

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



**Paul Nuttall defeated in Stoke:
Tories, not Ukip, not Labour, not
Lib Dems are winning Brexit battle**

- CLPD: undemocratic
- Defend the NHS
- Trump targets Iran
- Italian splits

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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**THE INFERNO ERUPTS:
MARCH 8 1917**

LETTERS



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

Egregious

In labelling the European parliament an "autocratic dictatorship", David Douglass makes an egregious error (Letters, February 23). This parliament is the largest transnational, democratically elected body in the world. Its members are grouped by political tendency and not along national lines, while all countries, including the UK, use a system of proportional representation to select their MEPs - a more democratic system than the "first past the post" used here.

Which brings me to my second point. Comrade Douglass translates the 52% Brexit vote as the equivalent, in UK parliamentary terms, of a 'landslide' government being elected to the House of Commons. However, thumping majorities have been obtained by countless governments with less than 45% of the votes cast (Thatcher and Blair, for instance); in fact, the last time a government in the UK won a majority of votes cast was in 1931. This invidious situation is one reason why communists are not in favour of the 'first past the post' system, as well as rejecting the populist use of referenda.

That the Tories called a referendum was due, on the one hand, to their fear of losing seats to the UK Independence Party - a mirage - and, on the other, because they thought 'remain' would win. Tories are not in the business of governing in the interests of the working class, nor in the interests of democracy in general. They are the longest-serving political party in history and their aim is to hold power in lock-step with capital, as well as undemocratic institutions like the monarchy, the House of Lords, a standing army and neo-imperialist military adventures. What the Tories make of the Brexit decision will be in the interests of the Tories, full stop.

The third point is as follows. Comrade Douglass is annoyed that the *Weekly Worker* has not modified its political critique in light of the Brexit victory. May I remind him that Theresa May's Tories won a majority at the last election and this has not stopped the *Weekly Worker* from hostile commentary; nor has the SNP's blanket win in Scotland stopped this newspaper from regularly inveighing against nationalist solutions. The editorial line was a boycott of the referendum, not a boycott of commentary, critical or otherwise, of the results and the manner in which a Tory government will interpret them.

René Gimpel
email

Chauvinism

The mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, addressed the Scottish Labour Party conference to tell them that "seeking to break up the union will only to fuel harmful divisions caused by the election of the controversial US president and the Brexit vote" (*The Independent* February 25). Khan condemned the Scottish National Party plan for a referendum. He claimed that the right response to the Brexit vote was "to build a more united kingdom".

Surely a better response to Trump and Brexit is for the people of Scotland to remain in a union with the Germans, French and Spanish, and a few more nations, too numerous to mention. It is what they voted for in the most recent referendum. What is so important about England that it trumps all other considerations? Khan speaks as an English nationalist. What is best for his nation is best for all. It does not enter his head that Scotland might be better off with Denmark, Ireland and Sweden than remaining in Theresa May's pro-Trump Brexit Britain.

Khan is not the first English chauvinist blinded by his own national arrogance. It is patently untrue that "there is no difference between those who try to divide us on the basis of whether we are English or

Scottish and those who try to divide us on the basis of our background (he surely means *class*), race or religion", as he was quoted as saying. Khan is not the first Englishman to come up with this theory of "no difference" between a bus driver and stockbroker or that supporting Scotland's or Ireland's right to self-determination is no different from racism, fascism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. He certainly won't be the last.

Look no further than David Cameron. On the day of the 2014 Scottish referendum result, Cameron stood on the steps of Downing Street to call for "English votes for English laws". Here is one "difference". Scotland has a parliament and England does not. Of course in a federal system there would be an English parliament elected by voters in England. The present constitution is a horrible mess of complexity and confusion, unbalanced by semi-federalism. It cannot last much longer.

But this wasn't a rational discussion on the byzantine complexity of the UK constitution. Cameron was playing the 'English card' as a Tory dog whistle for alienated English people. He was fanning the embers of resentment against enemies on the other side of Hadrian's Wall. The theme of Tory chauvinist propaganda is that Scottish people are living the life of Reilly at our generous expense. Of course, the Tories love conservative, law-abiding Scots, but hate the ungrateful Scottish nationalists who, in Khan's words, are "seeking to break up the union". They love workers as much as they hate 'divisive' strikers!

The EU referendum showed that the 'Prisoners of Mother England' are angry and some are mad as hell. Some of her prisoners are on drugs and others are into self-harm. Many want to kick the crap out of their fellow prisoners. Her Majesty's prison warders, in charge of the hell hole, have tried desperately to distract them with fake news about immigrants, the European Union, the troublesome Irish and - last, but not least - rebellious Scots.

Great English chauvinism is a weapon of the British ruling class. Cameron deployed it in the 2015 general election to finish off Miliband's version of New Labour. The Tories kept their best weapon for Liberal Democrat voters in the key marginal constituencies. They tested Miliband's patriotic virility by claiming that a vote for Labour would help the SNP. He was not found wanting. There was no way he would have an alliance with the nationalist SNP. He would rather lose the election than suffer that ignominy.

Like fear of immigrants, fear of the SNP caused panic in Labour ranks and persuaded voters in key marginals to back the Tories. It is ironic that Cameron's anti-Scottish election victory delivered a solid block of 50 SNP MPs, opened the way for Jeremy Corbyn, led the country out of the EU and to the brink of a Scottish exit from the UK. Cameron acted out his 'Flashman' role as the upper class, opportunistic English chauvinist. It 'worked' for him. As Khan has shown, since Brexit it is a card that desperate Labour is ready to use.

But the real problem is closer to home. The left in England is terrified of the English question and guilty of chauvinism by neglect. In that neglect are the seeds of the radical left's failure to connect with the people.

Steve Freeman
Rise and Left Unity

Cheerleaders

I attended the recent Momentum Teesside meeting, described in Steve Cooke's letter (February 23), where there was an obviously pre-arranged objection, supported by the chair, to the Grassroots Momentum networking conference being an item on the agenda. I was somewhat taken aback by the almost bullying attitude of several of those who were given the opportunity to speak in objection. Indeed, I would say that one member was particularly aggressive in his tone and manner.

Surely, if we are to call ourselves democratic, then no subject should be off limits for discussion. If supporters of the Grassroots conference are "the enemy", as stated by the branch chair, citing his supposed correspondence with Momentum HQ, then this begs the question: what will be Momentum's response to the branches who, unlike Teesside, had open discussions and then delegated members to represent them at the conference?

Of late, I find myself asking what is the purpose of Momentum? Are we there just to defend against the right when and if they decide to move against Jeremy? I hope not! My hope for Momentum at the outset was to change the structure of the Labour Party. Blair built a top-down, bureaucratic, centralised party, where members were just an appendage, no more than cheerleaders.

I believe that, if we want to be a truly democratic party, ordinary members need to be involved in policy making and in electing their parliamentary candidates. But, while the party machinery remains in the hands of the Blairites, then the future of the left is in jeopardy.

Mike Paling
Redcar

What happened?

Whatever happened to Momentum? Whatever happened to the 'new kind of politics' that Momentum was founded on? The support for the awakening of the grassroots activism that had been laid dormant after the rise of Blair and Progress in the Labour Party? The open welcome for fresh, invigorating voices that had seen something new in Jeremy Corbyn's socialist platform? The 'welcome back' to the returners to Labour whom Jeremy had helped to remember why they had originally joined all those decades ago, when unions were unions and being Labour meant you had tens of thousands of comrades to watch your back?

Momentum was formed to facilitate the individuals in these groups to share their passions, skills and talents. It promised to invigorate self-organisation at the grassroots and empower all Labour members to play their own vital part in shaping the party we all want to see in government.

Then we had a few shenanigans about who could call the shots in the organisation and a couple of standoffs between groups of people with strong opinions. All pretty much par for the course, when you bring together the sort of headstrong types who want to change the world (or the Labour Party, at least). Us oldies were going to stand with the new members, or at least try keeping up with them when they ran to the front of the battle against austerity, share with them the comradeship that comes from collective action, embrace the use of digital technology to bring people together and rebuild a Labour Party where members fight to protect public services, to make sure that vulnerable people aren't the ones who pay the price to keep the balance sheets tallied and are proud to stand up for socialism.

Then someone, in their wisdom, imposed a set of rules with no discussion and Momentum members were told very clearly, 'If you don't like it, there's the door'. Despite this, some members continue to try and hold to those lofty ideals, support each other and continue organising.

Then last week we held our local Momentum meeting. The Teesside branch chair said he'd been in touch with the Momentum office and that they are all in agreement that those organising and supporting the self-organised Momentum Grassroots networking conference were "the enemy", so any discussion of it was ruled out of order.

That's what happened to Momentum. But it's not the end of the story. What those sitting in the Momentum office, and those riding on their coat tails, need to get used to is that those they now call the enemy still believe in socialism, collectivism, joint action and comradeship. The road ahead is rocky and we hadn't anticipated

so much resistance from those we would call our own.

I left Labour once and regretted not staying to fight when the right of the party rose and started burying those on the left. This time I'm in it for the long haul and, if those supposedly on the same side can't stand with me and call me their comrade, that won't make me, or the many others like me, go away. It'll just make us battle harder. It's sometimes surprising where your motivation to keep fighting springs from.

Barbara Campbell
Stockton-on-Tees

Every bit as bad

I was sorry to read of the developments in Momentum's Teesside branch described in last week's paper, but the truth seems to me to be that Momentum failed from an early stage at a national level to capitalise on the new wave of Corbyn supporters.

The active membership of Momentum now seems to be only a few thousand people and Momentum appears to be replicating the splits within the Labour Party itself.

I think we all failed to appreciate fully the context in which Jeremy Corbyn's first leadership election victory took place. It was not based on a mass wave of people moving towards socialist ideas and it took place against the background of all those years of Thatcherism and Blairism, which had demoralised so many people, and where the level of industrial militancy had been at record lows for a very sustained period. Voting for Corbyn was for a lot of people a protest vote based on anger at the existing Labour Party leadership.

It is very unfortunate in hindsight that so many of us have (in good faith) put so much energy into the Labour Party and Momentum at the expense of other political activity. At least I can say that I gave the Labour Party a go, having joined in 2015, but my own Constituency Labour Party proved to be every bit as bad politically as my earlier political education told me it would be!

Simon D
Stockton-on-Tees

No illusions

A comrade has pointed out that Globalresearch - the website I quote in my article, 'Trump ups the ante' (February 16) - is an anti-Semitic site.

I have no idea if the accusation is true. All I know is that these days anyone, including any website, that opposes Israel is labelled anti-Semitic. Moreover, in quoting the reasons listed by the website why there is

a serious threat of US aggression against Iran, I do not condone or support the site. In fact I expressed disagreement with the second point I quoted in the article.

I often quote from the *Wall Street Journal*, *Financial Times*, CNN, BBC ... It does not mean I have any illusions about these news organisations, their backers or their paymasters. If they report something relevant I quote them.

Yasmine Mather
London

Marxist escorts

Many Marxists, together with HM Revenue and Customs, are very shy when it comes to discussing escorting and prostitution. Lenin and Trotsky wrote that Marxists must have answers to the small questions as well as the big questions, such as war and peace. This aptly applies to escorting and prostitution.

Statistics gained from AdultWork.com - the UK's premier website for putting female escorts in touch with potential clients - accurately show the extent of escorting in the UK. At the time of writing, there were 17,602 women with profiles on Adult Work, with 4,359 in the London area; 1,037 in Scotland; 511 in Wales; and just 78 in Northern Ireland. The small latter figure is a direct result of the new law, which makes it a criminal offence for a man in Northern Ireland to pay for the services of an escort.

So, what should be the policy of Marxists towards escorting and prostitution? Well, Lenin and the Bolshevik Party paid attention to the activity of brothel owners, whilst supporting those women who worked in brothels. Marxists do not call for the legalisation of prostitution. To do so would result in companies that run brothels being listed on the stock exchange, as happens in Australia. We don't want to see that in the UK or elsewhere. However, Marxists do call for the *decriminalisation* of escorting and prostitution. This is the policy of the English Collective of Prostitutes; the GMB sex workers branch; and the International Union of Sex Workers.

The experience of New Zealand, where escorting and prostitution has been decriminalised, is instructive here. Two or three women are able to work as self-employed escorts from the same property. This has put an end to most street prostitution and made it safer for escorts who previously worked alone.

John Smithee
Cambridgeshire

Fighting fund

Month to remember

Congratulations and thanks to all comrades who helped us race past our £1,750 fighting fund target in February. Despite this being the shortest month, we emerged with £1,889 - not enough to make up for the £214 shortfall in January, but within £75 of doing so.

The last week of February saw £107 come in through standing orders (of which the highlight was JT's £50), plus three handy PayPal donations - thanks to AN and TB (£30 each) and LT (£10). There were also two cheques from FN (£75) and JS (£25).

And, as I write, in the evening of March 1, we have already received £232 towards March's fund. That's the total from 15 start-of-the-month standing orders, ranging from £5 to the £40 donated by both MS and EW.

There's more good news as well in the form of a big increase in the number of online readers, compared to recent weeks - up to 3,458, which is over 850 more than the week before. As I say, that's good news, but wouldn't it be great if just a few more of those readers remembered to click on that PayPal button?

We rely on you - our readers and supporters - to make up for that constant difference between our regular expenses (office costs, printing, mailouts, etc) and the money that comes in from sales and subscriptions. So let's make March a month to remember! ●

Robbie Rix

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

LABOUR

Inconsistently democratic

Stan Keable of Labour Party Marxists reports on the CLPD annual conference

As I anticipated, the majority at the February 25 AGM of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy in London disgraced the organisation by failing to stand up for democracy in Momentum. How can the CLPD then campaign effectively for democracy in the Labour Party?

In place of the principle of working class solidarity - an injury to one is an injury to all - we were treated to the spurious, bureaucratic principle of so-called "non-interference" in the affairs of any fraternal organisation - a method of double talk which does not 'do what it says on the tin'. "Non-interference" is far from neutral, as its proponents pretend. It actually means taking sides - in support of the status quo.

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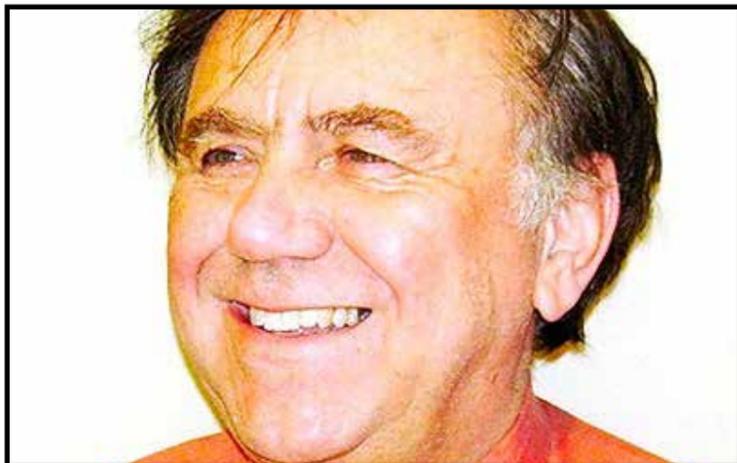
Neither the way the January 10 anti-democratic coup in Momentum was carried out nor the new constitution itself gave them a problem. The byzantine constitution was imposed suddenly, with neither discussion nor the opportunity of amendment, by the votes of six members of a defunct steering committee. But it can only be amended or overturned against the wishes of the newly established national coordinating group by a positive vote of 30% of the membership in an online ballot - the kind of threshold the Tories would like to impose on trade unions to prevent industrial action. And, were such a vote to be achieved, we should only expect more of the same - another counterrevolution from above allowing the dominant faction to stay in control.

These bureaucratic shenanigans in Momentum ought to be anathema for an organisation which - according to Pete Willsman's motion 1 (carried overwhelmingly, of course, with a few supplementary amendments) - campaigns within the Labour Party:

- for "rule changes that would significantly increase party democracy";
- "to regain conference sovereignty in relation to policy";
- for "addressing... the lack of accountability to local parties of councillors and MPs";
- for combating "illegitimate interference by party staff in the party's internal democracy".

Momentum has just undergone rule changes which 'significantly decrease' democracy, junk conference sovereignty, render the ruling faction effectively unaccountable to the membership, and make permanent the illegitimate interference by Momentum paid staff and their controller in the running of the organisation, as against the now abolished NC.

The CLPD majority were willing to overlook the junking of conference sovereignty in Momentum, while obliviously voting through Francis Prideaux's motion 3, which "recalls that the Labour Party's supreme authority



Peter Willsman: democracy in Labour, but not Momentum

on policy and organisation is the party's annual conference."

Labour Party Marxists motion 5, which I moved, "reaffirms that the CLPD remains committed to campaign for democratisation of the Labour Party, including mandatory selection of parliamentary candidates". It is good to know that the CLPD still supports mandatory reselection, which was achieved in party rules - and in practice - in the 1980s, but then reduced to meaninglessness by the introduction of trigger ballots. But will the 'non-interference' principle prevent the CLPD from demanding, on the national coordinating group, that Momentum starts campaigning for mandatory reselection?

Our motion also criticised "undemocratic behaviour in Momentum" and regretted the "curtailment of normal democratic procedures". However, this part of our motion was deleted by Barry Gray's successful amendment. Somewhat dishonestly, my dear friend, Richard Price (of the 'original' *Labour Briefing* split), claimed that the wording was "too vague" to be supportable, as no-one could be sure precisely what "undemocratic behaviour" the motion condemned. We should have been "more specific". But then, no doubt, the motion might have been 'too wordy', or whatever - as if anyone in the room did not know about the Momentum coup.

Of course, I accepted Richard's other point, that the "democratic procedures" achieved in Momentum were less than perfect, before any development was unceremoniously cut off on January 10. Lansman first attempted a coup on October 28, when he cancelled the November 5 NC meeting, which looked likely to go against him. But rebellious NC members went ahead with a meeting on that day. Then, after John McDonnell convened peace talks with Matt Wrack, Lansman was forced to allow the NC to meet on December 3 - and many new delegates were elected by regional committees and liberation groups in the run-up to that meeting.

If Lansman had got his wicked way on December 3 - a neutered, non-decision-making annual conference of the kind which the CLPD abhors in the Labour Party - there would have been no coup. But the refreshed NC wanted a sovereign delegate conference with decision-making powers, albeit with some online voting. So the NC was immediately subjected to a red-baiting media smear campaign involving the likes of Laura Murray, Owen Jones and Paul Mason, followed up by the new year 'survey', which was deceitfully designed to legitimise the instantaneous scrapping of what there was of Momentum's democratic structures.

Barry Gray's amendment, carried by a large majority of the 120 or so present at the AGM, replaced criticism of what has happened in Momentum by an entirely positive text. All is well in

Momentum, it seems:

CLPD welcomes the opportunity to participate in Momentum and to promote CLPD objectives and priorities through that collaboration. The task facing all of us is to defend Jeremy Corbyn and build an effective party that wins the general election. That has been CLPD's prime focus and must always be, together with uniting all progressive forces around that central focus.

A more pleasing outcome came with the majority vote in favour of Martin Green's motion 2. With Pete Willsman's blessing, the meeting decided:

to revisit CLPD's earlier campaign for a more meaningful clause four (rather than the existing version drafted by T Blair). We ask the EC to set up a small working group (this can involve non-EC members) to draft this new clause four for agreement at our next AGM and, if that AGM agrees, the new version will be circulated as a model rule change.

To help this along, I circulated a model motion - 'For a socialist clause 4' - with the text of three versions of clause four - the 1918-59 state socialism version; Tony Blair's 1995 abomination ("the enterprise of the market and the rigour of competition", etc); and LPM's draft for 21st century working class socialism.

It has to be said that, for an organisation campaigning for democracy, the debates were very pinched, allowing only three minutes for each speaker. Motion 1 - Pete Willsman's impressive list of tasks to be undertaken during the coming year - was taken near the start of day, with the secretary's report. The other six motions, plus several amendments, were squashed into one hour in the afternoon. Totally inadequate for actually thrashing out ideas.

The rest of the day was more of a rally than an AGM, with a range of speakers. We learned that Kelvin Hopkins wants the national policy forum abolished - good! Salma Yaqoob is "passionate about Jeremy Corbyn" and assured us that he "stays constant, whatever the weather" - forgetting about his backsliding on republicanism, Palestine, Trident, and his silence in the face of the anti-Semitism smear campaign. Claudia Webb told us that Labour membership was 543,645 on January 1, making Labour the biggest party in Europe, while Unite assistant secretary Diana Holland put trade union membership at 6.5 million. Trade unionism is not enough, she said, as not everything can be solved in the workplace: "The unions need legal and political action", while Labour "needs its link to millions of workers".

Quite right. Talk of Labour's imminent demise seems a bit - well - off the planet ●

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday March 5, 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 2: 'Paralysis as ideology' (continued).

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

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday March 7, 6.45pm: Book launch: *Human origins: contributions from social anthropology*. Speakers: Camilla Power, Morna Finnegan, Hilary Callan.

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: <http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

It's our NHS

Saturday March 4, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble Tavistock Square, London WC1, for march to parliament.

Organised by It's Our NHS: www.ournhs.info.

Alternatives to austerity

Saturday March 4, 2pm: Debate, room 3, Liverpool Central Library, William Brown Street, Liverpool L3. David Lowes and Paul B Smith on 'Socialist/communist alternatives'.

Organised by North West Socialist Theory Study Group: 07952 944318.

Save Harringay post office

Tuesday March 7, 7.30pm: Organising and information meeting, South Harringay School, Pemberton Road, London N4.

Organised by People's Momentum: www.peoplesmomentum.com.

Close Guantanamo

Wednesday March 8, 1pm: Protest, Parliament Square, Westminster, London SW1.

Organised by Guantanamo Justice Campaign: <http://londonguantanamocampaign.blogspot.co.uk>.

End the special relationship

Wednesday March 8, 7pm: Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, Upper Goat Lane, Norwich NR2. Speaker: Lindsey German.

Organised by Norwich Stop the War: <http://norwichstopwar.org.uk>.

Grassroots Momentum

Saturday March 11, 10am to 5pm: Conference, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1.

Organised by Grassroots Momentum: <http://momentumconference.app.rsvpify.com>.

No 'regime change' in Venezuela

Saturday March 11, 11am to 5pm: Conference, ITF Building, 49-60 Borough Road, London SE1.

Organised by Venezuela Solidarity Campaign: www.venezuelasolidarity.co.uk.

Media, misrepresentation and the Middle East

Saturday March 11, 6.30pm: Public meeting, Morlan Centre, Aberystwyth. Speakers include Chris Nineham.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Heroes of the Spanish Civil War

Saturday March 11, 1pm: Public meeting, Red Shed, Vicarage Street, Wakefield WF1. Speaker: author and campaigner Granville Williams. Admission free, including light buffet.

Organised by Wakefield Socialist History Group: www.theredshed.org.uk/SocialHist.html.

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>.

March against racism

Saturday March 18, 12 noon: Demonstration. Assemble outside BBC, Portland Place, London W1. Supported by Trades Union Congress, Muslim Engagement and Development, and many others.

Organised by Stand Up To Racism: www.standuptoracism.org.uk.

By Marx's graveside

Sunday March 19, 2pm: Annual oration at Karl Marx's grave, Highgate Cemetery, Swain's Lane, London N6. Oration by Venezuelan ambassador Rocío Maneiro.

Organised by Highgate Cemetery: <http://highgatecemetery.org>.

Remember JD Bernal

Friday March 24, 6pm: Public meeting, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. A celebration of John Bernal - socialist, scientist and peace campaigner.

Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.

Race to war?

Tuesday March 28, 6.30pm-8pm: Public meeting, Old Fire Station, 84 Mayton Street, London N7.

Organised by North London Stop the War: www.facebook.com/nlondon.stwc.7.

No to war

Saturday April 22, 10am to 5pm: Stop the War Coalition annual conference, Arlington Conference Centre, 220 Arlington Road, London NW1.

Organised by STWC: <http://stopwar.org.uk>.

CPGB wills

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

BY-ELECTIONS

Tories winning Brexit battle

Stoke and Copeland shows the growing ascendancy of the Tory Party, writes **Eddie Ford**

There can be no doubt that last week's by-election results were a setback for Labour. One of the first things that has to be said is that Stoke Central did not represent a "decisive rejection" of the UK Independence Party, as rather sillily claimed by Jeremy Corbyn - let alone the alternative reality inhabited by the ex-Trotskyist, Paul Mason, in which Labour "well and truly stuffed" Ukip and "shows how to destroy" the organisation (it is doing that all by itself).¹

Back in the real world though, Labour's candidate, Gareth Snell, got a pretty paltry 7,853 votes (37.1%), as opposed to 'Dr' Paul Nuttall's 5,233 (24.7%) on a very diminished turnout of 38.2% (down 11.7% from 2015).² A truly decisive rejection or stuffing would have seen Ukip near the bottom of the list, struggling to beat the Monster Raving Loony Party or the Christian Peoples - when in fact its vote went up slightly by 2.1%, whilst Labour's went down 2.2%.

True, there had been intense media speculation, ever since Tristram Hunt resigned the seat for his "dream job" of director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, that Stoke Central could fall into the hands of Ukip - for fairly good reasons, it does have to be said. Stoke council, though not the same as the constituency, has been under 'no overall control' since 2015, with Ukip at its core. Stoke, of course, notched up the highest Brexit vote of any UK city with 69.7% - hence the exaggerated talk about the "Brexit capital of Britain", and so on. Generally, Labour's grip on the area has slipped considerably in recent years, enabling Ukip to make relatively impressive gains in all three of the city's constituencies at the last general election - for example, closing the gap with Labour to just 2.7% in neighbouring Stoke-on-Trent North.

Alas for our former Tranmere Rovers player, it was not his night - with the

Conservatives' Jack Brereton breathing down his neck on 24.3%, a very close shave indeed (79 votes difference). As for the Liberal Democrats, they got what must have been a disappointing 9.8% (albeit up 5.7%). Overall, you can say that Stoke was not a disaster for either Labour or Ukip - depending on what their expectations were. At Ukip's recent spring conference, Nigel Farage set the bar very high, describing Stoke as "fundamental" for "the futures of both the Labour Party and indeed of Ukip too" - it "matters and it matters hugely". By that criterion, Stoke was a failure - but, regardless, for the time being Farage is publicly standing by Nuttall. Only time will tell.

Another thing that has to be said about Stoke was that it was dominated by near endless boring stories about Nuttall and Hillsborough - did he lose "close friends"? Whether a Ukip employee or researcher posted inaccurate material on Nuttall's website is profoundly uninteresting, especially when you consider all the big issues that could have been raised - Ukip's survival, the weakness of the Labour Party and the continuing crisis of Corbynism, 'hard' Brexit under Theresa May, etc. Similarly, we also had tiresome stories concerning a series of tweets made years ago by Snell that included calling Janet Street-Porter a "polished turd" and the panellists on ITV's *Loose women* "squabbling sour-faced ladies". Again, absolute trivia from the media. Anyway, Stoke was only a "decisive rejection" of Ukip if you were genuinely convinced that it should have been a shoe-in for Nuttall - which was always a dubious proposition.

Copeland, however, is a different matter. Yes, you can talk about special circumstances - such as the importance of the nuclear industry as a major local employer, Storm Doris, and the fairly small size of the Labour majority (2,147). Nevertheless, in terms of the core constituency, Labour has held

Copeland³ since 1935, when it was recovering from the debacle of the 1931 'national government'. In the end, the Tory candidate, Trudi Harrison, won with 13,748 votes (44.2%) on a much higher turnout than Stoke of 51.33% - amounting to a 6.7% swing to the Tories. Labour slumped to 11,601 (37.3%), down 4.9% - whilst the Lib Dems and Ukip trailed well behind, getting 7.2% and 6.5% respectively (meaning that Ukip's vote fell sharply by 9.0%).⁴ This represented the first gain for a governing party at a UK by-election since 1982. Copeland also saw the largest increase in a governing party's share of the vote in a by-election since 1966.

Labour's situation is even worse than it first seems when you remember that by-elections tend to underestimate support for the governing party, and reward oppositional parties, which provide voters with an opportunity to give the government a mid-term kicking. This makes it all the more telling, and ominous, that it was May who had the most to celebrate on Friday morning. Labour looks to be facing decimation at the next general election.

Revival?

These by-elections raise a number of worthwhile questions. Firstly, does Ukip have a long-term future? You do not have to be a genius to think it is pure nonsense to believe that Ukip is on the road to replacing Labour as the official opposition or natural voice of the working class. The Labour Party is a *historically constituted* party based on the trade union movement. True, that movement may have considerably declined over the decades, yet we are still dealing with a membership of six million - not something that will go away easily.

Ukip, on the other hand, is an ephemeral organisation based fundamentally on opposition to the European Union. In that sense, Ukip can only be defined negatively - by what it is against, not what it is for. Now, after June 23 - with Theresa May skilfully appropriating the 'hard Brexit' agenda - what actually is the point of Ukip? Maybe to stumble on as a pressure group, making sure the prime minister keeps to her pledge - which is not much of a reason to exist. No wonder Ukip tops are falling out with each other. Arron Banks with Douglas Carswell, Nigel Farage with Douglas Carswell, Neil Hammond with Nigel Farage, etc.

Essentially, in Copeland a big slice of the Ukip vote simply marched into the Tory camp. There is every reason to think that that this pattern will be replicated, to one degree or another, in the general election, as May ploughs ahead with her Brexit plans - EU deal or not, World Trade Organisation rules or not. If Brexit actually happens, which is a possibility in the new world of Trump, that would further place a question mark over Ukip's future - with job done, surely time to close shop. Then again, if Marine Le Pen does defy the polls and becomes president of France - not something you can completely dismiss - then the EU will be finished anyway, almost making Brexit redundant. There would be nothing to exist.

What about the Lib Dems? Historically speaking, this should be ideal conditions for a revival after getting punished by voters for getting into bed with the Conservative Party in the coalition government. We have had the unedifying spectacle of Jeremy Corbyn getting out his three-line whip and urging Labour MPs to vote *with the Tories* to trigger article 50 and proceed with what Labour was telling us would be a catastrophe for the British economy - in which case, surely

we should be duty-bound to oppose it? Step forward the Lib Dems, saviours of the country from Brexit darkness. After all, almost half of the electorate voted 'remain' and even in Stoke just over 30% came out for continued EU membership. And here is the party that is making opposition to Brexit its *core* issue. Yet what did they get in the by-elections? In Stoke, their vote only went up 5.7% (to 9.8% - at least they saved their deposit this time) and it was pretty much the same in Copeland - only increasing by 3.8%, putting them on 7.3% of the total vote.

You could argue that we could be seeing another attempt to create a centrist third party - in that the cross-party Open Britain has been backed by Tony Blair, Peter Mandelson, John Major, and others. Thus John Prescott in the *Sunday Mirror* says that OB "looks like an SDP mark two", with Mandelson and Blair "whipping up dissent to split Labour", just like Roy Jenkins and David Owen did before they launched the Social Democratic Party in 1981.⁵ This is very unconvincing, to say the least. In the 1980s you saw an upsurge of the centre ground - just as importantly, if not more so, for a while it looked as if joining the SDP could possibly be a good *career* move: it seemed to be going places.

But the situation today is totally different. British politics is increasingly polarised, albeit in contradictory ways, between left and right - and now is being *repolarised* along Brexit lines, with even more contradictory outcomes. The centre ground is not undergoing a significant revival. In Stoke and Copeland the Lib Dems merely showed that they still exist. Nor does anyone in the Labour Party seriously think that there is going to be another SDP that is going to provide them with an alternative career plan - or dislodge Jeremy Corbyn.

This explains Tom Watson's reaction to the by-election results at the Scottish Labour Party conference in Perth - he argued strongly that there should be no more challenges to Corbyn's leadership. Further attacks on Corbyn from the Parliamentary Labour Party could result in *Labour* MPs losing their seats (and lucrative careers) - and for what? Corbyn cannot be removed under current circumstances, as the mass membership retains faith in him - that was recently tested with the second leadership contest. The right's candidate, for all the backing from MPs and the media, lost badly - therefore to keep openly attacking Corbyn would be self-defeating. That is the calculation of most of the PLP: stick with JC as leader for now and muddle through to the next election hoping that events might come to your rescue. Perhaps Corbyn will have a heart attack.

Flawed

When you look at opinion polls, what is immediately noticeable is not the growth of the centre - forget it - but the strength of the Tory Party, increasing its electoral position over this period to almost 1950s levels of support. Hence a YouGov poll, published on February 17, has the Conservatives on 40% and Labour on 24% - with the Lib Dems on 11% and Ukip on 15% (support for other parties totals 11%).⁶ Theresa May continues to be the favoured choice for prime minister, with 49% of people preferring her to Corbyn. The Labour leader is backed by only 15% of voters, whilst 36% don't know.

Even worse for Jeremy Corbyn, an ICM/*Guardian* survey that came out on February 20 has the Tories on 44% and Labour on 26%.⁷ Apparently, only three other polls in the monthly *Guardian* series dating all the way

back to May 1983 have produced a larger Conservative lead, and two of those were just days apart before the June 1983 general election trouncing of Michael Foot. In other words, in terms of popular support, it is the Labour Party that is losing out - in Scotland to the Scottish National Party, and in England and Wales to the Conservatives. Stoke and Copeland just underline the growing ascendancy of the Tory Party.

Needless to say, this poses acute problems for Labour strategy - which appears fundamentally flawed, as argued by professor John Curtice in *The Guardian*.⁸ Curtice, of course, is famous for being the man behind the shock exit poll which flashed up on our TV screens at 10pm on general election night in 2015 - sending pundits into a frenzy and making Paddy Ashdown promise to "eat my hat" if the findings were true - 99% of all previous polls had said the Tories had no chance of securing an outright parliamentary majority. Anyhow, Curtice notes that Labour seems to have "misguidedly" decided that its "first priority" is to "stave off the threat from Ukip to its traditional working class vote - much of which supposedly voted 'leave' in the EU referendum". But in so doing, he writes, Labour "seems to have forgotten (or not realised) that most of those who voted Labour in 2015 - including those living in Labour seats in the north and the Midlands - backed 'remain'". Therefore the party, he concludes, is "at greater risk of losing votes to the pro-'remain' Liberal Democrats than to pro-Brexit Ukip" - with Stoke and Copeland seeming to prove that 'remain' voters "must now be Labour's top priority". Consolidate your base.

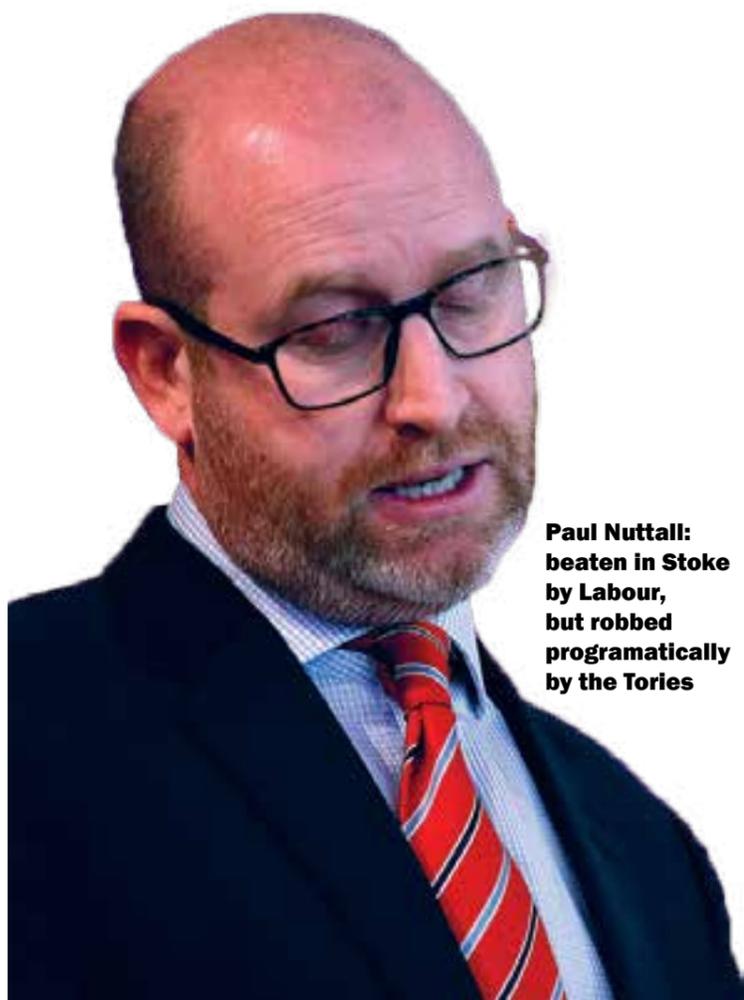
Meanwhile, the Socialist Workers Party carries on obliviously. Yes, it agrees that the by-election results were bad and that Corbyn has "made crucial concessions to the right in a bid to keep them inside" - when instead he should "break from the right".⁹ But its recommendations as to what the Labour leader should do next are pathetic and silly. "Crucially," we read, "there has to be more of the type of struggle that gives a sense that society can change" - which for the SWP means "big demonstrations against Trump and racism, and in defence of the NHS", all of which "are a start". The writer of the piece, Nick Clark, thinks "it is good" that Corbyn is joining the demonstration for the NHS on March 4, but wants "far more focus on active battles against racism and austerity".

The SWP's solution to the dire problems facing Labour is for Corbyn to go on more demonstrations. What is that going to do in terms of the ongoing civil war in the party, reselecting MPs, tilting the balance on the NEC, the anti-democratic coup in Momentum, rewriting clause four, ending the bans and proscriptions, etc? The SWP has nothing to say on such matters, being march-obsessed - as if all answers lie on the streets ●

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Notes

1. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/feb/27/stoke-destroy-ukip-brexit-byelection.
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stoke-on-Trent_Central_by-election_2017.
3. Or its predecessor, Whitehaven - created in 1832 and renamed Copeland in 1983.
4. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copeland_by-election_2017.
5. www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/after-disappointment-copeland-labour-must-9916059.
6. https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/02/17/voting-intention-conservatives-40-labour-24.
7. www.icmunlimited.com/polls.
8. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/feb/24/stoke-copeland-labour-remain-richmond-copeland-ukip.
9. *Socialist Worker* February 28.



Paul Nuttall: beaten in Stoke by Labour, but robbed programatically by the Tories

NHS

March ... and then?

Defending the NHS requires party politics, argues Mike Macnair

On Saturday March 4, we will be marching to assert our wish to defend the national health service, under Unite the union's slogans, "No cuts, no closures, no privatisations". It is important that as many of us as possible do march.

The reason is that a demonstration is fundamentally a way of saying to the government: 'Look! There are lots of us, and we support our demands strongly enough to march!' If only a few of us turn out, the result is that our opponents can point to the small numbers as evidence of *lack of support*. (This is true of all too many 'routine' demonstrations called by various campaigns without enough thought about effectiveness.)

At the same time, just turning out to march on Saturday is not enough. The 'crisis' in the NHS is not a short-term phenomenon or some sort of *mistake* by government. For this reason the term 'NHS crisis' is misleading. It is the product of conscious decisions made by governments since 1979 at the latest, and more particularly since 1989 and the introduction of 'internal markets'.

Less eligibility

In 1979-89 it became clear that the private health insurance companies could not deliver full-spectrum health provision at anything like a reasonable cost, so that the Thatcher government's initial policy of encouraging private health insurance as an alternative to the NHS by providing tax relief failed. The push for privatised health provision thus had to shift towards creating 'less eligibility' (as in the principle of the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834) for the public service.

The policy is essentially one of squeezing resources for *treatment* in the public service and using the media to talk up the resulting problems, to create an atmosphere of 'crisis in the NHS' and hope eventually to win a majority for changing the system to an insurance-based one. This has several aspects.

In the first place, all through the history of the NHS the pharmaceutical industry has remained in private hands; and the state regulation of new pharmaceuticals since the mid-20th century has tended to increase oligopoly in the sector, permitting predatory pricing. The *cost of medicines* has therefore been a permanent, albeit varying, requirement to support shareholders, managers and private lenders, as well as actual production and research.

Post-1989 this model has been expanded in several directions: notably adding a requirement to support shareholders, managers and private lenders to cleaning and catering companies through 'contracting out'; and most spectacularly in the 'private finance initiative' scams operated since the time of the Major government, from 1992, placing NHS *buildings* into private hands and at exaggerated costs.

The 'internal market' arrangements created after 1989 have also served to reduce transparency of budgets and facilitate the introduction of 'efficiency gains': ie, cuts primarily to staffing, producing demoralisation.

Similar schemes of manipulation and false accounting by HM treasury (contrary to section 17 of the 1968 Theft Act) drove many dentists out of the NHS in the early 1990s. More recent manipulation of general practitioner and junior doctor contracts, together with the massive payments available to locum agencies, threaten similar results in relation to doctors.

The 'internal market' and, more generally, managerialisation, has massively increased the share of administrative costs and managerial salaries in total health expenditure. In the 1970s the



Protest politics have their limitations

Pearson Commission on compensation for personal injuries remarked on the relatively *low* administrative costs of the NHS.¹ Today, thanks to marketisation and managerialisation, a much larger share of total health expenditure goes on administration.

Meanwhile, systematic attacks on local government expenditure, having particular effects on provision for the elderly and beginning most visibly under the Wilson and Callaghan governments with the 'IMF crisis' of 1976, have produced 'bed-blocking' in the NHS, meaning that elderly patients cannot be discharged.²

None of what I have said is to deny the existence of real pressures on health expenditure as a share of total social product. It is natural that increased *ability* to treat illnesses, and increased life expectancy, resulting from better knowledge of human health, will produce increased demand for health provision. (It is *not* true that this increased demand is absolutely unlimited, contrary to the claims of Tories and their marginalist economist fiends: the present actual functionality of the NHS, in spite of all the scare stories, is evidence in itself that most people do *not* seek treatment when they do not need it.)

But, accepting that there is a real increased demand, this is a matter of making *social choices* about what share of the total social product we should spend on health. Under the cover of this issue, Tory (and Blairite) NHS 'reformers' have siphoned off funds which the majority have agreed should be spent on health, to pay for PFIs, managerialism, locum agencies, contracting-out firms delivering reduced standards of cleanliness at increased costs, and so on.

These are *deceptive policy choices* made in pursuit of privatisation and for the benefit of party donors in the private health and financial sectors. Hence my description of the actual accounting and budgetary arrangements as amounting to offences under the 1968 Theft Act; it could be added that the whole scheme is an elaborate and long-running conspiracy to commit offences under the 2006 Fraud Act!

It is not a short-term crisis. And it is not a matter of mistakes, which government could be 'persuaded' away from by the mere opposition of large numbers. All the elaborate scams of 'NHS reform' have arisen because the Tories were unable to persuade a majority to reject the NHS in the 1940s, have been unable to persuade a majority to do so ever since, and they (and the Labour right since Callaghan's time) have sought

both to *undermine* popular support for the NHS and to chip away at the edges and get private firm trotters in the health trough through these scams.

Government

To overcome the problem requires fundamental changes in *government policy*. Such changes would necessarily not be only in relation to NHS organisation itself.

In the first place, what I have already said indicates that addressing the problems affecting the NHS requires a change in the *budget* affecting the NHS - and, thus, also affecting everything else government does. How much additional government income can be expected from increased taxation? How far would achieving increased taxation require major reforms to the courts and legal profession to get rid of 'strict construction' tax avoidance scams? What other expenditures can and should be cut?

Secondly, the policy commitments to privatisation go deeper and wider than just the NHS. There would be major savings available through demarketisation, demanagerialisation, and ending PFIs and other forms of contracting out. To achieve savings by making such changes would involve radical *legislation*.

But it would also involve much more by way of general policy changes. PFIs were not only an accounting scam to put more money into the hands of City finance houses (and their lawyers and the accountancy-management consultancy firms).³ They were also an accounting scam to evade the operation of the restrictions on public-sector deficits under the treaties of Maastricht and Nice.⁴ Equally, the apparent death of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership is apparently fortunate for the survival of the NHS;⁵ but the draft Trade in Services agreement would more rigorously attack public health services as a form of protectionist 'non-tariff barrier'.⁶

(By the way, this should indicate the uselessness of the 'left remain' policy. While 'left Brexit' hopelessly seeks economic autarky and 'socialism in one country', 'left remain' counterposes to this a policy of 'Always keep a hold of nurse, for fear of finding something worse'. But the place of 'nurse' is played by the current, deeply corrupt and anti-democratic European Union institutions, and the free trade ideology of Maastricht and Nice and of the neoliberals more generally - which genuinely drives privatisation and anti-union laws.)

In short, saving the NHS requires us to march on March 4. But marching on March 4 is not enough. We need a

radical change of government and of government policy.

There is a potential trap here, as much as there is in the idea that marching is enough. It is common to argue that we need a change of government, because the Tories are enemies to the NHS. Therefore we need a *Labour* government. Therefore, it is argued, we need an *electable* Labour Party - which means getting rid of Jeremy Corbyn and his allies (I do not add, 'getting rid of the influence of the left in the party more generally', because it is perfectly clear that, beyond the top leadership, the party right remains fully in control in spite of Corbyn's two victories in leadership elections).

But we have excellent reasons to suppose that electing a Blairite or similar Labour government *would not* save the NHS. I have referred already to the PFIs, contracting-out arrangements, manipulation of GP contracts, and so on, as part of the scams which are gradually squeezing the NHS to 'less eligibility', and bleeding off blood for the vampires of the City. *These policies continued throughout the Blair and Brown administrations.*

In reality, Blair was 'electable' precisely because he was committed to continuing the policies of the Thatcher and Major administrations in relation to NHS 'marketising' 'reforms' (and all the other crap).

In 'ordinary' times, 'first past the post' means that UK general elections are decided by the approximately 10% minority of 'floating' or 'swing' voters. These voters *imagine* that they are sophisticates who have got beyond political 'tribalism'. In reality, the 'floating voters' are merely characterised by a gullible willingness to believe whatever is the latest scam which the *käufliche Presse*, the bribed media, has come up with: from Tony Blair the moderniser, to 'Cleggmania', to Ed Miliband as Wallace, to ...

The result is that a Labour Party which does not take steps to combat the power of the mass media to set the agenda, and hence wins office by accepting the media's lies, will never be able to change the fundamental terms of the *policies* which have been set by the preceding Tory (or coalition) government.

The acute paradox of the present situation is that Corbyn was elected by a revolt against media-management Labour; but he and his advisors, retaining the commitments to bureaucratic managerialism ingrained into them by years in the milieu of the managerialist trade union bureaucracies and managerialist Labour, and seeking a way into office through conventional media-management means, are still stuck within this framework (and on the road, hence, to defeat in the next general election).

Party

How, then, can we create political conditions for an actual defence of the NHS, meaning the reversal of the whole systematic policy of undermining it pursued by Conservative, 'electable Labour', and Con-Dem governments?

The starting point is that, while a large majority of people support the NHS through gut instinct, they are too readily persuadable to accept the various 'market reform' scams which have served to undermine it. Lying behind these is the *general* argument that planning is utopian and inefficient, and socialism merely leads to Brezhnevism. Witness, for example, the attacks on the NHS of rightwing extremist Paul T Horgan on the *Conservative Woman* website.⁷ Most people can see at a gut level that it is better to have an NHS than to have a US-style system; but the long shadow of the failure of the Soviet bloc still

lends a spurious credibility to 'market reform' scams.

By now, it ought to be completely obvious that the claims of neoliberal capitalism to offer a better alternative to Soviet-style bureaucratic planning are, in fact, based on no more than the superior *military production* power of the imperialist centres. 'Market reform' has *impoverished* the former Soviet Union and much of eastern Europe; hence in part the pressure of eastern European migration to Britain. China, while partially marketised, has not followed the advocates of radical closures of state industry, and so on. Nor has the period of neoliberal ascendancy produced political and cultural liberty in the former Soviet bloc, but Putinism and other forms of nationalist authoritarianism elsewhere.

What is lacking in Britain is a *political party* that will aggressively make the case for socialism in general, including socialised healthcare and the NHS. Such a party would, equally, aggressively promote alternatives to the bribed media and its narratives.

A political party is essential because the problem is one of governmental policy and general social choice. The idea current around the far left - that all we need to do is resist more, get on the streets, and so on, rising to direct action - cannot address the underlying problem. Suppose we occupied hospitals (or even just A&E units) threatened with closure. How would the staff be fed? Where would the medicines, surgical equipment, and so on, come from?

The decisions need to be taken to support a public health service on the scale of the general material division of labour. That means *minimally* at the scale of the state, and in reality at a European scale. Tasks for a political party, not just for street campaigning and sectional industrial action.

The relation of such a party to Labour would not be one of simple competition. Labour *could* be a permanent general front of all the workers' organisations - trade unions, cooperatives, left parties - if it abandoned its present system of bans and proscriptions and similar exclusionary rules (vigorously at work in the last months as the right wing seeks to drive out opposition under various pretexts).

But even on those terms, Labour could not be defined by offering a radical alternative to capitalism as such. The task of offering such an alternative is the job of a *communist party*. The loss of such a party, leaving behind only fragments, mainly committed to bureaucratic centralism and obsessed with 'direct actionism', is the major obstacle to an effective defence of the NHS. To take action to create one would be a small step - but would produce an immensely powerful lever for this defence ●

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Notes

- Royal Commission on civil liability and compensation for personal injury (1978).
- See, for example, 'NHS bed-blocking rises 42% in a year, new figures show' *The Daily Telegraph* January 12 2017.
- Perhaps also building contractors; but the building contractors did pretty well under the old regime of building NHS facilities with funds raised by taxation and government borrowing, so that the change is probably mainly for the benefit of the City.
- Discussion of the rules by J Weeks: 'Why we need to rewrite the Maastricht rules' *Social Europe* March 7 2016 (www.socialeurope.eu/2016/03/need-rewrite-maastricht-rules/).
- See CJ McKinney, 'TTIP and the NHS', May 20 2016: <https://fullfact.org/europe/does-ttip-mean-privatisation-nhs/>.
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trade_in_Services_Agreement; www.globaljustice.org.uk/resources/what-tisa-and-why-we-need-stop-it.
- Eg, 'The NHS was born in crisis', January 16 2017: www.conservativewoman.co.uk/paul-t-horgan-nhs-born-crisis.

1917



Women workers led the men in what became a revolution

The inferno erupts

The struggle for women's liberation cannot be left to the feminists. The Russian Revolution shows that women's liberation and the struggle for socialism are inseparable, argues Anne McShane

The centenary of International Women's Day in Petrograd (St Petersburg) in February 1917 is an important moment to take a more critical approach to this history.

Most of us on the left are familiar with the events themselves. In his classic work, *The Russian Revolution*, Leon Trotsky provides us with a dramatic and inspiring depiction of the uprising in Petrograd - he describes in detail the five glorious days of struggle. How the Petrograd working class rose up in grim determination against the tsarist state. How the strikes, which began on International Women's Day, ostensibly in protest against the war, developed rapidly into a mass movement with the power to oust the imperial regime. How it advanced on the citadels of power, precipitating mutiny after mutiny among the armed forces, as soldiers and Cossacks refused to massacre the workers. In less than a week the centuries-long rule of the tsarist autocracy was routed by the Petrograd working class.

However, it must be admitted that the revolution was premature. There was no party leadership in place and the left, including the Bolsheviks, was caught unawares. The uprising was also confined almost entirely to Petrograd. It has often been described as a purely spontaneous movement - an angry working class letting off steam against the war, conscription and prohibition. But, as Trotsky makes very clear, to argue that the working class of Petrograd were just acting instinctively or in an unconscious way is absurd. Those (often in academic circles) who want to portray it as such are anxious to deny the depth of revolutionary ideas among workers, or their ability to analyse, decide and act on their own behalf. They want to separate off this movement from October and argue that the provisional government and 'bourgeois democracy' was the natural conclusion of February. The October revolution is presented as a putsch in contrast to the spontaneity of February. It is more concerning that some on the left also distinguish the two

revolutions in the same way. As always, however, reality is a lot more complex.

Trotsky wrote his book in 1928, in the early days of his exile from the Soviet Union. It is clear that he wanted to safeguard the memory of mass working class democracy from the Stalinist, bureaucratic rewriting of history. He was adamant that February had not been a directionless impulse from below - "the mystic doctrine of spontaneity explains nothing" about February. Petrograd workers were deeply politicised, having gone through the experiences of the 1905 revolution. They had absorbed the ideas of the left, and the Bolsheviks in particular, despite the weakness of party organisation. They were a sophisticated political force - with erudite leaders, skilled in tactics and strategy. He describes in detail how the various strategies for taking on the Cossacks and the police were discussed in factory committees and meetings throughout the February days and how inventive the movement was in winning over or neutralising state forces. For Trotsky, February had been led by "conscious and tempered workers, educated for the most part by the party of Lenin".¹ They were Marxist in their views and actions. They were a class which believed in itself.

It is disappointing that Trotsky does not extend his profound insights to the crucial role of Petrograd women in that struggle and their struggle to link their demands as women to those of the working class. True, he mentions that the revolution began on International Women's Day, and that the first to act were women textile workers, who called on the male metalworkers to join them in their strike. He also refers to the delegation of women strikers who went to the Bolshevik city committee to ask for support. It reluctantly supported the strike - after the initial opposition of the Vyborg district (the most important working class district). But he does not place any importance on the role of proletarian women as a distinct element and their own particular contribution. Indeed he

expresses anger with those who tried to label it a "petticoat revolution".²

February protests and women

The February days were in reality a central point in the coming into being of a mass working class women's movement. It had seen a huge surge in numbers since the beginning of the war. Women made up almost half of the workforce, labouring in the lumber mills and textile factories, and sometimes whole towns were populated almost exclusively by women.³ The worsening economic situation, horrific conditions within factories, the lack of facilities for pregnant and nursing mothers, lack of childcare, and the endless war all deeply affected women who had been left to cope with work and family on their own. One tsarist police officer reportedly remarked that such was the fury of Petrograd women that they had become "a store of combustible material" and just one spark would be enough to generate an inferno.⁴

This inferno erupted on February 23 1917 (March 8 in our calendar), when thousands of women streamed out of the factories on International Women's Day and joined the male workers at the Putilov plant, who were striking against the war. Both the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks argued that the class was not ready for a mass strike and urged a more limited action. However, at illegal meetings held that morning in textile factories on the situation for women, the war and the economic crisis, the anger spilled over. After voting to strike, the women took to the streets in their thousands and marched to nearby factories, calling on all workers - women and men - to join them. The flying picket was dramatically effective and 50,000 workers did so. This dynamic continued throughout the days which followed. When the police blocked the bridges, the women famously slid down the banks of the Neva and walked across the ice to the other side of the city. Trotsky reports how the women

got up to the cordons more boldly than

men, take hold of the rifles, beseech, almost command, 'Put down your bayonets; join us!' The soldiers are excited, ashamed, exchange anxious glances, waver; someone makes up his mind first, and the bayonets rise guiltily above the shoulders of the advancing crowd. The barrier is opened; a joyous 'Hurrah!' shakes the air. The soldiers are surrounded. Everywhere arguments, reproaches, appeals - the revolution makes another forward step.⁵

It was not a coincidence that the action took place on International Women's Day. Like the Petrograd men, women were also politically aware, despite the weakness of leftwing organisation among them, including by the Bolsheviks (wartime repression exacted a terrible toll). They called for an end to autocracy, an immediate cessation of the war and the return of soldiers. They also, of course, demanded food, but this was a slogan common to all the demonstrations, as the working class of Petrograd was suffering extreme hunger because of the war.

This was not the first time the women of Petrograd had taken wildcat strike action. Since their entry into the proletariat in the 1890s they had worked mainly in separate factories from men. They were also largely non-unionised. And, while men lived in barrack-room accommodation provided by the factory owner and were contacted by the left in their drinking taverns, women workers remained detached both from men and from revolutionary groups. While they were often more militant than men in this period, the perennial problem was the lack of organisation. The 1905 revolution witnessed an enormous upsurge in female militancy - women took part in mass strikes and unrest that spread throughout the empire. Women workers demanded radical changes to their working conditions and many strike demands in 1905-07 reflected working women's needs. Demands for paid maternity leave, time off for feeding infants and childcare provision at the factories were included in almost all strike documents.⁶

After the abdication of the tsar, the

women's movement again raised these questions. The fight for equality continued throughout the year. There were strikes and protests organised throughout those months by laundresses, by soldiers' wives and by peasant women. Organisation improved with the intervention of the Bolsheviks and in particular through the efforts of a group of Bolshevik women. Kollontai, Samoilova and others threw themselves into that fight.

Organising working class women

By February 1917, despite the high numbers employed, very few were members of a union. The percentage involved in political groups was minuscule and their participation in the leadership of these groups less than impressive.

Despite formal adherence to women's equality, the reality for the Russian left, including the Bolsheviks, was very different in practice. Women were perceived as backward, unpredictable and difficult to recruit. They were considered more likely to act as a fetter on the male working class rather than a part of its leadership. When women did act as they had in 1905 and in February, their actions were dismissed as a purely spontaneous and largely unconscious movement. Proletarian women might provide the spark and even number among the most radical, but because of their 'backwardness' they were unlikely to be at the core of the conscious movement. Their movement would flare up and die down like a barometer.

However, a number of the Bolshevik women saw things differently. They did not accept the arguments about the passivity of women and believed that they needed to be approached with politics that addressed their problems as women, as well as workers. Women like Konkordiia Samoilova and Klavdiia Nikolaeva, along with better known figures like Inessa Armand and Alexandra Kollontai, were ardent anti-feminists. They were always worried that they would be dismissed as feminists when

they raised issues in relation to women's rights and organisation within the party and movement. And often, despite their best efforts, they were denounced as such. While they had support from Lenin and some other party members, there was no real appetite for work among women and little acceptance of its importance.

Alexandra Kollontai was the best known of these women. In 1905, while still a member of the Menshevik wing, she became involved in activities in St Petersburg and attended the Bloody Sunday march on January 21 1905. She was impressed by the militancy of women workers and proposed to the city committee of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party that it set up a special bureau to work among working women. The RSDLP rejected this proposal out of hand. This rejection marked a long and persistent struggle on the part of Kollontai for the creation of a special section within the party to work among women. In her autobiography she records her disappointment at the lack of support. She states that she "realised for the first time how little our party concerned itself with the fate of the women of the working class and how meagre was its interest in women's liberation".⁷

Undaunted, she tried to pursue her project independently and, along with Klavdiia Nikolaeva, set up a club called the Society for the Mutual Help of Working Women in 1907. Although the organisation only lasted a few months, largely due to the attitude of the St Petersburg party, nevertheless it had an impact on the leadership in St Petersburg. In 1908 it agreed to send a contingent of women workers to the first All-Russian Congress of Women, organised by a number of feminist organisations.⁸ Kollontai wrote *The social basis of the woman question*, which was to be distributed at the event. In it, along with a blistering attack on feminism, she advanced her vision of women's emancipation within the socialist vision.⁹

The 35 women delegates of the Kollontai-led Workers Group were well prepared. And, despite their nervousness, they made an impact massively out of proportion to their size in the conference of over 700. They were locked in fierce polemical combat from the outset. The group argued that the political basis of the conference was erroneous, as there could be no united women's movement over and above class. They demanded support for universal suffrage for working class men and women, which was rejected by the conference leadership. Argument raged all day and finally some group members attempted to lead a walkout in protest. Chaos and confusion ensued - the police moved in to make arrests and the event collapsed in disarray. Nonetheless, despite organisational confusion, the Workers Group intervention had been a success. In Kollontai's words it had drawn "a clear line of demarcation between the bourgeois suffragettes and the women's liberation movement of the working class in Russia".¹⁰ It had created the basis on which to go forward.

Unfortunately the repression in the next few years made it difficult to continue the work of creating a distinctive working class women's movement. The next important event was not until March 1913, when Konkordiia Samoiloiva organised an illegal meeting to mark Women's Day. Klara Zetkin, the German revolutionary, had won over the Second International in 1911 to support an annual day of action to organise working class women in a movement distinct from feminist groups.

However, despite the clear fact that it was not a feminist event, Samoiloiva faced opposition from the St Petersburg party committee. But, having managed to overcome objections and evade state infiltration, the meeting was packed out. On the back of this success, she won the right to a regular column in *Pravda*, entitled 'The labour and life of women workers', where she wrote on the conditions in various factories.¹¹ Even

more significantly, the meeting brought together a group of women who would launch the journal *Rabotnitsa* (*Woman Worker*) a year later. Samoiloiva, Anna Elizarova Ulianova (Lenin's sister) worked with Nadia Krupskaya, Inessa Armand and Liudmila Stal - all in political exile - to produce the journal in February 1914. Despite the arrest of the majority of the St Petersburg editorial board and huge state repression, Anna Elizarova Ulianova - the only member of the editorial board to escape imprisonment - managed to get seven issues printed between February 23 and June 26, when the police finally closed it down.¹²

The journal, which was supported by Lenin, generated a widespread and keen readership despite its short-lived existence. It contained both theoretical and popular pieces - although Armand complained that Ulianova as editor was too populist in her approach.¹³ It discussed many programmatic questions that were to inform Soviet family legislation in 1917 - including divorce, abortion and illegitimacy. The proof of its popularity was in its relaunch after February 1917, following the mass upsurge of activity among women during the February revolution. In that period *Rabotnitsa* fought to generalise the slogans for equality and better conditions in the workplace. Its supporters set up groups which organised among women in Petrograd and Moscow. It set up a school to train women in political agitation, who were then sent back to their factories to "make speeches and new recruits, to teach others, to distribute *Rabotnitsa* and to report back to the centre".¹⁴ It linked the demands of striking women and soldiers' wives with the programme of the Bolsheviks and won tens of thousands of proletarian women over in the process.

Rabotnitsa hosted a working class women's conference in December 1917. Five hundred delegates attended, representing 80,000 women from soviets, factories, trade unions and youth organisations. At that conference Kollontai called again for a women's bureau within the party. However, she was opposed by the majority of Bolshevik women, who were worried that it would create divisions between comrades and be perceived as feminist. *Rabotnitsa* still existed at that time and it was believed that it would constitute the core of work among women. The 12-day event concluded with an agreement to continue to organise around *Rabotnitsa* and to hold an all-Russian women's conference on International Women's Day 1918.¹⁵

But because of the pressures of the civil war the conference was cancelled in 1918 and *Rabotnitsa* was closed down due to a lack of available newsprint. In the meantime, leading women party members had been dispatched to various parts of the former empire to build the war effort. Kollontai was asked to speak to women workers in the textile factories of Kineshma. These women impressed on Kollontai the continuing sexual and social oppression they were suffering and made clear that they expected far more from the new society. She contacted Samoiloiva, Inessa Armand and Nikolaeva and they organised an all-Russian Congress of Women Workers and Peasants in November 1918. The organisers expected to draw a relatively small number and the "prepared for only 300 delegates". But "over a thousand appeared: a motley array of red-kerchiefed - mostly workers - wearing sheepskins, colourful local costumes or army greatcoats". The event lasted several days and ended with an agreement to set up a permanent organisation to work among women. The programme of the new organisation, which was to go on to become the Zhenotdel (Women's department of the central committee of the Russian Communist Party), included demands

- to combat domestic slavery and the double standard of morality;
- to establish centralised and collective living accommodation in order to release wives from domestic drudgery;

- to protect women's labour and maternity;
- to end prostitution; and
- to transform women and their lives within the new Soviet republic.¹⁶

Ideas of the women's movement

The political ideas of the leaders of the Zhenotdel have been described as feminist by many academics and leftwing writers. I hear the words 'socialist feminist', 'Marxist feminist' to describe them and I wonder if those that claim them as feminists have ever read those leaders' words. Kollontai was known as a thorn in the side of the feminist movement. She, Armand, Samoiloiva, Krupskaya and their supporters embarked on a two-pronged strategy in respect of women's liberation.

They attacked the feminist movement in Russia for placing illusions in the capitalist system and using the grievances of proletarian women to divide the working class. They did not believe that feminism was an adjunct to socialism, but rather that women's liberation was an essential component of that project. Indeed, there could not be real socialism without the end of the patriarchal family and the liberation of women from that institution. Therefore they argued within their own ranks for specific work among women to address the grievances that the feminists wanted to exploit. They wanted to put the formal commitment to equality for women into practice, rather than leave it for some future communist society. Their vision was of a socialised form of society, where women would have the freedom to take part in society on an equal basis with men. Political freedom had to be underpinned by economic and social freedoms. It was a project to develop and realise the visions of communism most famously outlined by August Bebel and Frederick Engels.

Both Bebel and Engels had written about women's liberation and communism based on the research of anthropologist Charles Morgan. Engels argued that "the first humans had lived in stateless, communal and egalitarian harmony".¹⁷ The rise of private property and the state had led to the downfall of matriarchal, communist society and the "historical downfall of the female sex". The loss of a socialised approach to production and reproduction were the hallmark of this collapse. Bebel argued that primitive communism was not only "a general community of women and men, but also a community of children".¹⁸ The family under capitalism, like the system itself, had become a fetter on the progress of human society. Both advocated a future communist society based on a collective approach to production and reproduction. Therefore this meant as a first step the socialisation of childcare and domestic labour and the ending of the patriarchal family.

The German revolutionary, Klara Zetkin, was a contemporary of Bebel and deeply influenced by his arguments. She lectured on 'Women under socialism' and had some success in persuading her organisation, the Social Democratic Party of Germany, and the Second International to adopt policies aimed at creating a proletarian women's movement. The SDP set up special women's commissions at the Erfurt conference in 1891.¹⁹ Zetkin was an advocate of a separate women's section within the party, believing that this provided a mechanism for socialist women to organise both among the wider working class movement and within the party. Her continuing commitment to this strategy is evidenced in her resolution to the newly formed Third International in 1921, which called on all parties of the International to form their own Zhenotdels.²⁰

Kollontai and other Russian women were deeply influenced by Zetkin and also read Bebel and Engels. Kollontai worked closely with Zetkin while in political exile from 1908 to 1917. She developed particularly strong views on the need for radical and immediate change in the structure of the

family. In *The social basis of the woman question*, she argued that to "become really free, women had to throw off the heavy chains of the current forms of the family, which are outmoded and oppressive".²¹ The patriarchal family was "not only useless, but harmful" to the development of the socialist project. Its existence had to be actively undermined. In a speech in 1921 she echoed Bebel when she said that sex "should be natural like the satisfying of hunger or thirst". She believed that the future had to be made in the present:

the ideology of a social group, and consequently of the sexual morality, is accomplished in the very process of the highly difficult struggle of given social groups with hostile social forces.²²

Other Bolshevik women had also developed arguments to challenge existing social relationships. One of them, Inessa Armand, is unfortunately far better known among the left for her alleged affair with Lenin than for her outstanding role as a leader of the Bolsheviks amongst émigrés and the Zhenotdel. She too was committed to the ending of the traditional family.

And like Kollontai - to the disapproval of Lenin - Armand was an advocate of what she described as 'free love'. In 1914 she wrote a draft pamphlet, where she argued for sexual liberation for women. Lenin believed that the concept of 'free love' was a bourgeois one - too libertarian and potentially destructive. His view was that the women's movement should not go too far in promoting alternative lifestyles and alienating the working class. Armand's biographer, RC Ellwood, argues that, although Armand was forced to drop her writing project at the time, she did not abandon her beliefs. Indeed the Zhenotdel provided her with the opportunity to really test out those views in practice with the support of like-minded activists.²³ This was the project of socialisation of domestic labour in the creation of collective laundries, canteens and childcare that she developed in 1918 and 1919.

The views of Kollontai and Armand are central to the Zhenotdel project because of their key roles in its creation. While other Bolshevik women like Samoiloiva and Nadia Krupskaya were perhaps not so radical or impatient for change, they too shared the central premise of those beliefs - the supersession of the outdated and oppressive institution of the family. Krupskaya was the first of the group to write on the woman question in her pamphlet *The Woman Worker* in 1900. In it Krupskaya argued that the "task of conscious men and women was to erase the ancient prejudices and to assist women in sharing the common struggle". In the "socialist future, when exploitation and inequality will have vanished", women would play a full and liberated part. She "criticised men who claimed that women could have no place in the movement".²⁴ Women had to be freed from domestic slavery and drawn into education, work and society at large on an equal basis with men. The granting of legal rights to women in 1917 was simply the opening shot of the battle for radical change.

The Bolsheviks and the women's movement

My intention in this article has been both to salute the immense courage and talent of the February movement; and to criticise its limitations and those of the Bolsheviks in respect of the woman question. There is no point in recognising the talent, vigour and courage of the women of the February revolution, while at the same time not accepting that the movement was severely limited in terms of organisation and political ideas. The work conducted by the Bolshevik women and the party itself in 1917 addressed many of these shortcomings, and as a result the number of female party members increased dramatically. However, the forward strides in 1917 did not continue with the taking of state power. There is no doubt as to the difficulties that were faced in the depths

of the civil war, but it has to be admitted that the rights of women and the question of collectivisation were seen as of lesser importance than fighting the Whites.

Providing women with the means and ability to play an equal role in society is liberating for the entire working class and society, as it moves forward. The work of the Zhenotdel in the 10 years of its existence provides countless examples of what can be done if the commitment exists, even during famine and war. The Zhenotdel organised not just canteens and nurseries - it educated women, it provided medical consultations, it promoted them into employment and fundamentally it gave them a sense of ownership of the socialist project. Unfortunately, with the rise of Stalin and the development of nationalism, this project was isolated and diminished to the point where Stalin was able to close it down. When he did so in 1930, he claimed that the struggle for women's equality would now be carried out by the whole party and was no longer a sectional struggle. Of course, nothing was done and very many of the gains won on divorce, abortion rights, conditions in the workplace and position within the family were lost.

Lenin himself complained in an interview with Klara Zetkin in 1921:

Unfortunately it is still true to say of many of our comrades, 'Scratch a communist and find a philistine'. Of course, you must scratch the sensitive spot, their mentality as regards woman. Could there be a more damning proof of this than the calm acquiescence of men, who see how women grow worn out in the petty, monotonous household work - their strength and time dissipated and wasted, their minds growing narrow and stale, their hearts beating slowly, their will weakened?²⁵

Today we still face tremendous inequality despite the veneer of achievement. We need to revisit the experiences of the women's movement of the Russian Revolution - not to laud its glories, but to criticise and build on it. In order to honour the past we must critique it and put the Marxist vision of women's liberation firmly back on the agenda ●

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Notes

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IRAN

In Trump's sights

Yassamine Mather reports on the formation of a 'NATO' type alliance against Iran



Anti-Trump protest in Tehran

Last week, the United States started a process that could lead to the setting up of a Nato-like alliance against Iran. At a time when under a new president, less antagonistic to Russia, the US is considering its position *vis-à-vis* Nato, we could be witnessing the start of a new cold war - or maybe not so cold war - against Iran. According to reports in the *Wall Street Journal*, the proposed new alliance will include a "group of Sunni nations that would share intelligence with US and Israel".

Many Israeli papers, including the *Times of Israel*, have also covered the story: "the concern about Shi'ite Iran's expansionist aspirations unites these nations, and the goal is to create a pact whereby an attack on one of them would be treated as an act of aggression against all of them, according to five unnamed sources, who are involved in the ongoing discussions on behalf of those nations."¹ This information seems to have originated in leaks following the recent visit by Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu to Washington, and perhaps help explain some of the more outrageous statements made at last month's Munich security conference by Saudi and Israeli officials.

On February 19 the Saudi foreign minister, Adel al-Jubeir, told the conference that Iran's Islamic Republic was the main sponsor of global terrorism, alleging that the country was a destabilising force in the Middle East that wanted to "destroy us". Now this is rich coming from the foreign minister of a government that played a significant role in the birth of Al Qaeda² - not to forget more recent reports that Saudi royals and businessmen, if not the government itself, are considered by western intelligence services to be financial backers of Islamic State, Al Nusra, etc.

No doubt Iran's Shia allies have played their role in destabilising the region, but as far as 21st century terrorism is concerned, no-one in their right mind can ignore the pivotal role played by the Saudi kingdom. In this regard Iran comes a poor third or fourth (after Saudi Arabia, the Emirates of the Persian Gulf, and Turkey).

But, of course, the Saudi pronouncements about Iran's role in global terrorism were repeated by the Saudis' new ally, Israeli defence minister Avigdor Lieberman:

It's clear today that we suffer in the last period from lack of political determination. The results of soft power we see today in the Middle East, and not only with regard to Iran. The Iranian deal is 'copy/paste' of what we had with North Korea... No doubt, if you ask every man and woman in the Middle East, they'll say Iran will be another example of the North Korean deal.³

Lieberman insisted that the top three security challenges are: "Iran, Iran and Iran". He claimed Iran's "pattern of behaviour" was one of creating proxies throughout the region and beyond:

In Lebanon, we have Hezbollah; in the Gaza Strip, we have Islamic Jihad and Hamas; we have the Houthi militias in Yemen; the Shi'ite militias in Iraq, etc, etc... and all this activity falls under the umbrella of the biggest and most powerful, sophisticated and brutal terror organisation of the world: the Iranian Revolutionary Guards under the control of terrorist number one in the world, Qassem Soleimani.

Lieberman alleged that Iran's "ultimate objective" was to undermine Riyadh, and called for a dialogue with Sunni Arab countries to defeat "radical" elements in the region: the "real division" was not between Jews and Muslims, but between "moderate people" and "radical people". So the Israeli defence minister is now concerned that the authority of Saudi Arabia - a fundamentalist religious state, whose clerics sponsor IS and whose rich princes fund Al Nusra - is being 'undermined'!

Reuters reporters John Irish and Andrea Shalal summed up the situation correctly when they noted that Saudi Arabia and Israel are presenting a *de facto* united front against Iran:

While Saudi Arabia remains historically at odds with Israel, their ministers demanded at the Munich Security Conference that Tehran be punished for propping up the Syrian government, developing ballistic missiles and funding separatists in Yemen.⁴

The new alliance is likely to include that other 'democratic' Islamic state, Turkey. Recently we have heard a lot about the tensions between Iran and Turkey. In early February, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, speaking in Bahrain, accused Iran of trying to split Iraq and Syria by resorting to Persian nationalism - a policy which, according to Erdoğan, must be confronted. But by the time we got to the Munich conference, Turkey's tone was harsher. Minister for foreign affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, speaking on February 19, said: "Iran is trying to create two Shi'ite states in Syria and Iraq. This is very dangerous. It must be stopped."

In fact the tension led to postponement of a bipartite business forum, which was due to take place in Tehran on February 25. According to the website, *Al Monitor*,

Turkish businessmen had been waiting for such a forum, hoping to find lucrative opportunities in energy, petrochemicals, mining, construction, retailing, logistics and tourism, as some sanctions on Iran are being lifted. [Turkey's Foreign Economic Relations Board] issued a statement saying that the meeting could have been instrumental in increasing the volume of trade to the desired level of \$30 billion in two years.⁵

Anti-Trump Oscars

The latest episode to clearly demonstrate the beginning of a new era in the US state department came on February 26. In line with other Oscar nominations, the traditionally pro-Democrat Hollywood made sure no-one was in any doubt what it thought about Trump's foreign policies and migrant ban. The Iranian film *The Salesman* was chosen as best film in a foreign language. The director, Asghar Farhadi, stayed away from the ceremony in solidarity with Iranians who cannot travel to the US, and his speech was read by Iranian-American Anousheh Ansari, the first female 'space tourist'. Farhadi said:

My absence is out of respect for the people of my country and those of the other six nations who have been disrespected by the inhuman law that

bans entry of immigrants to the US. Dividing the world into the 'us' and 'our enemies' categories creates fear - a deceitful justification for aggression and war.

All this was predictable, but what was less expected was the reaction of the US state department. In an official Farsi tweet, it sent out and then deleted a congratulatory message to Farhadi and the Iranian people! "A congratulatory tweet was posted," a state department spokeswoman said. "We later removed the post to avoid any misperception that the [US government] endorsed the comments made in the acceptance speech."

All this happened at a time when Iranian royalists were reporting a meeting last week between the ex-shah's son, Reza Pahlavi, and Donald Trump and his advisors. The pretender to the Pahlavi dynasty claims that Trump has promised "change" and, of course, as the reactionary allies of our rather dim former crown prince assume, this means regime change from above.

It seems there is no end to the contacts and communications between sections of Iran's official and unofficial opposition and the new US president. The People's Mojahedin (Mojahedin-e Khalq) claims its men in the Trump administration, Rudy Giuliani and John Bolton, are paving the way for a transfer of power to them. Other opposition groups in the US, Canada and western Europe hope they will be the beneficiaries of US funds for regime change and inside the country Iran's former president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has also contacted Trump. According to reports from Tehran, on February 26 he sent a very conciliatory letter to the US president. Many Iranians have commented on the similarities between the rightwing populism of their former president and the current US one.

In the letter, Ahmadinejad congratulates Trump for winning through despite the predictions and pressure from the liberals and for describing the US political system and electoral structure as "corrupt and anti-public". However, like Reza Pahlavi he also addresses the issue of the ban on visas issued for Iranians: "The presence and constructive effort of the elite and scientists of different nations, including the million-plus population of my Iranian

compatriots, has had a major role in the development of the US", which "belongs to all nations".

Ahmadinejad, whose letter was delivered to the Swiss embassy in Tehran (Switzerland currently represents US interests in Iran), has a history of writing letters to US presidents. He wrote to both George Bush junior and Barack Obama - although those letters were far from conciliatory or congratulatory.

Ahmadinejad's intervention should be seen in the light of the forthcoming Iranian presidential elections in Iran in May 2017. As far as current president Hassan Rouhani is concerned, the celebration for the nuclear deal with the P5+1 countries seems a distant dream. Promises of economic prosperity have not materialised. US banks and financial authorities have kept in place many of the sanctions imposed on Iran over the last few years.

Uncertainty about the new US administration's attitude towards the nuclear deal has deterred many European countries from investing in Iran and soon after coming to power, adding insult to injury, Donald Trump issued a ban on Iranians visiting the United States. Of course, the ban was rejected by the US courts, but no-one believes that is the end of the story. The US administration is preparing new immigration legislation and there are rumours that, by adding Iran's Revolutionary Guards to the list of "terrorist organisations", the ban on Iranians visiting the US will become permanent. That is because the Revolutionary Guards practically own and run the state and large sections of the economy in both the public and private (privatised) sector, meaning that most Iranians will be affected by such a ban, because, whether they are aware of it or not, they work for RG-controlled companies and institutions.

All this has had a negative effect on Rouhani's attempts to improve relations with the west. From the day he took office in 2013, he has insisted that agreements concerning Iran's nuclear programme will solve the country's economic problems and with that will come 'reconciliation'. There is a lot of talk about such national reconciliation, mainly by 'reformists' - former president Mohammad Khatami has recently started a campaign to achieve it. However, what he means by 'national reconciliation' is peace between the factions of the regime, although it is often portrayed by sections of the Iranian media as reconciliation between the state and the peoples: ie, the many nationalities in Iran.

No-one in their right mind denies there are differences between the two factions of the regime, but these are insignificant compared to mutual antipathy between the state and a large section of the people, as was made more than clear by the protests of 2009. Unfortunately for the 'reformist' camp, to which Rouhani belongs, it is faced with a hugely powerful opponent in the shape of supreme leader Ali Khamenei. That is why Rouhani's re-election as president was in doubt even before Trump took office ●

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SOUTH AFRICA

Scapegoating foreigners

Cosatu calls for tighter immigration controls in response to township violence. Peter Manson reports

Fortunately, it seems nobody has yet been killed in the latest bout of xenophobic attacks to hit South Africa. Foreign-owned shops and the homes of other African nationals have been targeted by mobs looking for scapegoats for mass unemployment, homelessness and poverty.

Despite the (official) 27% unemployment rate, tens of thousands of migrants from other African countries have continued to pour southwards, many of them illegally. Official jobs are, of course, extremely hard to come by, but the size and relative prosperity of cities like Johannesburg and Pretoria act like a magnet for desperate people, who are prepared, for example, to sell goods to passing motorists at traffic lights.

Back in 2008, 62 foreigners were killed in a previous wave of xenophobia, and migrants are highly susceptible to violent attacks, particularly in the townships - the most horrific of which have seen victims clubbed and stabbed repeatedly or even burnt alive. The latest series of incidents were, at least in part, provoked by the comments of the mayor of Johannesburg, Herman Mashaba, in a speech celebrating his first 100 days in the post following his election for the opposition Democratic Alliance in August 2016. He placed the blame for crime firmly on illegal migrants and said they should all get out of "my city".

On February 24 there was an anti-foreigner march in Pretoria. Makgoka Lekganyane, one of the organisers, said the marchers were not xenophobic - their main concern was high unemployment. But the problem was, he added, that the government was letting "too many foreigners" into the country. President Jacob Zuma seemed to concur, when he said there would be a crackdown on employers who hired illegal immigrants, because "that pits locals against non-nationals". There was a massive police presence during the march - stun guns and rubber bullets were fired, and over 100 protestors were arrested.

It goes without saying that every major political organisation has condemned the attacks on foreigners. That includes the rightwing Democratic Alliance itself, which made large gains across South Africa in the 2016 municipal elections that saw Mashaba elected in Johannesburg. But the ruling African National Congress was quick to point the finger at the Johannesburg mayor: "His pompous call in December 2016 for foreigners to leave 'his city' - declaring that all foreigners in the province were illegal - in fact preceded this spate of attacks on foreigners."¹

For its part, the South African Communist Party issued a statement on February 26 following the meeting of its central committee last weekend. It was at pains to point out that

The CC condemns attacks against foreign nationals. However, moral condemnation of criminal, xenophobic behaviour by opportunistic elements will not gain traction until we recognise the abject failure of the police in many poor communities to deal effectively with crime, including drug-dealing, whether perpetrated by South Africans or foreign nationals.²

National sectionalism

So for the SACP it was mainly a policing problem. But for the SACP-led Congress of South African Trade Unions, there was a different emphasis. True, its statement began by demanding a clampdown on criminal activity, but, like the mayor of Johannesburg, it was not shy when it came to identifying



Out for Nigerian blood

the criminals:

While we agree that government needs to deal with the underlying issues - in this case it is claimed that non-nationals, in particular Nigerians, deal in drugs and prostitution - these should not be used to justify violence Those who deal in drugs and bring prostitution to the communities should be arrested, like those who attack foreigners.³

This singling out of Nigerians in particular - there are several hundred thousand of them living in South Africa - has led to an angry response from Lagos, which has urged the African Union to "intervene urgently". The president's office claimed that in the last two years "about 116" Nigerians had been killed in South Africa, while some Nigerian organisations have called for a boycott of South African businesses.

But Cosatu believes the South African government must itself act:

Unfortunately, until recently the South African immigration controls were weak. This and the subsequent economic activities of non-nationals has led to misconceptions and confrontation Cosatu applauds the department of home affairs in its endeavours to strengthen its immigration policy and in working to build its capacity to help deal with immigration controls.

And what was Cosatu's attitude to the xenophobic march in Pretoria?

Citizens must play their role in cleaning up their neighbourhoods in a peaceful and dignified manner. We note the march planned for today, February 24, against employment of non-nationals ahead of natives, the hijacking of buildings, prostitution rings and drug dealing. We call for a calm and peaceful march.⁴

That came about as near as it was possible to get to expressing open support for the

march without actually doing so. But this seems to have escaped the notice of the *Morning Star's* James Tweedie, whose report was headlined: "Violence erupts, as xenophobes march in Pretoria."⁵ Comrade Tweedie seems to have forgotten that the role of the *Star* is to give uncritical support to the likes of the SACP and the unions they lead. His dad, Dominic, who runs several pro-SACP email lists, ought to have a word with him.

In contrast to Cosatu's national sectionalism, the statement from the left-populist Economic Freedom Fighters seemed almost principled:

The EFF notes and vehemently condemns the erupting xenophobic attacks in Atteridgeville, Mamelodi and other surrounding areas in Pretoria. The current debacle pertaining to unemployment and inequality is wrongfully placed and blamed on African brothers and sisters, and black people from the developing world. Furthermore, the march against foreign nationals is disingenuous and is a platform for black-on-black violence.⁶

The statement continues:

The ANC has failed to transform the lives of South Africans. In the midst of attempting to confront economic strongholds against black people, white monopoly capital has been left untouched.

In other words, while the EFF correctly locates the blame for the latest outbursts of xenophobia on mass poverty and the dismal failure of the ANC to "transform the lives" of the majority, it claims that the main problem is "white monopoly capital", while the solution is black nationalism and African solidarity.

SACP break

In fact, this overlaps considerably with the official ANC policy for a "radical transformation" of South Africa through "black economic empowerment"

(BEE). And in this respect the SACP post-central committee statement was accurate and pertinent:

Unfortunately, "radical" in these quarters is largely rhetorical and is almost entirely focused on advancing narrow black elite accumulation. This very narrow version of BEE evokes 'blacks in general, and Africans in particular', but in effect, it's about 'me and mine specifically'

We are told that companies directly controlled by blacks only own 10% of the [Johannesburg Stock Exchange], but what is left unexplained is: if individual blacks owned 80% of the JSE, how would that impact on the triple (and racialised) crises of unemployment, poverty and inequality? The same applies to the constant references to "white monopoly capital" - if it became black monopoly capital, would that change the lives of the majority of South Africans?

All of this is designed to position private accumulation by a narrow black elite as "radical transformation" for the benefit of the majority in general.

You may think that, for the SACP, this is overly critical of official policy - after all, the party has played a key role within the ANC-led triple alliance, and its leaders still head major governmental departments. But it now looks certain that the SACP will decide at its July 2017 congress to ditch the alliance - at least in its current form. Instead of continuing to stand under the ANC banner, the SACP will probably decide to contest the 2019 general election under its own name.

That is why the post-CC statement once more highlights "the continued worrying turbulence and factionalism within our ANC-headed movement, which is also clearly impacting upon

the performance of government itself". The SACP claims that over recent months "the general features of this situation have persisted and in some respects intensified":

In particular, we are seeing growing recklessness and a disdain for collective decision-making and for formal, democratically elected structures. Policy shifts with a radical-sounding air are being announced randomly. Existing and even deeper looming crises in the water sector, or in revenue collection, or in the payment of social grants are left unattended for apparently factional reasons, while ministers performing patriotic service in extremely difficult circumstances become the targets for sustained and factionally-orchestrated undermining.

In this instance the statement is not referring to SACP ministers, such as general secretary Blade Nzimande or his number two, Jeremy Cronin, but to the SACP-backed finance minister, Pravin Gordhan, who for a few days in October 2016 faced fraud charges before they were dropped - part of this "factionally-orchestrated undermining", according to (not just) the SACP.

You get the idea. The party is now emphasising more and more those features of the ANC administration which in reality have always pertained to a greater or lesser extent. But it is doing so for a reason. It is now looking to "deepen and consolidate the national democratic revolution"⁷ in ways other than in close alliance with the ANC •

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Notes

1. ANC statement, February 24.
2. SACP statement, February 26.
3. Cosatu statement, February 24.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Morning Star* February 25-26.
6. EFF statement, February 24.
7. www.sacp.org.za/main.php?ID=1850.

ITALY



Splitters: Michele Emiliano, Enrico Rossi and Roberto Speranza

Reckless Renzi provokes split

With the splintering of the centre-left, the door has been opened wide for Grillo and the right, writes **Toby Abse**

At the very moment when Beppe Grillo's Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S - Five Star Movement) had finally started to run into serious difficulty as a result of the antics of its Roman mayor, Virginia Raggi, the Partito Democratico (PD) leader, Matteo Renzi, has come to its rescue, vastly increasing the chance of Italy having an M5S premier¹ within the next 12 months - perhaps the next six months.

Renzi's stubborn, irrational behaviour had been criticised by even his old friend, Graziano Delrio, the minister for infrastructure, in a private conversation with a PD deputy on February 17, unaware he was still being recorded by television journalists after the official end of a public meeting.² As a result of this behaviour the PD has now split, with much of the vaguely leftwing opposition walking out on February 19. In all probability this will lead to an electoral defeat for a divided and fratricidal centre-left. Given the divisions amongst the forces of what one has to call the 'traditional' centre-right,³ M5S is more than likely to be the strongest force in the next parliament. Indeed, an Ipsos opinion poll for *Corriere della Sera* taken on February 16 - in other words, before the PD split on February 19 - already put M5S ahead of the PD by 30.9% to 30.1%.⁴

The widespread notion that the split was an inevitable consequence of the impossibility of the original 2007 fusion between the ex-communist Democratici di Sinistra (DS) and the ex-Christian Democratic Margherita, which created the PD, is unconvincing. Many older former Christian Democrats had no real difficulty in working alongside former DS members.

The problem was Renzi, his intolerance and his desire for revenge for his defeat in the December 2016 constitutional referendum. Renzi has never accepted the consequences of his defeat, hanging on to the party leadership until his temporary resignation on February 19 - a formality that was required to trigger a PD congress⁵ and new primaries. He acted as a backseat driver, even after choosing his own successor as premier - his former foreign minister,

Paolo Gentiloni. Renzi remains obsessed with the idea of an early election - even if September 24 may have replaced June 11 in his dreams⁶ - in which he would be the PD's candidate for premier.

He seemed to pay no attention to the *Consulta* (constitutional court) when, exactly as president Sergio Mattarella had already done in January, it stressed the necessity of having compatible and broadly homogenous electoral laws for the two chambers, pointing out in its detailed explanation of its earlier negative verdict on Renzi's *Italicum*⁷ that it was the role of parliament, not the judges, to work out precise details. Renzi is indifferent to precise details, provided he chooses all the PD candidates and, having pushed his most serious internal opponents out of his own party, is unwilling to attempt to reach any broad consensus with other parliamentary forces.

Whilst Renzi became the main advocate of an early PD congress - something which he had originally opposed when it was first suggested by his internal opponents immediately after the referendum - he only did so as a staging post towards an early election. When he still hoped for an election in March or April, he had viewed an early congress as an obstacle, wanting to hold one at the December 2017 date expected in the PD constitution, after his planned general election.

Under the rules of the PD, which were set up by Walter Veltroni in 2007 as an American-style electoral machine, rejecting the emphasis on policies that had dominated the congresses of the old Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) and its immediate successor parties - the Partito Democratico della Sinistra (PDS) and the Democratici di Sinistra (DS) - the congress is essentially an instrument for electing a party leader via open primaries of self-proclaimed PD sympathisers, choosing amongst the

candidates shortlisted by the congress.⁸

Rightwing bulldozer

On February 13, Renzi got the endorsement of the PD's *direzione* (roughly the equivalent of the Labour Party's national executive committee) for his plan for an early party congress. His aim was to complete the primary process in April (finally a date of April 30 was agreed), so that the new party leader would be in place before the local elections due in June. Renzi's majority in the *direzione* was overwhelming - 107 votes to 12. A few other dissenters either abstained in person or walked out before the vote, but even if these vacillators had registered an openly negative vote, it would have made no substantial difference to the balance of forces.⁹

Significantly, Renzi's followers would not even allow a motion from the minority, confirming the PD's confidence in the government of Paolo Gentiloni, to be put to the vote - a clear indication not only of their desire for an early general election, but also of their intention to bring down a government led by a man from their own party, who holds broadly similar Blairite views to Renzi, even if his much calmer and more conciliatory personality

has won him some popularity amongst an electorate grown weary of Renzi's

aggressive ranting and crude Power Point presentations.¹⁰

Renzi has, of course, done nothing to help his successor as prime minister (or indeed the nation he claims to be so concerned about) by his demagogic attacks on the European Commission over its warnings to Italy for exceeding the previously agreed percentage for the budget deficit. He has not suddenly abandoned his attachment to the general principles of neoliberal austerity: it is merely that he is chasing the votes of those drawn to M5S or the Lega Nord by adopting populist, Europhobic rhetoric - a similar kind of counterproductive strategy to that propounded by those in the Labour Party who claim that the best way to beat the UK Independence Party is to ape its policies on Brexit and immigration.

All this is happening at a time of low economic growth rates in Italy, recent spikes in the 'spread' (the gap between the yields of German and Italian government bonds, the main precipitant of Silvio Berlusconi's fall in November 2011) and concerns about Italian banks and general market volatility in the wake of Brexit and Trump's victory. So to exacerbate the conflict with the Commission at a time when the outgoing governments of Germany and the Netherlands, threatened by rising far-right parties, are playing to their pre-electoral domestic gallery - hostile to the alleged 'spendthrifts' from southern Europe - is very unwise, and adds to Gentiloni's difficulties.

Even some key figures who have remained in the PD after the split were dismayed by Renzi's taste for unnecessary confrontation. Although both Andrea Orlando, the justice minister, and Dario Franceschini (culture) tried to restrain Renzi (more openly and publicly than Delrio did behind the scenes) and to act as mediators with the minority associated with the former PD leader, Pier Luigi Bersani, they had no success at all. Orlando's thoughtful suggestion of a programmatic conference before the congress, which might well have placated the minority, by allowing them to attempt to modify at least some of Renzi's neoliberal Blairism on issues such as 'vouchers'¹¹ or the Buona Scuola¹² in a mildly social democratic direction,

was rejected out of hand.

Renzi's proposals were put to a national assembly of 1,000 PD delegates on February 19. These delegates had been elected more than three years ago - during the December 2013 primaries, and therefore originally mirrored the percentages of the three candidates who had stood on that occasion - Renzi with 67%, Gianni Cuperlo (19%)¹³ and Pippo Civati (14%). Since the maverick young leftist, Civati, left the PD in May 2015,¹⁴ and some of Cuperlo's nominal delegates now belong to a faction known as the *Giovani Turchi* (Young Turks), some of whom subsequently defected to Renzi when he became prime minister, it has proved hard to give exact figures for current allegiances. Nevertheless, in the days leading up to the national assembly, it was clear that Renzi had every reason to feel confident that the assembly would back any course of action he advocated, provided Dario Franceschini stood by him, as he did.¹⁵

According to *La Repubblica*, 45% of the delegates were pure 'Renziani', whilst *Corriere della Sera* estimated his support at 44%. *La Repubblica* gave Franceschini (who supported Renzi in the 2013 primary) 20% of the delegates, while *Corriere* gave him 23%.¹⁶ In the immediate aftermath of the February 13 *direzione*, there was some talk of the minority - or some of them - boycotting the February 19 assembly, but in the event Massimo D'Alema was the only prominent minority member to do so.¹⁷ Bersani sat in silence, leaving it to Epifani - the interim leader in 2013 between Bersani's resignation and Renzi's election - to make the best statement of the minority's case. Bersani had made it clear immediately after the *direzione* meeting that the result of the assembly would be "cut and dried".¹⁸

Contemptuous

Since Renzi behaved in his usual gratuitously aggressive fashion - both in the wording of his opening speech and in his contemptuous refusal to bother to make use of his right of reply to his critics at the end of the debate - the split was announced on the evening after the assembly. As Enrico Letta, the man



Enrico Berlinguer: PCI general secretary 1972-84

What we fight for

whom Renzi ousted as prime minister in 2014, pointed out,

It is so easy to destroy! It is so much more difficult to construct. To destroy you need a minute; to construct you need a lifetime. It is not possible to destroy everything like this, to challenge the minority and even to be happy if they leave. The secretary has the greatest responsibility for the rupture.¹⁹

From his new academic post in the Paris Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po), Letta is sufficiently detached to realise that “a motorway is being opened for Grillo, for Salvini and for the return of Berlusconi”. Whilst former centre-left premier Romano Prodi has described the PD split as “suicide”, he claims to have made dozens of private phone calls to the leading protagonists in an attempt to reconcile them, and refuses to publicly assign greater blame to either faction.²⁰

Whilst the national assembly, like the *direzione* meeting that preceded it, was a walkover for Renzi, the balance of forces amongst the PD parliamentary groups is a little less certain. Bersani was still party leader at the time of the 2013 general election, and the candidate lists reflected this. Of the 303 PD deputies in the chamber, 40 were pure Renzi and 40 were with the Bersani-Cuperlo minority before the split, with the majority belonging to other intermediate factions that turned to Renzi after his seizure of the premiership from Enrico Letta in 2014. Of the senators, 15 were pure Renzi and 21 were with the minority, while a majority belonged to the more opportunist intermediate currents.

Given Cuperlo’s decision to remain in the PD, it is very improbable that all those once considered part of the PD minority faction in parliament will join the breakaway, but Bersani has a much greater weight than Cuperlo. Moreover, if Renzi starts excluding his milder critics from general election candidate lists, or placing them in unwinnable situations (such as low down in a party list if the election is conducted by proportional representation), a second wave might be inclined to defect before polling day. In any case, it remains to be seen whether Renzi could rely on the more opportunist parliamentarians voting down Gentiloni’s PD-led government, if the outcome would be an early general election - in which many would lose their seats (and high salaries).

After days of animated discussion about various possible names, the new political grouping was formally founded in Rome on February 25, with the official title of ‘Articolo 1 - Movimento Democratico e Progressista’.²¹ The shorter, everyday name for its parliamentarians (and eventually its members) is Democratici e Progressisti (Democrats and Progressives), abbreviated as DP. It begins its life with 38 deputies - 21 ex-PD and 17 ex-SEL (Sinistra, Ecologia e Libertà - Left, Ecology and Freedom) - and 13 senators (all ex-PD). This makes DP a much more substantial parliamentary force than the residual Sinistra Italiana (SI), which, after the very recent SEL/SI defections, is left with 14 deputies and eight senators. Nonetheless, DP is, of course, far weaker than the post-split PD, which still has 282 deputies and 101 senators. Gentiloni’s PD-led coalition still has a majority in both houses, without the DP parliamentarians, although in both cases the PD is more dependent than ever for that majority on an array of small centrist factions.

The final point that has to be made in relation to the pre-split PD minority (and thus of whichever of these rebels actually make the break within the next week or so) is that the minority is not all that leftwing, even if most of its members are to the left of the ultra-Blairite, Renzi. The more ideologically consistent anti-Renzi PD parliamentarians like Pippo Civati or Stefano Fassina had already departed in earlier small splits.²² Loathsomely as Renzi’s talk of “scrapping” the old guard (repeated *ad nauseam* throughout 2014-16) was, there is a small kernel of truth in the

notion of a purely generational conflict. It seems reasonable to see the elderly Bersani as a sincere social democrat, to some extent still influenced by his years in the PCI. As he put it at the Teatro Vittoria gathering of about 1,000 minority supporters in Rome on February 18 (the day before the assembly), “I am one who has remained faithful to the ideals of his youth”. He also made a point of quoting Enrico Berlinguer’s exhortation: “When you don’t know what to do, do what you ought to do”.²³ In his first television interview after the split, Bersani said: “I don’t want to create the Cosa Rossa, but nor do I want something that spits in the face of the left.”²⁴

The 58-year-old president of the Tuscan region, Enrico Rossi, clearly feels that Renzi has pulled the party too far to the right.²⁵ Another leading figure in the split, the rather younger Roberto Speranza, resigned from a prestigious parliamentary position in open protest against one of Renzi’s measures.

Opportunist D’Alema

However, it is, to say the least, unfortunate that the most enthusiastic advocate of a split in the PD has been none other than Massimo D’Alema, who may have a following amongst some PCI/PDS/DS career apparatchiks, but will repel many on both the radical left and the centre-left for a wide assortment of reasons.

D’Alema was one of the group who showed most enthusiasm for liquidating the old PCI in 1989-91 (although, typically, he was very keen to blame the arch-liquidator, Achille Occhetto, for the loss of the 1994 general election, rather than accepting collective responsibility for a shared strategic line). Whilst D’Alema later posed as a traditionalist in opposition to his avowedly ‘modernising’ Blairite rival, Walter Veltroni,²⁶ the founder of the PD, the rivalry was more personal than political, just like the Blair-Brown rivalry in the UK.

D’Alema was incredibly eager to seek a shoddy compromise with Berlusconi in 1996-98, saving the tycoon from a serious attack over the ‘conflict of interest’ question, at the time of the Bicamerale - a parliamentary commission drawn from both chambers - which came up with regressive, anti-democratic plans for a constitutional reform very similar to those D’Alema fiercely denounced when Renzi put them forward last year. D’Alema is generally believed to have been the man behind the fall of the first Prodi government in 1998 - a backstabbing operation equal in deviousness and hypocrisy to Renzi’s February 2014 coup against Enrico Letta, and one that involved such figures as the sinister Francesco Cossiga, the former president associated with Gladio, and the corrupt Christian Democrat Clemente Mastella.

D’Alema is seen by many as continuing his vendetta against Prodi until 2014, giving secret instructions to the 101 PD traitors who deprived Prodi of the votes needed for the presidency of the republic, even if some others suspect Renzi may have played a role in this disgraceful episode that led a devastated Bersani to resign the PD leadership in disgust.²⁷

In any event, D’Alema was responsible for the privatisation of Telecom Italia on terms that favoured a bunch of scoundrels, arguably setting a precedent for Berlusconi handing over the state-run Alitalia airline to another set of rogues at a similar fire-sale price. Moreover, D’Alema played a very murky role in a number of attempts, successful and otherwise, to merge banks with which he appeared to have some hidden connection.²⁸ His penchant for sailing in immensely expensive yachts has drawn much comment over the years, given the marked contrast with the austere lifestyle of such PCI leaders as Enrico Berlinguer and Alessandro Natta. Whether or not D’Alema’s particular hatred of Renzi is really connected with an unfulfilled desire to get Italian government backing for his pursuit of the post of EU foreign affairs spokesperson, as Renzi constantly claims, is irrelevant - the notion of D’Alema as a

principled advocate of even mild social democracy, let alone any broad left party that might absorb elements of the radical left, is utterly laughable.

Quite apart from the damage to the splitters’ public image if they are too closely associated in voters’ minds with the unscrupulous D’Alema rather than the more sincere Bersani, Epifani, Speranza and Rossi, the split has often been overshadowed in the media by the grotesque behaviour of the overweight and garrulous president of the PD Puglian region, Michele Emiliano. Emiliano joined Rossi and Speranza on the platform of the Rome gathering on February 18, even being photographed as part of a trio which was compared with the Three Tenors. Although he made the most virulent attack on Renzi of any speaker at the rally, it was undoubtedly very significant that he adamantly refused to join in the singing of *Bandiera Rossa*.²⁹ On February 19 he made a conciliatory - some might say grovelling - speech at the national assembly, shocking Rossi and Speranza, but failing to get Renzi to make any response.

By the evening, Rossi and Speranza, imagining they had got him back outside, got him to sign a joint statement supporting the split. Then, after a couple of days of very public vacillation, he turned up at the PD *direzione* meeting on February 21 and announced that he was staying in the party. Whilst Emiliano denounced the absent Renzi at this meeting, and made it clear that he was going to challenge him for the leadership in the PD primary, his candidacy may well have less credibility than that of the more consistent Andrea Orlando. Orlando, whilst criticising Renzi’s behaviour and to some extent his policies, had always made it clear that he had no interest in a split. In any event, Renzi, with his usual arrogance, did not even bother to attend the meeting - instead flying off to California to meet some Silicon Valley tycoons. Since his lackeys have assured him that he will secure 60%-70% in any primary contest with Emiliano and Orlando, he clearly thinks, ‘Crisis? What crisis?’

Inevitably, massive daily press coverage of the wrangling in the PD took Raggi and her crooked clique off the Italian front pages. The split in the PD will boost M5S’s chances in the coming general election, as the French journalists of *Le Monde* were very quick to recognise. The whole history of the Italian left and its earlier splits suggests that the combined percentage vote of the two parties will be lower than that of the united party in the last pre-split election. Renzi has in all probability handed the country to Grillo, who, even if his followers fail to reach the 40% threshold needed for the majority premium, will make some sort of formal or informal post-electoral deal with his fellow Europhobes and racists in the Lega Nord and the neo-fascist Fratelli d’Italia - with the blessing of Trump, Putin and Marine Le Pen ●

Notes

1. Whilst M5S has not yet officially chosen its candidate for premier - which will presumably be done through an online primary run by Davide Casaleggio’s firm in its customary opaque fashion - 29-year-old Luigi Di Maio is currently being groomed for the job. Di Maio’s grasp of history and foreign affairs is comparable to that of Donald Trump, and is best illustrated by his notorious remark about “Pinocchet’s Venezuelan dictatorship”. Beppe Grillo, despite his iron grip on party policy, is unable to lead M5S in parliament because of his old manslaughter conviction.
2. The 56-year-old Delrio, a devout Catholic father of nine children, had no political sympathy for the PD minority, whose older members were former communists. Moreover, Delrio, always loyal to his old friend Renzi, desperately attempted to back-track in substantial but unconvincing interviews with both *La Repubblica* and *Corriere della Sera*, published on February 18.
3. The collapse of Italy’s cold war parties, especially the Democrazia Cristiana (DC) in 1991-94, meant that the forces associated with Berlusconi’s coalition governments - Forza Italia, the Lega Nord and the neo-fascists - became the ‘traditional’ centre-right. Although their combined strength in opinion polls sometimes exceeds 30%, the 80-year-old Berlusconi has lost control of what were once his junior partners.
4. Figures taken from *Corriere della Sera* February 18 2017. The preceding Ipsos poll on January 11 had given the parties exactly the same percentages as the February one. It is notable that the Raggi affair has not eroded the M5S vote, even if it may have prevented its increase. In this respect, M5S

- resembles France’s Front National and Donald Trump in being largely immune to damage from scandals of the type that would destroy conventional career politicians.
5. According to the PD constitution, congresses can only be held every four years unless a leader resigns.
6. He has deliberately chosen the date of the German election on September 24. Given the general atmosphere of crisis in the EU, this once more demonstrates his complete lack of judgement, further illustrated by his demagogic, Europhobic turn discussed below. His apparent belief that such a coincidence of timing would enable him to put more pressure for ‘flexibility’ in budgetary matters on the Germans is totally insane, given the rigid and inflexible character of German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble, who took such sadistic delight in the ‘waterboarding’ of Alexis Tsipras in July 2015.
7. This verdict was discussed in my last article, ‘In the hands of the courts’ (*Weekly Worker* February 9 2017).
8. These are the three contenders with the most votes, providing they exceed a 5% threshold.
9. These doubters seem to have come into line with Renzi by the time of the PD national assembly on February 19.
10. The appallingly narcissistic Renzi is undoubtedly very jealous of Gentiloni’s current standing as the most popular of Italy’s major politicians. Gentiloni now has a 43% approval rating, up from 35% in December. Conversely, Renzi has sunk to 32% from 35% in December. M5S’s probable candidate for premier, Luigi Di Maio, has 33%, Grillo has 29% and Berlusconi 23%. These figures are taken from an Ipsos poll reported in *Corriere della Sera* on February 18 2017.
11. Explained in ‘In the hands of the courts’ *Weekly Worker* February 9 2017.
12. This measure gave greatly increased powers to head teachers, and has proved unpopular with classroom teachers, a major sector of the PD electorate in recent decades.
13. Cuperlo was the candidate supported by the traditionalist left of Pier Luigi Bersani and Massimo D’Alema. He subsequently broke with Bersani over the constitutional referendum, belatedly joining Renzi’s ‘yes’ campaign. He has now decided to remain in the PD, although he publicly stated: “Renzi seems not to have understood the effect the split would have had” and regards this as “the confirmation of his inadequacy” as PD leader (*La Repubblica* February 21 2017).
14. Civati is now leader of a micro-group called Possibile. Possible remains distinct from Sinistra Italiana (SI), the fusion between the remnants of Sinistra, Ecologia e Libertà (SEL - Left, Ecology and Freedom) and other leftwingers like Stefano Fassina, who split from the PD in reaction to its rightward drift under Renzi, long before the current split by Bersani and his followers. SEL lost a substantial number of parliamentarians on its right wing to the PD in the early days of Renzi’s premiership - most notably Gennaro Migliore, a former Rifondazione Comunista stalwart, whose latter-day adulation of Renzi is utterly nauseating.
15. Dario Franceschini was the only PD leader before Renzi to come from a Christian Democrat, rather than a communist (or, in the case of Guglielmo Epifani, socialist) background. Most of Franceschini’s supporters are former Christian Democrats who joined the PD in 2007 from the Margherita, not the DS. Whilst they may have been suspicious of the younger, disproportionately Tuscan, group that makes up Renzi’s hard-core support, they have little in common with the former DS, often ex-PCI members who made up the core of the PD minority.
16. Figures taken from *La Repubblica* February 14 and *Corriere della Sera* February 15 2017.
17. In a long television interview on February 21, he claimed to have had a cold on February 19, from which he had presumably made an extraordinarily rapid recovery.
18. He actually said, “cotto e mangiato”, which literally means ‘cooked and eaten’.
19. *Corriere della Sera* February 21 2017. It should be stressed here that Letta is a former Christian Democrat, who came to the PD via the Margherita, and in no way a hard leftist from the DS, even if he has a good personal relationship with Bersani. Letta let his own membership of the PD lapse in 2014, after Renzi’s stab in the back.
20. *La Repubblica* February 21 2017.
21. ‘Articolo 1’ is a reference to article one of the Italian constitution, which specifies that “Italy is a republic founded on labour”.
22. Even SI its initial parliamentary form was hardly on the radical left. Arguably, the election of Nicola Fratoianni, ex-PRC and ex-SEL, as its secretary at the recent congress may represent a left turn.
23. *Corriere della Sera* February 19 2017.
24. *La Repubblica* February 22 2017.
25. However, it has to be said that his record on privatisation and outsourcing at a regional level has left a lot to be desired, as the local representatives of Rifondazione Comunista have often made plain.
26. Of course, Veltroni’s open identification with Tony Blair in the latter’s heyday - Veltroni was probably himself responsible for his media nickname, ‘Baby Blair’ - was a little more understandable than Renzi’s neo-Blairism, at a time when his proclaimed role model is remembered in the UK as the architect of the disastrous Iraq war, and a very well-paid lobbyist for an assortment of dictators. By 2008, Veltroni had transferred his affections to Barack Obama, and adopted a variant of ‘Yes, we can’ as the general election slogan of the Partito Democratico, which had taken its name from its American counterpart.
27. Giorgio Napolitano, who ‘reluctantly’ agreed to re-election as president in Prodi’s place, subsequently did nothing to stop Renzi’s coup against Letta.
28. D’Alema denied all wrongdoing, despite some very interesting wiretaps that were leaked to the press at the time - presumably by investigating magistrates.
29. As he recently admitted in a lengthy, rambling and self-justificatory interview with *Corriere della Sera* published on February 22 2017, “My father was a Messino” (ie, a member of the neo-fascist MSI).

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

Ruling class split over Trump

At war with fourth estate

The left needs more weapons in its armoury than street demonstrations, argues Paul Demarty

Donald Trump continues to lurch from crisis to crisis; and there can surely remain no lingering doubt, not only after the last month or so, but the last two years, that he gets off on it.

His latest provocations are again directed at the media at large: he barred journalists from niche media outlets like CNN and the *New York Times* from his White House press briefings and announced that he would refuse his first opportunity to attend the White House Correspondents' Dinner - an event which traditionally involves the sitting president catching a roasting from a major comedian, before doing a little routine himself.

Trump, who previously suffered a spectacular sense of humour failure at the event in 2011, does not appear to be the type to enjoy that kind of treatment; but, even if he were, he might think twice. For the dinner is a matter for the ordinary affairs of the American ship of state - everybody blows off some steam, but the presidency and media use it as a kind of bonding exercise, affirming their underlying solidarity in service to the national cause and the American religion of liberty. It is those bonds so spectacularly under strain just now - between the Oval Office and the fourth estate, and indeed with sections of the capitalist class proper and the 'deep' state core.

The response of the American left is conditioned inevitably by the response of mainstream American liberalism - by far the dominant oppositional force, and a force for whom a sudden and fortuitous concordance of interests with the Federal Bureau of Investigation is nothing very much to worry about. It is, ironically, on the fringes of liberalism that the most sense (in strictly relative terms) is being talked - in *The Baffler* and *Jacobin*, house journals of the Sandernistas, one can read reasonable commentary about the shallowness of liberal anti-Trumpism.¹

On the far left proper, there is very little of this kind available; thus the paradox that those in principle closer to a serious left response to the present bizarre world situation have the least worthwhile things to say about it. *Socialist Worker*, the house journal of the post-Cliffite US International Socialist Organization, published a basically reasonable article by Brian Sullivan warning against placing too much faith in American judges to rein in Trump's excesses: "Social movements and public opinion, for better or worse, have the power to set the limits of what's considered legitimate and illegitimate," writes comrade Sullivan.² Indeed so. But what does he have in mind? It is not immediately clear; but the relentless and breathless wall-to-wall coverage of every last anti-Trump protest elsewhere in the paper and on its website might give you a clue.

On this point, the ISO's editorial policy is indistinguishable from the quasi-Stalinist Party for Socialism and Liberation; while the Revolutionary Communist Party - Bob Avakian's Maoist cult - differs only in explicitly and repeatedly designating the new government "fascist"; Socialist Alternative, the American offshoot of our own Socialist Party in England and Wales, has gone so far as to change the masthead image of its website to a



Opposed by Hollywood, the mainstream press ... and the FBI

stylised photo of an anti-Trump protest. That is what the SA comrades want you to know about them, before anything else: they are anti-Trump; they can hold their placards real high. Where do I sign?

'Worried'

American politics is an international thing, and no shortage of British leftwingers may be found singing the same tune as the American comrades. We pick on the ISO's former sister organisation, the Socialist Workers Party: a particular item grabs us in a recent issue of *Party Notes*, the weekly members' bulletin whose brief tenure (in redacted form) as a public document ended mid-last year. We quote from the February 13 issue, where the immediate news agenda was the backlash against Trump's travel ban, John Bercow's 'disinvitation'. Our author, one "Kevin B", writes:

There is much speculation about the time and shape of Trump's state visit - the suggestion that he should be confined to speaking only in the Midlands and not come to London is a sign that politicians and others are worried about the level of protest he will face. They are right to be worried.³

Really, words fail; but this is an article,

so words, alas, will have to do. The ruling class is "worried" - worried, indeed! - that Trump's state visit will be met with protests. The most immediate indications to the contrary are, of course, that very large sections of the ruling class are utterly jubilant at the scale and spirit of anti-Trump demonstrations heretofore, including the very ones comrade Kevin demanded his charges attend. Worried, they are - so very worried that every op-ed outside the most rightwing press outlets exhorts Americans to stand up for the values that made their country great, in defiance of the Oval Office's orange interloper; so "worried" that these demonstrations are as star-studded as the Oscars red carpet and, unlike at the Oscars, everyone (including the SWP!) is bang on message.

The ruling class is not worried at all, of course, about the demonstrations currently going on. But that was not the claim of Kevin - he said rather that they were worried about the ones that will greet the visit itself, that these would be a whole other kettle of fish. This is, if anything, a *more* fantastical claim - which we will revisit later.

The SWP makes for a particularly degenerate example because of the sheer cynicism of its current political orientation. In this week's *Party Notes*,

comrade Kevin states that "the question of racism remains the framing narrative to *all issues*".⁴ Blairites like to accuse the Labour left of wallowing in their 'comfort zone', but nobody has ever been more comfortable anywhere than the SWP in doing anti-racist work today. Shouting about racism being bad has several salutary advantages for the SWP. It is, first of all, unlikely that the sentiment will be disputed *as such* - that somebody will ask if you had not considered the possibility that racism may in fact not be bad, but good.

If somebody does, of course, they can be denounced with zero intellectual exertion due to the second advantage - anti-racism is *official state ideology*, and thus the halo around the anti-racist activist's head has an objective as well as subjective character, nullifying somewhat the residual hostility left behind by the SWP's 2013 crisis.

Third - and perhaps most important - is that it requires no complex arguments among one's own members. If they even bothered to apply to join an organisation called the Socialist Workers Party, they are probably anti-racist. Job done! We raise, by way of contrast, the question of the Labour Party and specifically of fighting within it for a democratic political regime and explicitly socialist and internationalist

programme - against which the SWP has for the last 18 months been most vigorously counterposing the need for more anti-racist street demonstrations, and which in reality is also the primary cause of its current anti-Trump mania.

In reality, what is paradoxically obvious about the SWP is in fact true of all the protestomanias mentioned thus far. They all work from the first principle that there is something fundamentally revolutionary about the street demonstration as such. But this has the consequence that pretty much any political sacrifice is acceptable in the interest of getting people out on the street - which in turn tends to rob the demonstration of educational value, for it hands over the political substance of the event to some element or another of the elite, whose ideas are - all things being equal - the ruling ideas in society at large.

Let us revisit comrade Kevin, at SWP head office, and say for the sake of argument that his hypothesis - that the Trump state visit will be the occasion of a wave of protest truly worrisome to the establishment - is actually true. For this to happen, it would be necessary for anti-Trump anger to spread *from him* to other, how to put it, less heterodox members of his class: the City pin-stripe, the state bureaucrat, the very journalists who boosted the earlier demos ...

Such things are hardly inconceivable as such; Father Gapon could tell you a thing or two about protests getting out of control, had events not put a Narodnik noose around his own neck in the end. Yet he had to reckon with several influential trends in the working class and socialist underground of 1900s Russia, which each had their own developed world views and strategic orientations. Who is going to lead the spirited protestors of New York, California and London to the correct identification of the great mass of their enemies, those same people who have until now been false friends? Is it the SWP or the ISO, which only repeat the slogans of the false friends more stridently?

Not at all, for their contribution is to try to *trap* people within those political limits ●

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Notes

1. See, for example, Connor Kilpatrick's entertaining take-down of Trumpite 'new deal' rhetoric, whose context is precisely the rightward trajectory of actually-existing liberalism: www.jacobinmag.com/2017/02/steve-bannons-autobahn.
2. <https://socialistworker.org/2017/02/24/the-left-cant-litigate-trump-into-submission>.
3. <http://cpgb.org.uk/assets/files/pn130217.pdf>.
4. <http://cpgb.org.uk/assets/files/pn270217.pdf>.

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