdogs. So it is that some popular elements may be found to join them.

Benefiting

Conspicuously absent from this spirited fightback is, of course, our own Theresa May, who came under intense pressure over her government's decision to invite Trump for a state visit when the juicier parts of the new president's policy started to come into effect. May reacted swiftly to the Brexit vote, positioning herself as a ruthless implementer of the supposed popular will; her longer-term history as a prototype-Cameron, a liberal reform Tory, was already pretty distant from her approach at the home office, and now barely a trace remains.

In a generally reasonable article in last week's *Socialist Worker*, Alex Callinicos makes the rather eyebrow-raising claim that "Theresa May must have thought it was a smart move to become the first foreign leader to meet Donald Trump in the White House ... But it doesn't look like such a smart move now" (January 31). Now that ... what? Why, now that there are substantial mass protests against Trump's Muslim travel ban.

On that *exact* point, we shall wait and see. In a wider sense, of course, there is a truth to it. A friendly attitude to Trump is certainly not without risks. Suppose that le Pen is indeed defeated by Macron; that parliamentary arithmetic contrives to keep Geert Wilders out of the top spot in Holland; that Europe, in short, restabilises; and suppose that the American state core succeeds in bringing Trump to heel or impeaching him. Under those circumstances, May's decision to stake everything on cordial Atlantic relations will leave her dangerously exposed, as Brexit negotiations pick up speed.

Yet it is difficult to see what else she

might have done. Comrade Callinicos makes great play of the Churchillian "kitsch" on display at May's meeting with Trump, and in honour of the reactionary old bastard, we might say that May took the riskiest path, except for all the others she might have tried. Sharply flipping back into the socially liberal Toryism she briefly espoused in the middle of the last decade *now* would be political suicide. Maintaining a hard Brexit position, while condemning Trump's travel ban, will make her no friends on the continent, may make her powerful enemies in Washington, and would require absurd leaps in logic. If the nationalist tide is turned back for a time, she is in a tough spot, but no *more* screwed than she would be otherwise.

If things go the other way, of course, May stands to benefit considerably. If the rise of le Pen, Wilders and co destroys the EU and sets European unity back by decades - as it genuinely could - Britain will be in the enviable position at the front of the queue in bilateral negotiations with the global hegemon, as economic chaos reigns across the channel. In its ropiest periods, global capitalism is a negative-sum game - to use a term of Macronian delicacy for mass unemployment and war. If you are going to have to climb to safety over the bodies of others, the earlier you start making for the higher ground, the easier things will be later on.

If there is one organisation which will not be benefiting from all this chaos, it is the Socialist Workers Party. Callinicos's argument is tediously familiar stuff, with street demonstrations fetishised almost to the level of self-parody in the SWP's contemporary political outlook. In the same issue of *Socialist Worker*, Simon Basketter provides a lengthy paean to the protest march:

Collectively standing up for ourselves and others breaks down the atomised grind of life under capitalism. Those at the top want us to be passive observers of politics - but when we march we are putting ourselves at the centre. Protest pushes against the habit of subordination that capitalist society puts upon us ...

People can suddenly find they cannot go on living in the old way. They are repeatedly faced with a choice between enduring a terrible worsening of their lives or fighting back. The fightback does not always occur, nor is it guaranteed success. But when it does it throws the whole of society into crisis. Unable to solve its problems at our expense, the ruling class can split down the middle.

The logical result is that the only thing that matters is that people register their discontent in this particular, well-defined way. There are no explicit political criteria for the value of a protest *at all*. Which is not to say there are no *implicit* criteria (*Socialist Worker* did not support the marches of Pegida in Germany, after all); merely that they are not subject to serious argument, but rather merely 'obvious', and thus rely on pre-existing leftwing common sense, some of which is inherited directly from official state social liberalism.

The SWP is cock-a-hoop at the size of anti-Trump protests, and considers it the most important thing since the last million important things. When, months or years from now, it shows itself unable to distinguish itself from the wider neoliberal rearguard action, will Alex Callinicos acknowledge that it was not such a smart move? ●

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TRUMP

Epic confrontation brewing

Liberal opinion is in open revolt against the new president, writes Eddie Ford

Though it is still very early days yet, there is no sign of the Trump administration moving towards a more consensual or conventional *modus operandi* - or the president himself getting his wings clipped by the bureaucratic machinery. Quite the opposite, if anything: established norms and protocols are being thrown out of the window, as Trump continues to wage war on what he views as the liberal establishment.

This is graphically illustrated by the continuing showdown over Trump's executive order 13769,¹ which imposed a temporary, 90-day travel ban on people from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen - all of which, of course, have a predominantly or overwhelmingly Muslim population. Revealingly, insiders were said to be "stunned" by the apparent lack of legal groundwork done by White House aides (reportedly senior counsel Steve Bannon and policy chief Steven Miller) who wrote Trump's executive order, which created chaos at airports.

The resulting legal challenges to the order have led to what one American lawyer called an "epic confrontation" between the president and the constitution itself - sparked off on February 3 when a Washington state federal judge, James Robart, granted a temporary restraining order halting Trump's decree. There is to be a review of the lawsuit brought by Washington attorney general, Bob Ferguson, which maintained that the ban was "unconstitutional" and "harmful to the state's interests".² By doing so, Robart was siding with Minnesota and other states that are also attempting to sue the government. More precisely, Ferguson argued that the Trump order "violated" the guarantee of equal protection and the first amendment's establishment clause, infringed the constitutional right to due process and contravened the federal Immigration and Nationality Act - the attorney general is hoping to turn the temporary restraining order into a permanent injunction.

In response, a furious Donald Trump issued a volley of Twitter attacks on the "so-called judge", saying he "cannot believe a judge would put our country in such peril" - and "if something happens blame him and court system". Another tweet went: "I have instructed Homeland Security to check people coming into our country *very carefully*", but "the courts are making the job very difficult!" Doubtlessly making Trump even angrier, attorneys for the department of justice immediately filed a motion with the Ninth Circuit appeals court requesting an emergency stay of the order - but were denied the request "pending briefing". Naturally, the DOJ continues to rigorously defend the travel ban and urged the court to reinstate it in the interests of national security - a 15-page brief argued it was a "lawful exercise of the president's authority" and not a ban, or "shut-out", against Muslims as such. However, at the time of writing, DOJ lawyers appear to be having a tough time - Trump's electoral campaign statements specifying a Muslim ban have been cited, as were remarks by one of the president's advisors, Rudy Giuliani, about coming up with a way of making such a ban "work legally".

Trump's move has outraged large swathes of bourgeois and liberal opinion in the US - provoking nationwide protests and demonstrations (with the enthusiastic support of the Democratic Party, of course). Bernie Sanders - who gave Hillary Clinton a serious scare during the battle for the Democratic nomination - denounced a president who "apparently has contempt for the



Each front cover worth a thousand words

entire judiciary", urging congress and the courts to "actively check each other and the president", as the US is supposed to be a democracy, "not a one-man show". He worried that Trump was leading the US into a "dangerous and unprecedented moment in American history", and declared that the "onus" was on Republican leaders - especially Mitch McConnell - to "have the courage to stand up" to Trump's "movement toward authoritarianism".

These ructions over the travel ban have reverberated throughout the world. In Britain, it was said that executive order 13769 would prevent the Iraqi-born Tory MP, Nadhim Zahawi, from visiting his children, who are studying in the US - he described the order as "cruel", "sad" and "hugely discriminatory".³ Reflecting this outrage, John Bercow, former Tory minister and now the House of Commons speaker, said he was opposed to the US president addressing parliament during his already controversial state visit to Britain, because "opposition to racism and sexism" were "hugely important considerations" for the Commons - which might puzzle some on the left who insist that capitalism is inherently or institutionally racist. Bercow added he was "even more strongly opposed" after the president's travel ban, as it posed a threat to "equality before the law and an independent judiciary": ie, good bourgeois values.

Obviously, Bercow's comments irked many - even if he has said he is "genuinely sorry" for not following protocol and consulting his counterpart in the Lords, Norman Fowler.⁴ Naturally, US Congressman Joe Wilson told the BBC's *Newsnight* that Bercow's 'ban' was a "slap" to Trump and the Republican Party as a whole - "if ever in recent years there's been a more pro-British president of the United States, it's Donald Trump". As evidence, he pointed out that Trump had "assured" Theresa May over his commitment to Nato, expressed a desire to boost UK-US trade relationships, and - most important of all - brought the bust of Winston Churchill back into the Oval Office.

Many Conservatives are indignant, accusing Bercow's of "arrogance" and "hypocrisy", of "abusing" his position and "speaking out of turn" - one unnamed Tory MP and former cabinet member grumbled to the BBC that Bercow "must be close to standing down", whilst Crispin Blunt, Tory chair of the foreign affairs select committee, darkly suggested that the speaker was going to have to deal with "the consequences" of his comments. But, of course, the opposition benches unequivocally welcomed Bercow's intervention. Harriet Harman twittered

that Bercow's stance was a "proud moment" for the Commons - "Racism and sexism not welcome here" - and her colleague, Wes Streeting MP, waggishly parodied Trump's inflammatory tweet: "Speaker Bercow has decided to check people coming into our parliament *very carefully*". As for Jeremy Corbyn, he warbled about how Bercow was defending "British values" and everything that is nice. Similarly, the right-moving Owen Jones offered "all praise to John Bercow", because he "spoke for Britain" - unlike the government which is out to "humiliate" the country by making it "Trump's lapdog".

Frosty

With few exceptions, world leaders are increasingly alarmed by the US president - who seems intent on turning the established political-diplomatic world upside-down. Concern is particularly mounting in Europe, deeply worried that the US administration might start some sort of trade war. Or, as Nigel Farage gleefully put it, the European Union is "terrified" of the Trump presidency.

So recently we had the extraordinary spectacle of Donald Tusk, the president of the European Commission, classifying the Trump administration as comparable to other "threats" like China, Russia and radical Islam - now that it has "put into question" the last 70 years of American foreign policy. And EU leaders are nervously waiting for Trump's choice of ambassador, given that the name, Ted Malloch, keeps cropping up.

Malloch is infamous for likening the EU to the Soviet Union, making it "another union that needs a little taming" - not to mention calling the bloc "outdated" and "unelected". He has also bluntly asserted that "the post-Berlin Wall globalisation consensus is over" and "read the obituary: Davos-man is dead" - in fact, the "only supranational organisation in which the president believes is God". Manfred Weber, leader of the centre-right European People's Party grouping and close ally of Angela Merkel, has accused Malloch of "outrageous malevolence" towards "the values that define this European Union". Not without reason, appointing Malloch as ambassador would be taken as another sign that Trump is aiming to break apart the EU.

Europeans are not the only ones upset by Trump. It has been widely reported that he abruptly hung up the phone on the Australian prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull - whom Trump told that he was going to "review" the Obama-brokered plan for the US to take up to 1,250 refugees from Australia's offshore detention facilities, which

the president described as the "worst deal ever". Apparently, Trump even accused the Australian prime minister of trying to send America the "next Boston bombers". Sean Spicer, a White House spokesman, said the refugees - if they ended up coming - would be subject to an "extreme vetting" process to ensure they had "peaceful intentions" and did not pose a threat to "US security". Australian officials remain concerned that the refugee deal could be scrapped altogether or made effectively meaningless by the vetting process.

Relations between the US and Canada are getting frosty too - how times change. The relationship between Justin Trudeau, the prime minister, and Barack Obama was called a "true bromance" in a White House Instagram post. Alas, this is not the case now - the love has turned sour. One of Trudeau's top foreign policy advisors has admitted that Trump's travel ban came as a "shock" to the prime minister - raising questions, for example, about whether Ahmed Hussen, Ottawa's own immigration minister and a former Somali refugee, could still cross the two states' shared border.

Other potential flashpoints between the US and Canada include the North American Free Trade Agreement, which Trump blames for the loss of US jobs and which he has pledged to overhaul; Nato, which Trump has labelled as "obsolete"; immigration, with Canada pledging to admit 25,000 Syrian refugees this year; and climate change, as Trudeau tries to push through a carbon tax plan - with Trump, it goes without saying, going in completely the opposite direction. Madly, the US president thinks that global warming is a "Chinese hoax".

Insurgent

You do not have to read the leftwing press to find open hostility to Donald Trump. There is plenty of it in thoroughly mainstream journals and publications. For instance, *Der Spiegel* caused a flurry of controversy with its February 4 front cover illustration, depicting a cartoon figure of the US president with a bloodied knife in one hand and, in the other, the Statue of Liberty's head dripping with blood.⁵ Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, a member of Germany's Free Democrats (FDP) and vice-president of the European parliament, complained that the cover was "tasteless". Meanwhile, *Die Welt* thought that such a provocative cover "damages journalism" - whilst another German daily, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, editorialised about how this was "exactly what Trump needs - a distorted image of him, which he can use to work more on his distorted image of the press".

Appease the president instead.

But *Der Spiegel's* editor-in-chief, Klaus Brinkbäumer, was unrepentant - telling Reuters that the cover art was intended as a response to the "seriously endangered" principles of democracy and freedom of the press. He went on to write in an editorial that Trump was "attempting a coup from the top" and wanted to "establish an illiberal democracy". The cartoonist, Edel Rodriguez - who arrived in the US as a political refugee from Cuba in 1980 - told the *Washington Post* that he wanted to make a comparison between Islamic State and Donald Trump, as both "both sides are extremists". Staging a similar provocation, *The New Yorker*, which endorsed Hillary Clinton, showed on its front page the Statue of Liberty's flame being extinguished.⁶ John W Tomac, the artist, explained that the statue's "shining torch was the vision that welcomed new immigrants", but now, it seems, "we are turning off the light."

In yet another striking image, *The Economist* - not known for its revolutionary or insurrectionary views - has a baseball cap-wearing Trump throwing a Molotov cocktail. The accompanying article, entitled "An insurgent in the White House", begins by saying that Washington "is in the grip of a revolution" - meaning America's allies are "rightly" worried about latest developments. The article singles out for opprobrium the "grenade-chuckers-in-chief", Stephen Bannon and Stephen Miller.⁷ The "secrecy and confusion" of the immigration ban, it continues, are not a sign of failure, but rather how the Trump team "shun the self-serving experts who habitually subvert the popular will" - America's allies, the journal concludes slightly apocalyptically, "must plan for a world without American leadership". The world is being reconfigured right before our eyes. Almost anything goes.

If anything, Simon Schama is even more vicious about Trump in the eminently respectable pages of the *Financial Times* (January 21). He laments the "abandonment of the America" of the Marshall Plan, the Atlantic Charter and Nato - of the America which under FDR, Eisenhower, John F Kennedy and Reagan, "took the freedom and safety of Europe and the remainder of the world as intrinsic to its personal sense of democratic obligation". The "cantankerous" and "mentally lazy" Trump, is, he said, a "shameful" and "terrifying prospect". Dammningly, writes Schama, the America of Trump has "been greeted by ultranationalists and fascists" in Europe with the "form of manic glee displayed by seaside bullies kicking in the sandcastle". These forces may be "living a dangerous fantasy", he adds, but until they are stopped in their tracks "their goals will change into all of our nightmares".

The bourgeoisie is worried ●

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Notes

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_Order_13769.
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ITALY

In the hands of the courts

The judiciary is playing a significant role in shaping Italian politics, reports Toby Abse



Virginia Raggi: mired in scandal

The direction of Italian politics over the last few weeks has been to a very large degree influenced by decisions in the courts. Judicial decisions of a different kind may yet have a further impact, as the year progresses. There have been three different developments which can, to varying degrees, be seen as intersecting in terms of their consequences, even if their causation is quite distinct. Two concern judgements on matters of obvious national importance (electoral law and labour law) by the Consulta (constitutional court), whilst the third relates to the Roman mayor, Virginia Raggi - now at long last subject to a criminal investigation likely to lead to a trial.

It seems best to begin with the Consulta's decision on January 11 about the legitimacy or otherwise of three referenda proposed by Italy's largest trade union confederation, the leftwing CGIL, which aimed to overturn Matteo Renzi's aggressively neoliberal labour laws, and restore some of the rights the organised working class had gained after the Hot Autumn of 1969. It should be emphasised that the CGIL had collected more than 3.3 million signatures for each of their abrogative referenda. This was far more than the 500,000 minimum required and way above the usual additional quota that instigators of referenda often collect to insure themselves against the frequent invalidation of some signatures during the legal validation process - an initial hurdle that the CGIL had no difficulty in overcoming (in contrast to some of the more amateurish referendum enthusiasts in earlier decades).

The Consulta ruled that two of the proposed referenda were acceptable in technical terms, being purely abrogative in nature, but the third, and most important one, concerning the Jobs Act, was to some extent a propositional attempt to create a new law, and therefore unacceptable. The decision to reject this attempt to reinstate and,

perhaps unwisely, to extend the famous article 18 of the 1970 workers' statute, ensuring the automatic reinstatement of any worker sacked "without just cause" was not unanimous. The verdict was passed by eight votes to five (one of the 15 places on the Consulta is currently vacant and another judge is seriously ill). Although the CGIL may have been pushing their luck in trying to extend the protection of workers against arbitrary dismissal to workplaces with more than five employees, rather than the 15 that the 1970 law specified in all sectors apart from agriculture (which did indeed have a lower limit of five), the split amongst the judges was, to some extent at least, along political lines rather than on questions of pure legal interpretation.

The CGIL's leading opponent on the Consulta was Giuliano Amato, a former prime minister, who in 1993 played a role in destroying the last remnants of the *scala mobile* (wage indexation), and who first rose to political prominence under the patronage of Bettino Craxi, the corrupt Socialist premier who had led the first assault against the *scala mobile* in the 1980s. Conversely, the judge who led the pro-CGIL faction on the Consulta was an expert in labour law who had in her youth been a pupil of Gino Giugni, the author of the original workers' statute in 1970. Quite understandably, she refused to draft the report setting out the reasoning behind the majority verdict on the Jobs' Act referendum, a task that had been assigned to her before the vote was taken.

It is also worth reminding readers that a previous referendum aimed at extending the protection of article 18 to all workers had been permitted in 2003. On that earlier occasion, Rifondazione Comunista (RC) - the initiators of the referendum - had merely called for the deletion of the lower limit of 15 workers, rather than inserting any new limit, so the question was technically purely abrogative. Given the recourse to this 2003 precedent by the CGIL's lawyers

and its sympathisers on the Consulta, it is one of the ironies of history that in 2003 the CGIL leadership, under general secretary Sergio Cofferati, played a key role in sabotaging the previous attempt at extension by urging abstention in alliance with a broad front of political parties from the far right through to the centre-left, thus depriving RC of a quorum.¹

Although some ultra-left critics of the current CGIL general secretary, Susanna Camusso, have claimed that the CGIL deliberately drafted a question that would be ruled out of order, this seems extremely unlikely. Camusso's detestation of Matteo Renzi, like her loathing of Mario Monti and his labour minister, Elsa Fornero, in 2011-13, is perfectly genuine, and she wanted to reverse all the working class defeats of the last six years.²

Workers' conditions

This is evident in her intransigent line on "vouchers"³ - the subject of one of the two permitted referenda. These vouchers are a sort of token worth €10 gross (of which €7.5 go to the worker, and €2.5 are taken in tax and national insurance) to be paid for an hour's work, supposedly to take various occasional part-time forms of employment - of which gardening might be a good example - out of the black economy. In practice, they have been used on an ever-increasing scale as a way of avoiding giving proper contracts to young and casual workers, including some employees of the municipal administration in Turin under Chiara Appendino of the Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S - Five Star Movement). Even more blatant scams have occurred on construction sites, since workers can show inspectors a voucher for an hour's work, whilst working a full day, the remainder for cash in hand. Camusso has taken issue with Partito Democratico (PD) parliamentarians, including some

on the 'left', who have suggested that such abuses can be avoided by tightening the rules. Undaunted, she has held out for total abolition. Whilst eliminating 'vouchers' is not as important as restoring article 18, nonetheless a CGIL victory in a referendum on the issue would be a serious blow against Renzi's neoliberal agenda, and would revive the prestige of trade unions amongst precariously employed young workers currently drawn towards M5S.⁴

The third issue at stake for the CGIL concerns responsibility for workers' wages and conditions in the event of subcontracting. At present, the original contractor can escape all liability for any malfeasance by the subcontractor. A worst-case scenario might involve either genuine or fraudulent bankruptcy by the subcontractor. The CGIL proposal would close this loophole and make the initial contractor ultimately responsible. One of the reasons why Renzi and his followers within the PD want an early general election - by June 2017 - is that such a clash in timing between a referendum and a general election has always meant the election takes priority. The CGIL referenda currently scheduled by the Consulta for the period between April 15 and June 15 would be postponed for a year. Whilst this postponement is not as urgent for Renzi as it was a few weeks ago, when a potential CGIL victory in a referendum on the Jobs Act later this year would certainly have put an end to Renzi's political career, even a second referendum defeat on a lesser issue like 'vouchers' would, in the wake of the disastrous December 4 referendum outcome, create very serious problems for the PD leader. Obviously, a referendum campaign centred around the Jobs Act would have represented the best possible chance of shifting the focus of Italian politics from the PD-M5S clash back to fundamental class issues, which would in all probability have revived and, perhaps, unified the shrunken and divided forces

of the radical left. However, even a controversy over 'vouchers' would put an alternative to both Renzi's centrist, Blairite neoliberalism and the Ukip-style, rightwing, racist populism of M5S leader Beppe Grillo in a more credible position.

The Consulta's verdict on the 'Italicum', Renzi's new electoral law for the Chamber of Deputies, on January 25, was less damaging to Renzi than he might have feared: indeed it has reinforced his irrational desire for an early general election. Since the Italicum was designed for a mono-cameral electoral system based on the Chamber of Deputies, it was inevitable that, if Renzi's constitutional reform (to which the abolition of a directly elected Senate was absolutely crucial) was rejected in the December 4 referendum, the new electoral law would have to be altered in some way. Moreover, since the *ballottaggio* (second-round run-off ballot) was now more likely to favour M5S than the PD, the judges' decision that it was unconstitutional because it risked giving a clear majority of seats to a party with a low share of the popular vote in the first round (and perhaps a low share of the potential electorate in the second, when some supporters of parties eliminated in the first round might abstain), was no great disaster from Renzi's point of view.

The other change made by the judges concerned candidates who managed to get elected in more than one of the 100 constituencies created by the Italicum. The judges did not prohibit these outrageous multiple candidacies, but said that any candidate who was elected in two or more localities could not choose which of the seats he or she could take up. Instead, the judges managed to find a clause in an old law which they could use as a justification for deciding that the seat allocated to the candidate would be chosen by lot. Whilst there was no explicit reference to ancient Athens in the judges' brief summary, they may

well decide to emphasise their classical education in the longer statement to be issued by the end of February.

The controversial majority premium of 55% of the seats to be given to any party gaining 40% or more of the votes was accepted as valid by the judges. This endorsement was because their previous negative judgement against Berlusconi's electoral law - the 'Porcellum' - in 2014 had hinged on the fact that there had been no minimum percentage threshold for such a bonus in the Porcellum, so they could hardly contradict such a recent judicial precedent. Obviously, there is a strong case to be made that the premium is undemocratic, because it prevents an accurate representation of the will of the electorate. However, as things stand, no party is anywhere near the 40% threshold.⁵ Inevitably, there have been rumours of electoral cartels designed to reach the 40% threshold, even if the notion that the PD can simultaneously incorporate in its list, as junior allies, both forces to its right like foreign minister Angelino Alfano and the Nuovo Centro Destra (NCD - New Centre Right,) and forces to its left - rightward-moving former members of Sinistra, Ecologia, Libertà (SEL - Left, Ecology and Freedom) seems impractical.

More sinister rumours of a joint M5S-Lega list have repeatedly surfaced in the mainstream press and, when Roberto Fico, a leading M5S parliamentarian on the 'orthodox' wing, wrote, "God preserve us from the Lega", he was immediately denounced and silenced by Grillo on his sacred blog.⁶

Compatible

Whilst the judges, in their brief official statement, made it clear that their modified version of the Italicum could be applied as it stands, so that there was no judicial black hole in Italian electoral law, it is unlikely that this is what they would advise. Their full reasoning will be published before the end of February.

President Sergio Mattarella - a Consulta judge immediately prior to his election as president - has repeatedly emphasised that the current parliament needs to make sure that the electoral laws for the Senate and the Chamber are genuinely compatible. The two separate electoral laws created by the Consulta's successive judicial modifications - for the Senate in 2014 and for the Chamber in January 2017 - differ substantially. The Chamber has 100 relatively small constituencies, while the Senate has 20 large regional ones. The system for the Chamber awards seats to distinct party lists, whilst that for the Senate allows for electoral coalitions.⁷ The system for the Chamber has a majority premium, whilst the senatorial one does not. The minimum percentage thresholds for individual parties' representation are much higher in the Senate than the Chamber. One could list other differences, but the general point should be clear. In short, Mattarella's suggestion is well thought-out and completely rational.

Unsurprisingly, all the parties of the populist right - M5S, the Lega and the neo-fascists of the Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) - are demanding elections as soon as possible. Renzi's defeat in the December 4 referendum places them in a strong position *vis-à-vis* the PD, and a totally chaotic hung parliament would suit them perfectly, whether or not they all enter into a formal alliance before or after the election.⁸ In theory, the PD is united in proposing a return to the 'Matarellum' - the 75% first-past-the-post, 25% proportional system used for the general elections of 1994, 1996 and 2001. Since a greatly weakened Forza Italia, which would be severely penalised by any variant of FPTP, will never accept a return to the Matarellum - even if it gave Silvio Berlusconi two of his three general election victories in years gone by - this is pointless play-acting on Renzi's part.

The real division in the PD is between, on the one hand, Renzi and

his acolytes, who want an early election - preferably on Sunday June 11 - and, on the other hand, the more leftish minority around Pier Luigi Bersani, who oppose this. The minority oppose the lemming-like rush to the electoral cliff for two reasons. Firstly, they are inclined to heed the president's advice about devising a more considered electoral law, being particularly anxious to stop party leaders from having the right to nominate the lead candidate in each of the 100 lower-house constituencies - a right which Renzi could use to exclude most of the PD minority from the next legislature. Secondly, they calculate that a longer interval before polling would increase their chance of ditching Renzi as party leader and winning back some of the party's lost voters from abstention or M5S with a more social democratic programme.

Berlusconi is anxious to delay the election, firstly because he still hopes that in the course of 2017 the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg will overturn his exclusion from standing for electoral office in Italy, and secondly because he is on increasingly bad terms with the Lega and the FdI, and would like time to persuade the PD of the merits of a German-style Grand Coalition against M5S (and secondarily against the Lega and the FdI).

The parliamentary arithmetic for a new electoral law or a premature dissolution remains unpredictable, since Renzi's centrist junior coalition partners, such as Alfano's NCD, are less enthusiastic about an early election,⁹ and the PD minority might rebel against Renzi's party line, or even heed Massimo D'Alema's proposal for a leftwing breakaway. Nonetheless, an agreement was reached on January 31 between the PD, M5S, the Lega and the FdI to start discussions on a new electoral law in the Chamber of Deputies on February 27 - a timetable that increases the chance of a June election.

Renzi has now uncritically accepted the M5S proposal to extend the Italicum, as modified by the Consulta judges on January 25, to the Senate, thus fulfilling the letter, although certainly not the spirit, of Mattarella's advice to create two compatible electoral laws for the two Chambers. Renzi's thoughtlessness beggars belief. The M5S proposal completely rules out any pre-electoral coalition - the best safeguard that the PD could have had to prevent it from being overtaken by M5S. In short, Renzi seems set on a course of action that would probably lead to a PD defeat and hand the premiership to one of Grillo's young minions, since an M5S minority government could gain Lega and FdI support in any vote of confidence.¹⁰ Interestingly, former president Giorgio Napolitano - certainly not a man on the left of the PD - has warned Renzi in hardly veiled terms against an early election.

Charges against Raggi

On January 24, the tangled web of deceit spin by Virginia Raggi, the M5S mayor of Rome, finally began to unravel, with legal consequences. She was summoned to appear before investigating magistrates on January 30 in relation to two possible criminal offences: "abuse of office"; and giving false testimony in an official document.

The abuse of office alleged is, of course, the appointment of Renato Marra, the brother of Raffaele Marra (her former head of personnel, generally known in the city hall as 'Rasputin'¹¹) to the post of director of the municipal tourist office. The seizure of Rasputin's mobile phone and computer at the moment of his arrest on December 16 provided the magistrates with an extensive email trail to back up whatever compromising information they had already collected by intercepting his phone calls to the construction magnate, with whom he is alleged to have had corrupt dealings over several years when

he held posts relating to housing and planning policy under earlier municipal administrations.

None of these recently examined emails offers any support at all to Raggi's repeated claim that she excluded Rasputin from any involvement in his brother's appointment, and handled the entire matter herself, rigorously comparing a large number of rival CVs. The emails make it quite clear that Rasputin had urged his brother to apply for the post, and given him detailed advice on his application, emphasising whom to talk to rather than what to write on any form. Moreover, there is even an email from Raggi expressing annoyance with Rasputin because he has substantially increased his brother's salary - by €20,000 - without informing her in advance.

Whilst the charge of abuse of office had been widely forecast, the additional one of giving false testimony was less expected, and seems to have come as a shock even to Grillo. This latter charge arose from Raggi's story about her single-handed appointment of Renato Marra, which she had foolishly put in a written deposition to the Roman municipality's own anti-corruption unit, and which that unit had then automatically passed on to ANAC (the national anti-corruption authority). One might have imagined that Raggi, as a trained lawyer with many years' experience in practice, would have realised that such a statement was much more dangerous to her than her habitual and increasingly casual lies to journalists, ordinary Roman citizens, external political opponents and even anybody inside M5S, but outside her *Raggio Magico*. The increasing reluctance of the more honest members of the Roman M5S to back up Raggi's shameless and utterly implausible deceit became apparent on the evening of January 24, when the *assessore* (municipal cabinet member) for economic development, Adriano Meloni, told the prosecutor's office: "It was Raffaele Marra who suggested to me the nomination of his brother, Renato, as director of the tourism department."¹²

Whatever convoluted attempts Raggi may make to play up possible ambiguities in the emails on Rasputin's mobile, it is hard to see how she could explain this away in an interrogation by magistrates without calling Meloni a liar. There is a very plausible account - subsequently denied by Grillo - that no sooner had Raggi got into her mayoral office on January 25 than she received a furious phone call from an incandescent Grillo on her mobile, in which he accused her of concealing the additional charge of false testimony from him - he only found out about it in the morning papers. Gross ingratitude, given the way he and Davide Casaleggio had changed the M5S code of conduct to protect her from the consequences of an abuse of office charge.¹³ Hypocritical demagogue that he is, Grillo has now given orders that M5S must rally round Raggi and assert her innocence.

In reality, there have been articles in both *La Repubblica* and *Corriere della Sera* claiming that Raggi was attempting to plea-bargain. These were presumably inspired by Raggi or her lawyer.¹⁴ Whilst false testimony might appear the graver offence in the eyes of the Roman public, the suggestion was that Raggi might plead guilty to that offence if the abuse of office charge was dropped, since only the latter could trigger her automatic ousting under the Severino law - the very same law which led to Berlusconi being barred from elective office. Any such enforced removal of Raggi from public office would make it hard for M5S supporters to repeat their shrieks of "Honesty, honesty, honesty!" on the streets - chants which had been so prominent a feature in their merciless hounding of the former Roman PD mayor, Ignazio Marino. However, Raggi's continuance in office via plea-bargaining would have a serious

downside, since any plea-bargaining would be a partial admission of guilt on the part of 'Little Red Riding Hood'.

Raggi and her lawyer, Alessandro Mancori, had by January 29 managed to persuade the magistrate to postpone her interrogation for a few days, presumably so they could get her story straight, get her to remember her lines¹⁵ and, above all, prepare themselves for likely awkward questions. Raggi's interrogation by the investigating magistrates on February 2 lasted for eight hours, which caused a certain amount of panic in the ranks of M5S, with some of the more anxious members wondering whether she was about to be arrested and kept in custody like 'Rasputin'. Although by 5pm on Friday February 3 Raggi was claiming on Facebook that the interrogation had been "long, but cordial",¹⁶ it was in reality very fraught indeed. She obstinately stuck to her story about the Marra brothers, claiming she had appointed Renato to his leading role in the tourism office herself, but blaming 'Rasputin' for increasing his brother's salary without telling her (which would constitute an "abuse of office" by the former head of personnel). One suspects the magistrates were not impressed by this account.

Moreover, her attempt to exculpate herself by laying more blame on 'Rasputin' (and thus increasing the length of his potential sentence) has led him to retaliate by announcing that he will make a statement to the magistrates in the next few days - his defence lawyer seemed very relieved that they had finally got the mobile phone with the numerous damning emails back from the prosecutors, and has said that they intend to make extensive use of the emails in Rasputin's defence, which does not bode well for Raggi.

However, this was not the reason for such extended questioning of the mayor. Raggi unexpectedly found herself asked about a completely different matter, for which neither she nor her defence lawyer were at all prepared, and of which she claimed to have no prior knowledge whatsoever. The investigating magistrate suddenly confronted her with the fact that Salvatore Romeo had in January 2016 taken out a €30,000 life insurance policy, of which she would be the beneficiary in the event of his death.¹⁷

Grillo-Trump

It is now quite clear why the devious and power-hungry Grillo is so anxious to have an early general election before the sordid saga of Raggi and Rasputin reaches its conclusion in the courts¹⁸. What could prove a tragedy for the Italian masses is Renzi's delusory and narcissistic drive to push the PD to the polls in June - reiterated yet again in his speech on January 28.

If Renzi bends interim premier Paolo Gentiloni and the PD parliamentarians to his will, he risks handing control of the national government to the sinister comedian,¹⁹ whose constantly repeated phrase of "the statesman, Trump" is no coincidence, given how much they have in common - not just at an ideological level (most obviously their hatred of immigrants and love of closed borders), but also at a personal one (both love to communicate by one-sided edicts on social media, both hate the mainstream press, both have a love of 'alternative facts' and both are thin-skinned bullies who love to abuse and humiliate their opponents, but have almost zero tolerance for criticism of any sort).

Although as yet no additional criminal charges have been brought in relation to this matter, clearly the magistrates were suspicious that there was some link between the insurance policy and Romeo's subsequent promotion from an ordinary municipal employee on a €39,000 salary to the head of Raggi's secretariat on €110,000 (subsequently reduced to €93,000 by ANAC). Moreover, this insurance policy had been paid for in one fell swoop rather than in instalments, which raised questions as to where a man on €30,000

a year got such a sum at short notice. Raggi sacked Romeo on December 21 as a result of pressure from the leadership of M5S in the wake of Rasputin's arrest on December 16. The reversion to his original €39,000-a-year salary, and consequent loss of power and prestige, has alienated Romeo from Raggi, and all recent communication seems to be through their respective lawyers. Although the 'reason' was said to be *relazione sentimentale*, both Raggi and Romeo deny any affair.

Journalists on both *La Repubblica* and *Il Corriere* favour another explanation. They suspect Romeo was in some way involved in funnelling money from Roman far-right circles linked to Gianni Alemanno²⁰ to Raggi's faction in M5S.²¹ It is worth pointing out that on January 24 Romeo - called as a witness in the Mafia Capitale trial - was asked by the prosecution how many times he had met Gianni Alemanno, and replied: "Only once in my life."

As an anonymous source involved in the investigation told *La Repubblica* (February 3), with almost British understatement, "Let us say that things are not quite like this, that this memory is a little reductive" ●

Notes

- For more details, see my review of Salvatore Cannavò's *La Rifondazione mancata, 1991-2008* ('Failed refoundation' *Weekly Worker* October 18 2012).
- It is no accident that the editor of the PD Daily *L'Unità*, Sergio Staino, wrote a vitriolic personal denunciation of the combative Camusso a few weeks ago. He contrasted her unfavourably with earlier CGIL leaders like Luciano Lama and Bruno Trentin, whom he saw as more concerned with the 'national interest'. Later in January the hapless Staino was making desperate appeals for support from Camusso and the CGIL when his hero, Matteo Renzi, helped pull the plug on *Unità*'s finances yet again, having decided that even the totally subservient revived version of the party daily, which no longer gave any space to the PD minority, had too low a circulation to save.
- As in so much of Renzi's anti-working class legislation, an English rather than an Italian term is always used. The precedent set by Thatcher's 1980s anti-union laws for continental neoliberals should never be underestimated, although it frequently is by 'left' Brexiters.
- Needless to say, M5S sided with politically backward workers in the Almaviva call centre in Rome, when they objected to their militant shop stewards' refusal to accept a brief postponement of their mass redundancy conditional on far lower wages and far worse conditions. M5S argued that workers did not need representatives. Given the participation of some Almaviva workers in a demonstration called by neo-fascist Fratelli d'Italia leader Giorgia Meloni in Rome on January 28, the need for a class-conscious vanguard is indisputable.
- According to an Ipsos poll, cited in the *Corriere della Sera* (January 27), M5S has 30% support, and the PD 29.7%, with Forza Italia on 12.5%, and the Lega Nord on 12.4%.
- See *La Repubblica* January 28. The majority of M5S councillors in Genoa have recently left the party, proclaiming "Never with the right!" (*Mai con la Destra!*).
- This means openly proclaimed alliances between separate parties, not the bizarre hypothetical mish-mashes standing under a flag of convenience discussed above.
- The Lega and the FdI are already very close, and share a common patron in Marine Le Pen.
- Their low opinion poll ratings mean many centrist parliamentarians would lose their seats.
- The irrationality of Renzi's line has been pointed out by commentators in the mainstream press - see *Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica* (both February 1) for sharp critiques from the centre-right and centre-left respectively.
- See my earlier article, 'Rasputin and Little Red Riding Hood' (*Weekly Worker* January 19) for more details.
- La Repubblica* January 26.
- Corriere della Sera* January 26.
- In a Trump-like rant on his blog on January 28 against the alleged lies of the mainstream press, Grillo has subsequently denied that this plea-bargaining was ever even contemplated.
- It would be essential to avoid subjecting the magistrates to anything resembling her farcical efforts in the council chamber, where she has been known to read out poorly edited, cut-and-paste, verbatim extracts from Wikipedia.
- Corriere della Sera* February 4.
- Since the insurance company had no legal obligation, in the event of Romeo's death, to inform Raggi of the policy's existence, it seems odd, to say the least, if Romeo had not told her about it.
- One assumes that 'the Previti girl' will not be able to repeat her mentor's tactic of buying verdicts with multi-million-euro bribes to Roman judges.
- Far too many, both in Italy and abroad, have been all too willing to overlook his old manslaughter conviction.
- The neo-fascist former mayor of Rome.
- La Repubblica* and *Corriere della Sera* (both February 3).

THEORY

Reclaim the heritage

Rex Dunn concludes his exploration of Marx's concept of the human



'Dystopia abandoned' (2012)

In the final article in this series I will discuss the remaining three problems that I believe we need to address in relation to Marx's essentialism and his concept of the human.¹

1. Post-Stalinist vacuum

The first of these concerns the vacuum left by Stalinism, which continues to be filled by post-structuralism/postmodernism (and now 'post-capitalism'). The overthrow of the 'grand narrative' approach to knowledge, relativism and pluralism has replaced the idea that there can be any objective understanding of reality, based on dialectical and historical materialism. The 'logics of disintegration' provides an intellectual fig leaf for *neoliberal ideology*, whose material basis (of course) is neoliberal economics: ie, the free-market economy, whilst labour is stripped of its rights to organise in defence of wages and conditions, etc.

Post-structuralism/postmodernism also facilitated the rise of *multiculturalism* (still popular within the social sciences). Its basic premise is that we now have to put an equals sign between secularism and all other cultures: despite wide-ranging differences between rational and religious beliefs and practices. This is in the interests of bourgeois society based on 'freedom in diversity' - look how progressive it still is! Therefore we have the introduction of faith schools supported by the state; animals can be slaughtered inhumanely; women have the right to wear the burqa (even though this is a symbol of patriarchal oppression); but female genital mutilation is a step too far (even if little is being done to stop this in Britain), etc. Rather than combating racism and xenophobia, for example, multiculturalism exacerbates it, especially amongst poorly educated workers who are victims of globalisation (job losses, low-wage jobs snapped up by immigrants, competition for housing and healthcare. All of these things, however, have nothing to do

with immigration: rather they have everything to do with austerity.) But today the 'left behinds' constitute another kind of identity politics: us against them.

Alongside this, thanks to technology and the modern mass media, we have a society where the individual becomes increasingly *atomised* by the system - and not just within the body politic: this is also reflected/reinforced by the entertainment industry. The latter fully exploits the mind-crippling effects of the bourgeois division of labour. As a result, with the help of advertising and the celebrity industry, it is able to fulfil the 'needs' (manufactured, not genuine) of the masses. This involves techniques designed to provide distracted viewing and listening. Instead of allowing for a sense of totality to develop, the emphasis is on disjointed stimuli. The audience is meant to amuse itself (hence the 'pornography' of violence, on the one hand, or the plethora of trivia, on the other; noise instead of music, etc.) Amusement encourages the 'elimination of critical thought'.

In addition to the infantilisation of entertainment, we also have standardisation - notably stereotypical images of beauty (the female is still the traditional object of desire - albeit in a commodified form, as a means to sell other commodities - but now the male as object is fast catching up!). The impact of these manufactured images on the individual consumer is underlined by the proliferation of beauty products, fitness studios, the obsession with white teeth, as well as cosmetic surgery (for women and men). Of course, ordinary people react to these stereotypes, because they are unreal; but many go on to create their own sub-cultures, usually associated with entertainment (eg, goths); but they also include the celebration of the opposite to standardised beauty (eg, *extreme* body-tattooing/piercing and the celebration of fatness, all of which are easily appropriated by the market). At the same time, the need to conform to this or that manufactured image means that individuals are unable to realise

their own human potential, as well as their uniqueness.

Hence the culture industry, despite its contradictory turns, reinforces the sense of *loss of individuality*. In this regard, the rise of *identity politics* today may be seen as a 'what about me!' protest against the tidal force of mass culture. Although it is driven by the need for affirmation, it is becoming more and more negative and protective. This leads to calls for *institutionalised* censorship - eg, the 'safe spaces' policy - which in turn leads to *self-censorship*. Therefore identity politics becomes a form of group ghettoisation, within which old and new struggles are made to fit. Of course, 'black lives matter', as do the lives of GLBT people. But the problem is that they have become inward-looking in their search for solutions to their oppression. Some transgenders, for example, have a policy of 'no-platforming' gays and lesbians, who disagree with them. Therefore it becomes difficult - if not impossible - for Marxists to convince GLBT people (etc) that, if they are to be truly free to decide what they really want, capitalism has to be overthrown and this can only be done by building a mass movement of workers and all the oppressed. Meanwhile identity politics is trumpeted by the neoliberal establishment as freedom in diversity - proof-positive of a bountiful capitalism for the 21st century!

The transgender phenomenon also raises the much bigger question: *how far can we push nature's envelope?* Marx's favourite maxim was: 'Nothing human is alien to me'. But where does the human end and the inhuman begin? Clearly, the post-capitalists (eg, Paul Mason) believe that anything is possible, based on technological utopianism: in 2013, two American academics - Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams - issued a 'Manifesto for an Accelerated Politics', affirming "mastery", technology and the liberator possibilities of capitalism if "pushed beyond its limits". They include the "post-gender dreams of radical feminism" and even more: ie, the possibility of a "new kind of human

being" - "an interventionist approach to the human", an embrace of "individual bodily experimentation" set against "restricted images of the human", "a new human with a new body", in conjunction with the creation of a new society, whose agency is the "internet generation".²

But, as Lenin says in his *Philosophical notebooks*,

Human knowledge ... does not follow a straight line, but a curve ... Any fragment can be transformed ... one-sidedly into an independent ... straight line, which then (if one does not see the wood for the trees) leads into the quagmire, into clerical obscurantism (where it is anchored by the interests of the ruling classes).³

2. Computer technology and the digital media

Could this lead to a disconnect between intelligence and consciousness (including empathy)? Technology *per se* is not a determining factor. But, as long as it remains in the hands of the privately owned corporate media, it poses a threat to humanity, because it serves the instrumental ends of the managerial bureaucracy.

It is already using artificial intelligence in the form of algorithms to manipulate our tastes and desires. So far there has been no movement against this, partly because people have become atomised, both physically and psychically; also because they are happy to be manipulated, as long as this leads to sensuous satisfaction in one form or another.

The digital media has an *atomising* effect, in the sense that people are spending more time online; therefore they are spending less time in the real world of social interaction. This is particularly true of young children, for whom the old media (TV, etc) comes second to the new, digital media. But

adults too are just as addicted to the latter; except that their generation was raised under the influence of the former: eg, they grew up watching TV together; they still read newspapers, etc.

One only has to consider recent events - in particular Donald Trump's election victory. Why did the pundits get the result so badly wrong? Firstly, and to reiterate an earlier point, the latter are familiar with more than 50 years of mass consumerism, including mass entertainment and the mass media that "serves as total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system".⁴ But now this is exacerbated further by the digital age and the new forms of communication, over which the neoliberal elites do not have complete control.

To be more exact, Trump's victory shows that we have a war between traditional and new media: ie, TV and the press, as opposed to the internet and social media. A new corporate-controlled communications system is using the new to usurp the old. At a superficial level, information technology is in the hands of the masses, but it is really controlled by the technocrat capitalists who own Google, Facebook, etc. Together they can remove material which is 'politically incorrect', whilst at the same time they rely on advertising and algorithms for their revenue.

To put this another way, Trump's victory was partly the result a major disconnect between the 'Washington bubble' (which relies on traditional media), and the 'echo chamber' (the new digital media), the *modus vivendi* for Trump and his supporters. Facebook, for example, is quite happy if its clients discuss only those things which they want to believe in (eg, his show-biz election campaign), at least for the moment. Then there are the professional hackers in faraway places - like Macedonia - who make up lies and post them on social media under 'Daily News' banners, just to confuse everybody!

Of course, Trump's victory also has a *material* basis: it is a reflection of the

rise of rightwing populism, which is presently sweeping the world. It was a backlash by the American working class (mostly white men and women, but it also included a considerable minority of blacks and Latinos; despite Trump's misogyny, racism, xenophobia, etc) against the neoliberal elites - or the 'political class' - in Washington (who are responsible for globalisation, job losses, low wages, mortgage foreclosures, etc). Even if Trump ends up carrying out a *modified* version of his election promises, this will still be significant, if not the end of neoliberalism. In order to "make America great again", he might build some kind of wall across the southern states; he might throw out more illegal immigrants (especially Muslims), such as those with criminal records; he might invest in jobs and infrastructure (but for whom - the police, the military or workers?); he might scrap America's free trade agreements, put up tariffs against cheap Chinese imports (including Apple products, currently made in China), etc - but that would amount to a *seismic* shock for neoliberalism which has ruled the world for the last half century or so on behalf of finance capital and the banks. The world could be turned upside down. China may or may not retaliate with a trade war. But if it does come to pass, then this would be extremely dangerous for the world, given the build-up in American nuclear missile bases in the Pacific. It depends on whether Trump delivers on his pledge to return to the protectionist policies of the 30s.

To sum up, Trump's election showed that the working class still exists as a conscious force, but today this does not mean that it will be drawn towards socialism.⁵ Finally, what would happen if there is another financial crash like that of 2007-08 during his watch?

Digital devices and empathy loss

The power of the TV generation is long gone (so brilliantly satirised in the 1976 film, *Network*). Of course, it did not stop the flourishing of the anti-Vietnam war movement and the rise of the Marxist left. But the digital age produces a different kind of challenge.

In the epoch of capitalist decay, technology is becoming an obstacle to the human, because we have allowed this to happen. In the absence of a successful social revolution, false consciousness (in the form of *technological utopianism*) means that we have embraced the digital media with open arms, which then becomes a new reality. But, unlike the old media, it is eroding the human capacity for empathy and compassion. How so? This new technology threatens to replace reading, especially literature, as opposed to bestsellers. We prefer to play with our iPhones or read the latest marketed book on Kindle. Moreover, although digital technology is still based on private corporate control, it is more of a problem, because it exacerbates the atomisation of the individual.

Google and Apple are pushing the values of speed and efficiency above all; they also decide what we want. But, according to psychologists, it

takes time for the brain to comprehend the psychological and moral dimensions of a situation. The more distracted we become, and the more emphasis we place on speed at the expense of depth - redefining 'text' from what fills hundreds of pages of a novel - the less likely and able we are to care.⁶

Humans need undivided attention to develop a sense that they are truly loved; but in the digital age, we are getting less and less. Hence "our relationships to the world, and to one another, and to ourselves, are becoming increasingly miserly". But "Google ... is in the business - as they put it - of organising and making accessible 'the world's information'". Apple is doing the same. Whereas the old phone was designed by engineers

for its functionality - communicating with another person - "the phones in our pocket ... are always built in dialogue with marketers, who have carefully noted how colour and curve, brightness and texture, heft and size make us feel".⁷ Texting is faster and easier than a phone conversation, because it does not require complexity, especially with regard to feeling and attitude. The same thing applies to shooting off emails.

The novel is dying as an art form. This results in a human loss, because

To read a book is to devote oneself to the book. Novels always traffic empathy, always bring the other closer, always ask us to transcend our perspectives ... [Like all authentic art, they have always] stood in such stark opposition to the culture that surrounds it.⁸

On the other hand, "phones and the internet have, in subtle ways, made life less rich, provided bright pleasures at the expense of deep ones, have distracted [us] made concentration more difficult". We have to consider the question: has "technology in the forms in which it has entered our everyday lives ... diminished us?"⁹

Digital media and the rise of the technocratic state

Over the past few years Ofcom has been conducting an experiment on children and young people, who are spending increasing amounts of time online. Not only is this a constant distraction from real life, such as social interaction or study, but, once again, it is leading to a lack of empathy.

An interim report reveals that today children spend less time watching TV and more time on their tablet. On average, five-15-year-olds spend 15 hours per week online, as against 13 hours, 36mins watching TV. Around 24% of eight-year-olds and 38% of 12-15-year-olds identify sponsored links on Google as advertising, while 27% of this age group assume that if Google lists a website they can trust it.

A senior professor of psychology at the University of California reported on an experiment with two cohorts of juniors. One was deprived of digital devices for a week. As a result, they tested as emotionally more interactive than the other cohort, who were allowed to carry on using their handsets. It would seem that the use of digital devices reduces the human capacity for empathy.

More worrying still is the fact that today many three-four-year-olds are given iPhones. This means that children are starting to spend more time online from a much earlier age. Screen time is replacing interpersonal communication between real people, which suggests that empathy loss will become more widespread across society.

What about the bigger picture? In his book, *Homo Deus: a brief history of tomorrow* (London 2016), Yuval Noah Harari has an ambivalent attitude towards humanity's future (compare the post-capitalists). Interviewed about his book for *Channel 4 News* (September 7 2016), he warns that, if things remain the way they are, technology is going to make most of us redundant. Given the rise of intelligent algorithms - whose main function is to monetise the material needs of everyone, every minute of the day - along with artificial intelligence/robots, there is the possibility that within 50 years, hundreds of millions of people will be pushed out of the job market. In the 21st century we might very well see the creation of a new 'useless class'.

But, as Harari reminds us, technology is not deterministic: it only plays this role if we allow it to. Therefore it could also be used to create a either a communist or more democratic society than what we

have at present (although he has a pessimistic view of communism). But, if society continues down the same road as at present, then he offers the scary prospect that, in the not too distant future, the state might decide to provide the opportunity for people to spend more leisure time within virtual reality (eg, playing computer games) rather than in real life! But it would have to pay them for the 'privilege' of continuing such an escapist activity; otherwise they might reject this, even though this is currently an obsessive activity for millions of people. Harari assumes that this would make it easier to maintain the neoliberal strategy of austerity, cutting welfare and imposing low-paid, unskilled jobs on millions of people across the western world (especially the young).

On the other hand, Harari is right when he says people are beginning to realise that political power is shifting away from their democratically elected governments to a new managerial layer. It is the latter which is beginning to run the capitalist system on behalf of capital. Meanwhile the governments we elect have absolutely no idea of where humanity might be in 20-30 years time. The people who do have some idea or plan are currently working in 'Silicon Valley' on behalf of the private corporations who employ them. So bourgeois democracy has become a sham: its cant and hypocrisy becomes more shrill; along with a penchant for referenda, etc.

This is not a good situation for humanity to be in. As technology advances, it becomes more concentrated in the hands of these technocrats, who serve not just private institutions like Google or Apple, but also bigger national and international ones like the Federal Reserve, the Bank of England, the European Bank and the International Monetary Fund; along with the media, of course, in both its traditional and the new (digital) forms; all of which are unaccountable to the masses.

Nevertheless, Harari tries to end his interview on an optimistic note. The new revolutionary technology could also be used to create a very different kind of society. But the crucial thing is for all of us to have the opportunity to start thinking about what kind of society we would like, rather than just leaving it to market forces to decide the future for us. So far this is not happening. Rather, when confronted by the new digital media - which threatens to reduce us as humans, beginning with the impact of algorithms on human behaviour - scientists of all stripes appear to have submitted to a resurgence of technological utopianism. (It is only a few lonely novelists who are raising some doubts.)

In his review of Harari's book,¹⁰ David Runciman reiterates the point that it is unaccountable technocrats and the media who want us to believe that mankind's "unparalleled ability to control the world" is turning into "something new". This takes the form of western-centric statements, such as "War is increasingly obsolete; famine is rare; disease is on retreat around the world." Such claims are, of course, obscene. Whereas Harari seems to be warning us that "The individual will not be crushed by Big Brother; it will disintegrate from within", on the other hand,

Corporations and governments will continue to pay homage to our individuality; but in order to service them they will need to "break us up into biochemical subsystems", all of them permanently monitored by powerful algorithms. [But] individuals who sign up first to the [data-based] project will be the only ones with any real power left.

Hence we will see the rise of a "new super-elite". Thus, according to Runciman, we have "the grim prospect that the rest of humanity [will become] simply tools

in their vast schemes": ie, a dystopian, Orwellian/Huxley/Phillip K Dick view of the future.

3. Degradation of the environment

While it is directly linked to Harari's observations, the degradation of the environment is arguably a more imminent threat. But, combined with the threat outlined by him, the ongoing destruction of the environment could bring about the end of civilisation as we know it.

I refer to the reality of global warming - the disappearance of the Arctic ice cap, which is increasing year on year, will speed this process up. This will have a huge impact on the whole planet, not just in terms of a rise in sea level, but also in terms of unstable weather systems in the temperate zones of the planet, leading to more floods, storms, etc.

This is already happening. Deforestation of the equatorial rainforest is continuing on a massive scale, along with desertification. Deadly toxic waste from factories is being poured into the earth's major river systems; even the oceans are becoming polluted (which are many times greater in area than the earth's land mass). Finally, we are seeing a new mass extinction of species (many of which could be of great use to man); only this time it is man-made. The devastating impact of China's rapid industrialisation on the earth's environment, as well as the health of its 1.3 billion people, is a warning to us all.

What is happening now in north-eastern Nigeria represents a 'perfect storm': ie, it is a disastrous combination of climate change, terrorism and a huge refugee problem, which is getting worse. Here four countries border on Lake Chad, which due to warmer temperatures has shrunk in size by 90%. Experts say that this is an indirect cause of violence in the region and subsequent displacement. Recent crop failures have resulted in at least 400,000 children being malnourished. More than 1.4 million people have become refugees, which is a quarter more than those who reached Europe by boat in 2015.

Nearly everyone is running from the jihadis, who control large parts of Lake Chad. The largest of these is Boko Haram, which is at war with a corrupt central government. So far, it has forced 2.6 million people from their homes (more than the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey). The governor of Borno, which is the largest state in the region, believes that "more Nigerians will try to go to Europe. At the moment, most of them are economic migrants, but if this madness is not trying ... you will see a mass of humanity solved to get to Europe via the Mediterranean."¹¹

The extent of environmental destruction today exceeds Rachel Carson's wildest nightmare. Man is the most intelligent of all the primates. He is now capable of producing artificial intelligence, even robots, which should be able to solve problems that confront us, as well as make life easier for all. On the other hand, loss of empathy is increasing. Therefore we are capable of making the world uninhabitable for higher forms of life and ultimately ourselves. In the worst-case scenario, especially if there is a nuclear war (brought closer by 'Trumpism'?), the world will go on, based on the same principles of instrumentalism and technological utopianism, even if civilisation is reduced to a level lower than the Middle Ages.

The future?

In his review for *The Guardian* of a new book by Peter Frase,¹² Ben Tarnoff describes it as "Phillip K Dick ventriloquising Marx".¹³ In his consideration of potential futures, Frase states that automation will be a constant. However, politics and the ecological situation will change (for better or worse?) and climate change will affect the resources upon which technology depends. Will this be clean energy or not? If so, what will be its basis? Nuclear, wind, sea power, solar? Artificial intelligence

will give us super robots, but who will control them?

Of Frase's four possible futures, I shall mention only two here: communism and 'exterminism'. We could have communism, based on social ownership and control of an abundance of resources: "Robots running on unlimited clean energy, providing a material basis for a post-work, post-scarcity, post-carbon world." But without communist consciousness and the abolition of the existing division of labour, the economic elites will be able to preserve their power and privileges, even if a system of wage labour is "totally superfluous".

On the other hand, we could have "exterminism", based on neo-feudal rule, degradation of the environment and scarcity. The rich will have retreated into their fortified enclaves, whilst robots do the work; but the majority will be trapped outside in a "soggy hell, a rapidly warming planet ... At a certain point, the rich [will want] to exterminate the poor ... now that they are no longer needed as workers". Thus we have a hyperbolic image of the barbaric present.

I have only scratched the surface here: there is not enough space and it is too much for one mind to deal with (certainly this one). So I must defer to Marx, once again. In *The German ideology* (1845), he reiterates the telos of man as a "species being", albeit from the standpoint of dialectical and historical materialism. To quote Mikhail Lifshitz:

Communist society removes not only the abstract contradiction between work and pleasure, but also the very real contradiction between ... "the play of bodily and mental powers" and "the conscious will". Together with the abolition of classes and the gradual disappearance of the contradiction between physical and spiritual labour comes the all-sided development of the individual ... Only communist society, in which "the associated producers regulate their interchange with nature rationally, bring it under their common control, instead of being ruled by some blind power", can establish the material basis for "the development of human power which is its own end, the true realm of freedom".¹⁴

If Marx were to return, what would he say now about capitalist decline and transition to communism? Even for a rational optimist, the results and prospects of the past 150 years do not look good. That transition is contingent upon the achievement of "communist mass consciousness", which has not materialised, and the 'window of opportunity' is in danger of closing.

Given the gaps in Marx on this vital question, it remains our responsibility to fill these in and so reclaim his heritage. Lenin tried to do this in a hostile environment, which eventually failed. So far we have not been able to improve on his vanguard model or envisage an alternative to it. We are still dealing with the consequences. Stalinism also gave capitalism a second chance, and look at what it is happening!

Meanwhile the odds for the success of the human become even more difficult ● www.rexdunn.co.uk

Notes

1. For the first two articles, see 'Marx's concept of the human' *Weekly Worker* January 26; and 'Filling the gaps' *Weekly Worker* February 2.
2. O Hatherley, 'One click at a time' *London Review of Books* June 30 2016.
3. VI Lenin, 'The question of dialectics' *CW* Moscow 1972, Vol 38, p363.
4. G Debord *The society of the spectacle* New York 1995, thesis 6, p13.
5. Cf VI Lenin in *What is to be done?* (1903).
6. JS Foer, 'Losing touch' *The Guardian* December 3 2016.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *The Guardian* August 27 2016.
11. *The Guardian* November 26 2016.
12. P Frase *Four futures: life after capitalism* London 2016.
13. *The Guardian* November 26 2016.
14. <https://thecharnelhouse.org/2014/12/15/art-is-dead-long-live-art-mikhail-lifshitz-on-karl-marx-philosophy-of-art>. Lifshitz's quotes are taken from K Marx *The German ideology* London 1965, pp483-84.

IRAN**Missile test: a gift for Trump**

Coming full circle

Under Donald Trump the Iranian people are facing intensified sanctions and a real threat of war, writes **Yassamine Mather**

Last week, while Trump's executive order on visas and a travel ban from seven mainly Muslim countries, including Iran, was dominating the news, the leaders of the Islamic Republic - or at least some factions within the Shia clerical order - decided to launch a missile from Semnan, 140 miles south of Tehran. Neither the Iranian press nor various commentaries on the subject inside and outside the country explain what possessed the Revolutionary Guards and their masters to embark on this foolish exercise in such a dangerous period.

Clearly some of those involved hoped the ballistic missile test would not be noticed, given the focus on Trump's ban on visas. In fact unusually for Iran, the missile test was not publicised. There was a news blackout on the subject and the first official admission that such a test had taken place came three days after sections of US media had covered the story, on February 1.

It could be that the Iranian leaders were under the false impression that Russia might influence Trump's reaction to the event and that any penalties they would face would not be that serious. Another explanation is that they believed Trump's anti-Saudi rhetoric during the presidential campaign. If there is one - and so far there is only one - divergence in Trump's declared policies from what he said during the election campaign, it is the absence of any criticism of the Saudi kingdom. On the contrary, the president is surrounded by current and former lobbyists for the Saudis (Rudy Giuliani, John Bolton ...) in circumstances when many reports claim he has past and/or current financial ties with Saudi Arabia.¹ So maybe the Shia clerical rulers in Iran were unaware of all that and miscalculated the possible reaction to the missile test.

Irrespective of their thinking, the consequences were both predictable and disastrous for the country. The US demanded a meeting of the United Nations security council and its ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, called for UN "action" in response to the "alarming" test. By February 1, US national security advisor Michael Flynn was claiming that the missile test was "in defiance" of UN security council resolution 2231: "We are

officially putting Iran on notice," he said.

Resolution 2231 - which endorses the 'Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action' (commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal) - notes that "Iran is called upon not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using such ballistic missile technology."

We do not know if president Hassan Rouhani and his government had any prior knowledge of the test - he definitely plays second fiddle to supreme leader Ali Khamenei. However, foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif had no option but to defend the country's military. But he warned of a possible US reaction: "The new administration in the United States, presently facing an unfortunate international situation following the imposition of the visa ban, may capitalise on the issue to provoke new tensions." He added: "Iran will never use missiles produced in Iran to attack any other country" and repeated the usual claim that "No Iranian missiles have been produced to carry nuclear warheads."

This was followed by renewed efforts on the part of the Israeli government to establish a new anti-Iran consensus. On the eve of prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu's visit to London, the *Times of Israel* quoted Netanyahu as saying that the US, UK and Israel must form a united front to combat Iran's "extraordinary aggression". Iran is "trying to test the boundaries" of the new administrations in Washington and London, said Netanyahu.

According to Netanyahu, the Iran nuclear deal "threatens Europe; it threatens the west; it threatens the world". Which is why "I welcome president Trump's insistence on new sanctions against Iran. I think other nations should follow soon - certainly responsible nations." And he hoped to find a new ally in Theresa May. However, a Downing Street spokesperson said that the prime minister had defended the nuclear agreement in her meeting with Netanyahu, arguing that it was stopping Iran from arming itself with nuclear weapons.

But the US announced new sanctions against Iran - and, of course, Khamenei has often said that the imposition of any new

sanctions would mean the end of the 2015 deal and so Iran would resume its nuclear programme. A position supported by conservative radicals, who have remained diehard opponents of the concessions made by Rouhani and Zarif during the nuclear negotiations.

According to the Persian radio station run by the German news agency, Deutsche Welle, US sources were said to have claimed that the new administration in Washington had formed an alliance with three unnamed countries in the Middle East to prepare for a possible attack on Iran.

'Terrorist'

On the travel ban itself, Iranian leaders have had a field day. First of all, leaving Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the Arab Emirates (countries repeatedly accused by Trump during the election campaign of funding al Qaeda, Islamic State and Al Nusra) off the list of alleged 'sponsors' of terrorism made a mockery of Trump's accusations that Obama and Clinton had double standards when it came to fighting terrorism. Secondly, as for claims that Iran is sponsoring 'terrorist activities', Tehran has responded that, at least since 2004-05, it has been the *target* of Islamic terrorism and its forces have fought IS and Al Nusra.

The Iranian government is certainly terrorising its own population - that is why many Iranians leave the country if they can. However, its only ally labelled 'terrorist' by some in the United States - Hezbollah - has actually been part of the Lebanese government since 2005. Of course, Hezbollah and Iran have been fighting Sunni fundamentalist groups in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, but Trump had claimed that his main priority was defeating IS and Al Nusra. Clearly in this respect his policies have changed. As for the choice of countries covered by the travel ban, here we are seeing a return to the traditional policies of neo-conservative Republicans and the Bush era of the early 2000s.

Rouhani has condemned the ban as a measure directed against the Iranian people, as opposed to the government, and this, he says, has exposed claims by US officials that they felt no animosity

towards the Iranian people themselves. However, while banning Americans from entering Iran would be a "symmetrical response", it was "not a very attractive idea". Although Iran's reaction to the US ban would be "clear" and "decisive", it would be "asymmetrical".

Another response came from Iran's parliamentary speaker, Ali Larijani, who said that Trump's three main qualities were "money worship", "vulgarity" and "racism". Larijani argued: "We should provide special funding for the scientific and research centres [in Iran] to accept and welcome the Iranian scientists who are working in the United States, but can't go there any more due to the visa ban." He added: "American scientists are vehemently opposed to Trump's decision; they are very interested in coming to Iran and speaking with our scientists." Larijani said Iran would also offer "special funding" to "the scientists and students of other Islamic countries" that Trump has targeted.

As for Khamenei himself, he did not hold back on the sarcasm:

We are thankful to this gentleman ... he has shown the real face of America ... What we have been saying for more than 30 years about the political, economic, moral and social corruption in the US ruling system - this person arose during the election campaign and ... has confirmed it.

Khamenei also referred to the young boy who had been held for several hours at a US airport last week, following the announcement of the ban: "By what he does - handcuffing a five-year-old child - he shows the true meaning of American human rights."

So Iran's leaders are in one sense pleased with Trump - his policy announcements and tweets make Iran's leaders appear sane and moderate. However, no-one should be fooled: the rulers of Iran's Islamic Republic remain authoritarian, misogynist dictators, who, 38 years after coming to power, preside over a corrupt, capitalist economy, more dependent on international capital than the day they came to power; a country where the gap between the rich and

poor is far worse than under the shah; a country where corruption encompasses every aspect of political, economic and social life.

We seem to have come full circle, back to the pre-2015 Obama position on sanctions. And once more the Iranian people face the threat of foreign aggression, at a time when their own rulers have no intention of ending their repression and when the overwhelming majority of the country face even more serious economic hardship - they already have to put up with non-payment of wages and a constant drop in their standard of living, courtesy of the devaluation of the Iranian currency, combined with the effects of previous sanctions.

Hopi

All this brings me to Hands Off the People of Iran, the campaigning anti-war organisation. Hopi was founded in 2007 and quickly established itself as a principled focus for activists in the movement who understood it was possible and necessary to oppose the threat of imperialist war against Iran without dressing up the country's rulers as 'anti-imperialist' or maintaining a diplomatic silence on their repressive crimes against the working people of the country.

After the conclusion of the Iran nuclear deal we assumed there was no longer an immediate threat of war. However, the situation following the election of Donald Trump, and the continued obsession of Israel and Saudi Arabia with Iran's perceived domination in the region, have convinced us there is a need to step up our efforts. In the next few weeks Hopi will be contacting trade unionists, political organisations and activists of the left to join our campaign against the threat of war and sanctions and in support of the struggles of the Iranian people ●

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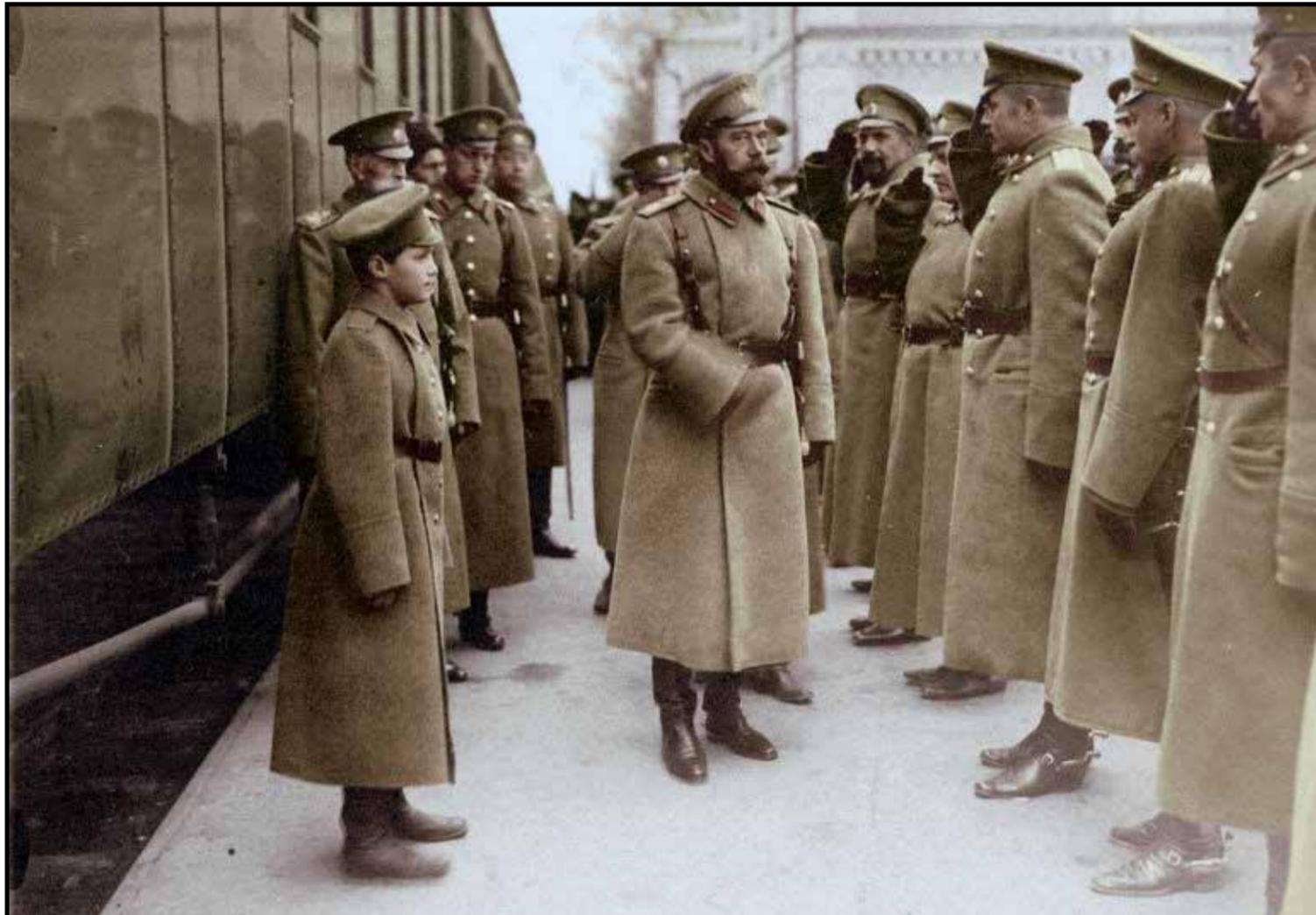
Notes

1. See, for instance, <http://fortune.com/2017/01/27/donald-trump-muslim-immigration-ban-conflict>.

1917

Call for provisional government to bring freedom and peace

1917: the view from the streets - leaflets of the Russian Revolution, No3



Tsar Nicholas, with son Alexei, addressing army officers

One hundred years ago this week, on February 6 (January 24) 1917, a Menshevik-influenced workers' group within the Central War Industry Committee issued the following appeal for a demonstration calling for a provisional government.

The War Industry Committees were set up by Russian businessmen in 1915 to assist the Russian imperial government

with military supplies. Managers and engineers filled the committees, which were supplemented by groups of workers elected from factories. Bolsheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries were generally opposed to such collaboration by workers with owners and managers of industry, but some Mensheviks participated in the worker groups.

In early 1917, the

Menshevik-composed Central Worker Group under the Central War Industry Committee attempted to mobilise workers to call for replacing the tsarist regime with a Provisional government. The following appeal led to the arrest of the members of the Central Worker Group on February 8-9 (January 26-27) 1917. The government postponed the convocation of the

Duma (parliament) until February 27 (February 14); workers responded with a one-day strike rather than the mass demonstration suggested below.

For the Bolsheviks' reply to this appeal, see document No4, to be published next week.

The series is edited by **John Riddell** and the leaflets have been translated and annotated by **Barbara Allen**.

Appeal to the workers of Petrograd from the Central Worker Group of the Central War Industry Committee

The despotic regime is strangling the country. The autocracy's policy is worsening the already severe disasters of the war, which bear down with all their weight upon the classes which do not own property. And the government's self-seeking multiplies many times over the already countless victims of war.

The government, which created a severe crisis of food supply, is stubbornly pushing the country, day by day, toward hunger and complete ruin. It is using wartime circumstances to enserf the working class. By chaining the workers to the factory, it turns them into factory serfs. Incapable of coping with the tasks set by the war, the ruling regime has nevertheless used it to intensify the persecution and oppression of Russia's various peoples.

Neither the war's end nor the peace that the weary country thirsts for can lead the people out of calamity,

if the war is ended by the current autocratic power rather than by the people themselves.

Once they end the war, the autocracy will attempt to forge new chains for the people. Instead of relief, the end of the war can bring new, even more terrible, misfortunes to the people. Bound hand and foot by the lack of political rights, the people - especially the proletariat - will be given over to arbitrariness, unemployment and hunger. High prices and unemployment, together with the government's despotism, will cast the working class into poverty and slavery.

The working class and democratic forces can wait no longer. Each missed day is dangerous. The task now urgently posed for resolution is to decisively eliminate the autocratic regime and fully democratise the country. This is a matter of life and death for the working class and democratic forces.

Proceeding from everything stated

above, it is clear that the current conflict between propertied bourgeois society and the authorities creates conditions especially favourable for the working class's active intervention. The people's movement can use the Duma's conflict with the government to promote a decisive blow against the autocracy.

We, the workers of _____, resolve:

- to immediately set about unifying and organising our forces and electing a factory committee; to reach an understanding with comrades of other mills and factories;
- to explain to all comrades at many assemblies the extreme importance of this moment;
- and to provide information about our decisions to other factories.

We should be ready for a general, organised public initiative at the moment when the Duma convenes.

Before the Duma convenes, let all of worker Petrograd, factory by factory,

district by district, simultaneously move toward the Tauride Palace [seat of the Duma], in order to present the main demands of the working class and democratic forces.

The entire country and the army should hear the voice of the working class. Only a Provisional government, leaning for support on the people who have organised through struggle, is capable of extricating the country from a dead end and fatal ruin, of strengthening political freedom within it and of bringing about peace on conditions acceptable to both the Russian proletariat and the proletariat of other countries ●

Translated from **AG Shliapnikov Semnadsatyi god Vol 1, 1923, pp279-80.** Previous leaflets in the series are available at <https://johnriddell.wordpress.com>.

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly WORKER

Broadness for the sake of broadness leads straight into the camp of liberalism

Against Trump, for what?

The February 4 demonstration pulled in many people new to politics, reports Peter Manson

The new US president has certainly provoked a hostile reaction from substantial elements of the ruling class and, partly as a result of that, from large numbers below.

Not surprisingly then, demonstrations against Trump are pulling in many thousands on both sides of the Atlantic and the February 4 mobilisations in Britain were no exception. The London event - under the slogan, "Stop Trump's Muslim ban, stop May supporting it" - which gathered outside the US embassy in Grosvenor Square for a rally before heading off to Downing Street, pulled in well over 20,000 and possibly as many as the 40,000 claimed by the organisers.

Of course, these particular organisers - specifically Stand Up To Racism, the People's Assembly and the Stop the War Coalition (supported on this occasion by the Muslim Association of Britain, Muslim Engagement and Development, the Muslim Council of Britain, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and others) - are not renowned for their honesty in estimating the attendance at their events. SUTR is, of course, the latest 'united front' of the Socialist Workers Party, while the PA and STWC are run by former SWP members, now organised in Counterfire.

On this occasion the figure of 40,000 might have been exaggerated - but on nowhere near the same scale as the June 2015 anti-austerity demonstration called by the PA, when Counterfire's John Rees in particular insisted that 250,000 people had turned out for a march that was in fact around a quarter of that size.¹ But there was another very marked contrast between 2015 and February 2017.

Most encouragingly, last Saturday's event was the first this writer can recall with a majority female attendance - at least for a demonstration which was not specifically aimed at women. More than that, they were mostly young women - a factor that ought to augur well from the point of view of drawing new forces into the working class movement.

However, the contrast was particularly sharp in a different sense, if you compare February 4 2017 with the 'Solidarity with Refugees' demonstration of September 12 2015. If that date seems familiar, it is because it was the very day that Jeremy Corbyn was declared the new Labour leader, and the demonstration outside parliament marked his first speaking engagement.

On that occasion I can vividly recall how eager the marchers were to snap up anything political - the *Weekly Worker*, like, I am sure, other left papers, was selling like hot cakes and people were queuing up at our stall to get their copy by the end of the afternoon. But last Saturday was totally different: it was very hard work selling our paper, while comrades handing out the latest free copy of *Labour Party Marxists* report that they also had to work very hard.

In other words, it is not just that most of the anti-Trump demonstrators were not the usual left suspects, or even those with an affinity to some kind of working class or Labour politics: many were either totally new to politics altogether or else from the green/liberal milieu.

So how should the left interact with this milieu? Is the most important thing the sheer numbers on the street, united



Good turnout, but now the political lessons must be learnt

in their opposition to a particularly reactionary individual? Or should we be aiming to go beyond that and try to win people to a positive, progressive, working class alternative? As the SWP's

internal *Party Notes* reported, "Speaker after speaker called for unity against Trump".² By that it meant that almost everyone restricted their contributions to the non-controversial, concentrating

on what their audience was known to be against.

This was epitomised by the SWP's very own Weyman Bennett, representing Stand Up To Racism. He proclaimed:

"If Donald Trump comes to this country, we're going to kick his arse. Black and white, gay and straight, women and men - we're going to kick his arse." Leaving aside the total impotence of such a threat, comrade Bennett did not say anything in favour of a specific political alternative.

In that sense he was pretty indistinguishable from the likes of Azad Ali of the Muslim Safety Forum, who said we should "bring the whole of London to a standstill" if Trump turned up, while Muslim Association of Britain president Omer el-Hamdoon claimed that the new situation had revealed not only "who are the racists", but "who are the fascists". As for Corbyn himself, who appeared via a video link, he mainly restricted his comments, as you might expect, to platitudes, such as condemning the "nasty policies created to sow division and hatred".

Lindsey German of Counterfire, speaking for the Stop the War Coalition, predicted: "This is the beginning of a mass movement." But what sort of mass movement, Lindsey? One that adopts specific programmatic demands or merely contents itself with reminding us all of what we don't like?

But, for her, that is par for the course. Both she and comrade Rees, in all the time they have headed the STWC, including well before they flounced out of the SWP, were hardly renowned for their advocacy of a leftwing political programme when they spoke from the coalition's platforms. The words, 'working class' or 'socialism', never passed their lips whenever they wore their STWC hats. Stop the War could not even bring itself to recommend a particular vote or electoral tactic in its heyday prior to the 2005 general election - that would have been too 'divisive', it seems.

Apparently it is not the job of a demonstration's organisers or even the speakers on its platforms - whatever their leftwing credentials - to attempt to win their audience to working class politics. That is the job of the rank-and-file SWP (or Counterfire) members, who try to persuade individual demonstrators to join their organisation and help 'build the party': ie, one of the existing tiny sects.

However, I am not sure they had too much luck on this occasion ●

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Notes

1. See 'Huge cheers for Corbyn' *Weekly Worker* June 25 2015.
2. *Party Notes* February 7.

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To _____ Bank plc _____

Branch address _____

Post code _____ Account name _____

Sort code _____ Account No _____

Please pay to Weekly Worker, Lloyds A/C No 00744310 sort code 30-99-64, the sum of _____ every month*/3 months* until further notice, commencing on _____ This replaces any previous order from this account. (*delete)

Date _____

Signed _____ Name (PRINT) _____

Address _____