

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly
worker



Debating the Palestine-Israel question: Jack Conrad calls for strategic thinking

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Fighting the Tories and Labour's right



CRUSH THE SABOTEURS

LETTERS

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

Unprepared

Jeremy Corbyn's performance on the Andrew Marr show last weekend was a little embarrassing. He was unable to provide a clear answer to any question.

He has a very long track record of campaigning against nuclear weapons in all their aspects, and one might expect he would carry through some of what ought to be basic principles into his role as leader of the Labour Party and potential alternative prime minister.

I was not clear whether Mr Corbyn on Sunday was woefully underprepared, he had simply not thought through some of the basic issues, or if the vagueness was deliberate and intended to be "clever".

With regard to what is apparently the first task of any new prime minister, which is to write and seal letters to each of the Trident submarine commanders instructing them what to do if they were cut off from the chain of command and it appeared the United Kingdom had been hit by a massive nuclear strike, Mr Corbyn eventually said he would ask them to follow orders!

Mr Corbyn could either have refused to comment on what he would write in such letters - the standard response from all previous prime ministers - or, if he was sticking to his non-nuclear principles, could have openly said the letters would (for example) instruct the submarine commander not to launch missiles, find a relatively neutral shore to ground or scuttle the submarine and hand themselves over to the relevant authorities.

On being asked whether he as prime minister would ever order the use of nuclear weapons, Mr Corbyn eventually stated he would never order a first strike. This, given his non-nuclear record, was extraordinary. Almost by definition, it appeared to imply he would be prepared to order a second, retaliatory strike.

Even one Neil Kinnock, when campaigning for the Labour leadership in 1983, stated in an interview with the then magazine *New Socialist* that he would never order the use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances. Obviously, he would never order a first strike, an appalling and dangerous escalation of any conflict, guaranteed to obtain massive nuclear retaliation. He also went on to say, correctly, a retaliatory nuclear response by the UK would be the most

pointless and dreadful act of history, mass murder and revenge from the grave, and he simply would not do it. That position was principled, humane and rational.

Why can't Mr Corbyn say something similar about nuclear weapons today? It wouldn't necessarily conflict with current Labour party policy, which is to renew Trident. It would simply state that he as prime minister would never authorise the use of such weapons and would actively seek their decommissioning, but subject to the will of parliament and the people.

What really worries me is that the Labour party appears woefully unprepared to take electoral office, let alone to use that office to really take over and transform state power.

For people of my generation, the experience of Allende and Chile in 1973 was incredibly powerful and formative. Chile in the post-World War II years and up to the 1970s was often described as the Britain of South America, in that a peaceful, democratic road to socialism, unusually, appeared possible.

The coup d'état launched on September 11 1973, and the installation of a most brutal and murderous fascist military dictatorship, where tens of thousands of leftists, socialists, communists, democrats and generally progressive individuals were systematically identified, rounded up, imprisoned, tortured and many murdered or simply 'disappeared', well illustrated the true flipside of any apparently 'democratic' and 'constitutional' bourgeois state.

In the British Conservative Party, the rising new right backing Margaret Thatcher's takeover of the leadership (some still around as MPs) were open admirers of Chile's Pinochet, and regarded his actions as a brutal but necessary corrective purgative, to accompany his free market reforms.

If there had been that much-rumoured coup against Harold Wilson in the 1960s and 70s, there could be little doubt about what would have been done to enforce its rule. Perhaps we were 'fortunate' that Thatcher managed to win three general elections.

If a Labour government is elected on June 8, there are two main possibilities. One, it really does tax the rich and massively invests in public services and in productive industry, genuinely putting the interests of working people first. In which case, it will surely suffer the most severe reactionary response from the capitalist class and their state. We are unaware to date if Labour is even

proposing reform of the state.

Two, it very quickly adapts itself to what is 'realistic' and 'acceptable' in terms of economic and financial policy and delivers a number of mild reforms deemed 'affordable' by the establishment, but very quickly slips into trying to show it can manage capitalism better than the Conservatives. That seems to be where shadow chancellor John McDonnell is at.

I do not believe that socialist revolution can be effected through parliament, but we are right to place demands and expectations on any political party and government claiming to represent the interests of the working class majority. Economic and financial policies designed to significantly improve the position of working people, accompanied by equally systematic efforts to democratise and transform the state apparatus.

Will we see this in the Labour manifesto?

Andrew Northall
Kettering

No-brainer

Much quoted in the media, Brenda from Bristol says she is sick of elections. But it's not elections the people of the UK are sick of; it's politicians, particularly those from the main three parties, who have proven to be self-serving, lying, pathetic warmongers pissing up the back of big business.

Apart from a handful on the left of the Labour Party and some in the other parties, such as the Greens, SNP and Plaid Cymru, hardly any in the main three parties can be trusted to make the country a truly better place. Even UKIP have some in their ranks whose heart is in the right place, if a little misguided with their views on immigration and socialism.

What a mess we are in. But it's Jeremy Corbyn and his policies that will help the majority of ordinary people and reverse the redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich over the last 30 years, that I will be voting for. It's a no-brainer.

It's just a shame that those on the right of the Labour Party, stuck in a Blairite past, through their hatred of Corbyn, have probably put paid to any chance of Labour winning the election.

Ronnie Chambers
Hartlepool

Nations

Further to the discussion between Moshé Machover ('Palestine and Hebrew self-determination', January 12) and Tony Greenstein ('No self-determination', April 20), it is often assumed that self-determination applies only to oppressed nations. This cannot be true since a given nation that is independent already, and is presumed to not possess a right to self-determination, may then be permitted to lose its independence. As such it would then become an oppressed nation and so there is no difference between the self-determination of an independent nation and one that is not, since they are both nations.

A further contradiction in the concept of self-determination relates to the definition of nation. The liberal methodology assumes that only independent nations are nations and so nations that are not independent are not nations by definition. As such the nations that are not independent are not nations and as such are not entitled to national self-determination. Such is the essence of a circular logic. The Zionist resort to such logic is to negate the concept of Palestinian nationhood and others will use the same argument to dismiss the Jewish self-definition of nationhood.

Next, if self-determination is a principle, then a given nation which is not an independent nation may determine the fate of any other nation that it considers to be in the confines of its self-conceived nation, which is not a nation by liberal definition. What a wonderful mess is conceived there.

The mess that is fostered by the so-called principle of self-determination

only gives rise to the related concept of sovereignty, the absolute power to dictate the destiny of a parcel of land and its economy, otherwise known as the licence to kill and steal. Basically, that concept of self-determination lacks reciprocity and coherence.

As for the definition of the nation floated, one article also resorts to a Zionist definition from an Israel court that upholds the national definition of the Zionist state and so denies the existence of an Israeli-Hebrew nation as if such a definition is somehow in support of the anti-Zionist position.

To consider that the Jewish Israelis are obliged to become Hebrew Palestinians is to confront any Palestinian with what the Israeli-Hebrews are considered to be, and you should know that they are not considered to be Palestinians. To insist upon the non-existence of the Israeli-Hebrew nation and their assimilation into a Palestinian nation, is to call for that which neither nation cares to support.

To avoid all such pitfalls one is obliged to conceive of the no-state solution, which leads to a federation of the related nations by means of the national-cultural autonomy of each nation concerned. Certainly, such a conception requires further elaboration and during my five months of work in Nablus, Palestine last year, and the three months so far this year, there is now a book entitled *The Federation of the Kana'an* which makes such a proposition a precise work.

In order to complete the Arabic translation with help from my friends, this work may be completed with a possible visa that I will need to apply for with Israel's ministry of the interior. On my return from a visit to Nabatia-Petra in Jordan, the Israel border supervisor considered that I only merited a week-long visa. So much for sovereignty and so much for the so-called 'Jewish state'. And so much for self-determination by the Zionist militias of 1948 and its Nakba, now 69 years stale.

Abraham Weizfeld
email

Falsification
Lars T Lih ('All power to the soviets!', April 20) continues his project of rewriting the history of the Russian revolution. His aim is to prove Lenin's *April theses* were of no especial significance and there was no real disagreement within the Bolshevik party over it, it was really a continuation of 'old Bolshevism', and the right opposition of Stalin, Kamenev, Kalinin, etc was not capitulating to the provisional government and there was no coming together of Trotsky's *Permanent revolution* and Lenin's *April theses*. It was a wholly unnecessary document and it was not the indispensable theoretical and political conquest needed to consummate the great revolution. This is an ignoble exercise to which Lih has devoted his life for more than a decade, joined by acolytes like Eric Blanc and John Riddell. His target is, of course, Trotskyism-Leninism, the continuity of Leninism as the theory of world revolution. He seeks to prove that this is just nonsense, no one really believed it then and no one in their right mind would believe it now.

Writing in 1937, in his introduction to his *Stalin school of falsification*, Trotsky identifies several stages in the rewriting of the history of the Russian revolution. This latest attempt to rehabilitate the right opposition is not just a historical debate. It began in 1923 when the right opposition triumvirate, led by Zinoviev and Kamenev, with Stalin the third and lesser figure, coalesced and then came to power after Lenin's death in January 1924. But Stalin, as general secretary, concentrated his efforts on building up a base in the Bolsheviks by promotions and granting privileges to those sections who had lost faith in the future of the

revolution and were now concentrating on careers and self-advancement. He became expert at rigging conferences. Zinoviev saw his position threatened by 1925 and realised his base in Petrograd was not enough to save him from Stalin. Trotsky tells us: "But already at the end of 1925, Zinoviev became frightened by the consequences of his own initiative and came over to the ranks of the opposition... In 1926, Zinoviev and Kamenev joined the (United) Opposition."

Stalin then allied with the new right Bolshevik opposition led by Bukharin (who had flipped from ultra-left to right by then); "In the economic sphere, the theoretical weapons against Trotskyism were forged by Bukharin: "the underestimation of the peasantry," "super-industrialisation", writes Trotsky. Then he recounts the third rewrite: "In November 1927, Zinoviev and Kamenev turned to the path of capitulation. They were followed first by Piatakov, and then by Radek."

During the period of the United Opposition - 1925-27 - Zinoviev revealed how they had planned the rewriting of the history of the revolution and the vilification of Trotsky. And the ruling clique had no shortage of party hacks to do their bidding after 1929, as Trotsky tells us: "They organise campaigns of vilification against Zinoviev who used to be their infallible authority, against Bukharin whom they used to acclaim as their leader, against Radek whom only yesterday they reverently cited in the struggle against Trotskyism."

The fourth rewrite came with the expulsion of the right Bolsheviks led by Bukharin in 1929. "The fate of Bukharin is no less well known: the official champion of pure Leninism was soon proclaimed a 'bourgeois liberal', was later pardoned and is now in jail awaiting trial", Trotsky tells us. Bukharin was immediately executed after this trial. As we know, by 1936-38 all these former allies of Stalin were executed in the great purges.

Lars cites a great 'pioneer party historian' writing in 1926: "In 1926, the pioneer party historian, Vladimir Nevsky, published the first substantial source-based history of Bolshevism. His book appeared in the brief interval after primary sources had been collected, but before Stalinist orthodoxy ended genuine historical debate."

Of course, we have seen that by 1926 Soviet history was undergoing its second major rewrite; Nevsky was a rewriter for Zinoviev but not yet for Stalin. He doesn't even merit a stub article in Wikipedia, such was his historical importance, and we don't know his subsequent fate. Perhaps Lars can rectify this. Trotsky mentions another such professional rewriter of history:

"The deceased MN Pokrovsky must unquestionably be acknowledged as the most authoritative Soviet historian. For a number of years, he waged, with a vehemence peculiar to him, a struggle against my general views on the history of Russia and especially my conception of the October revolution... The reign of his school was absolute. His textbooks or the textbooks of his disciples circulated in millions of copies. Shortly before his death, he was idolised as the lawgiver in the domain of scientific thought. But already in 1935, steps were taken suddenly and all the more drastically to review his heritage. In the course of a few months, Pokrovsky was completely cashiered, crushed and discredited."

He was also executed. This was obviously the fifth major rewriting of history necessary to justify the great purges, which now revealed that without Stalin there would have been no Russian revolution, all the rest were traitors and/or agents of imperialism, apart from Lenin who had been safely iconised in his mausoleum. Lars builds on an

ignoble tradition.
Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

Bizarre

In a speech to the Petrograd city conference of Bolsheviks on April 14 1917, Lenin proclaimed that "Old Bolshevism must be discarded". In a bizarre article in *Weekly Worker* (April 12), Jack Conrad, with a barely a nod to the April Theses or this particular speech, argues that the claim that Lenin broke with the Old Bolshevik perspective of "a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" was one hatched by Trotsky after Lenin's death. He insists that the Bolsheviks stuck to the idea of pushing the bourgeois-democratic revolution "to the end", and that this implied that a substantial period of time might elapse between the consummation of this stage and the socialist stage. If this were the case, it's impossible to understand why Lenin's April Theses caused such a furore when they were published. Lev Kamenev, in an article entitled 'Our Disagreements', published the day after the April Theses, succinctly expressed the Old Bolshevik position: "As regards Lenin's general schema, it is unacceptable to us, insofar as it proceeds from recognition that the bourgeois-democratic revolution is finished and counts on the rapid metamorphosis of this revolution into a socialist revolution". Kamenev's critique - which for a short while was endorsed by a majority of Bolsheviks - was spot-on. As Lenin himself explained to the city conference: "The bourgeois revolution in Russia is completed insofar as power has come into the hands of the bourgeoisie. Here the 'old Bolsheviks' argue: 'It is not completed - for there is no dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.' But the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies is that very dictatorship."

Conrad talks much about a "revolutionary provisional government" - an idea absent from Lenin's thinking at this time - and manages barely to say a word about his call for power to pass to the soviets. Yet the April Theses represent an astonishing demarche: "Not a parliamentary republic - to return to a parliamentary republic from the Soviets of Workers' Deputies would be a retrograde step - but a republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies throughout the country, from top to bottom." Conrad entirely misses the breath-taking radicalism of this demand. Lenin equated it with the creation of a 'commune state' in which police, army and bureaucracy would be abolished and the people armed. There were many reasons why Lenin became convinced that the soviets

represented an embryonic dictatorship of the proletariat, notably his appreciation of the devastating economic and political impact of the World War I, his conviction that imperialism represented the highest stage of capitalism, and his belief that the Russian peasantry was splitting along class lines. Certainly, Conrad is correct to say that he didn't think that socialism was on the agenda except on an international scale, but he was nevertheless hopeful that "this is the type of state under which it is possible to advance towards socialism".

Steve Smith
Bures, Suffolk

Marxist migration

What is the attitude of revolutionary Marxism to mass economic migration? Firstly, we are against it. Mass economic migration is one of the most miserable excrescences of late, dead and decaying, neo-liberal imperialist capitalism. Secondly, if we can stop it, we will. Thirdly, if we cannot stop it, then it is the duty of the labour movement to organise immigrant labour and to fight any attempt to divide and rule the labour movement along racial and religious lines.

However, since the 2008 economic catastrophe there are billions of workers now surplus to capitalist requirements. Even if the UK borders were hermetically sealed, there would already be a huge surplus of workers in Britain and, with robotisation in the west designed to make it competitive with China, once again millions more will join them.

These millions and billions of surplus workers worldwide are becoming a serious problem for capitalism, hence the growing authoritarianism around the world and the corporate capitalist and fascist attack on democracy. Capitalism has to do something dramatic with these people and it won't be pretty. In fact, all that capitalism offers humanity now is a new dark ages and global conflagration that our species is unlikely to emerge from with its life. The choice really is between socialism and barbarism.

The available work has to be shared. There must be a regime of full-employment and a rapid reduction in the length of the working week without loss of pay. Only world proletarian revolution can transcend unravelling globalisation and dead capitalism. A world federation of sovereign socialist states cooperating to create a rational global economy that can take humanity on the next leg of its historical journey.

David Ellis
Leeds

Fighting fund

Louder than words

Commenting on an article in the *Daily Mail* headlined "Communists back Corbyn", comrade AN remarks: "Yes, but communists also articulate the need for a Communist Party to effect a revolutionary transition from capitalism to socialism." And he adds: "The *Weekly Worker* puts that case every single week."

I couldn't have put it better myself, comrade. But AN goes one step further by putting his money where his mouth is and donating a very handy £50 via PayPal. While comrades TB (£30) and GS (£20) also made donations using the same method, they made no equivalent complimentary remarks. But money sometimes speaks as loud as words!

Those three were among the *Weekly Worker's* 3,142 online readers last week - and they were also among those who clearly took heed of my appeal last week for a

little "acceleration" in order to meet our monthly £1,750 fighting fund target. Another in that category is comrade TY, whose £50 cheque was more than welcome.

Finally, let me commend our regular standing order donors - namely SK, PM, DC, SS and GT - whose contributions added £377. So, all in all, it was an excellent weekly total of £527, taking our running total to £1,464. But that means we still need another £286 in just three days.

Help us get there via our PayPal facility or - better still - by making a bank transfer using your online account (sort code: 30-99-64; account number: 00744310) ●

RobbieRIX

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

Repeal the Union

The Tories, UKIP, Liberal Democrats and Labour have all refused to recognise that Scotland voted, as did Northern Ireland, to remain in the EU. This is the one fact that every democrat, never mind socialist, should recognise and defend.

As socialists we should be campaigning for a Great Repeal Act. Not the one the Tories want for Europe, but the repeal of the 1707 Act of Union. At a stroke the Scottish parliament and people would secure their sovereignty and hence the right of the Scottish people to decide for themselves whether to remain in the EU and maintain free movement and existing workers rights or not. It is their decision. Only the Tories and the other English inspired chauvinist parties would deny it.

Repealing the Act of Union does not rule out any closer relationship with England. It does not as such preclude any decision to be part of a new republic. On the contrary political action from 'England' to end the Union makes genuine internationalism possible. Indeed it is a precondition for it. This is a policy for the international working class, not some opportunism designed to help Corbyn win the general election. It is too late for that. The die is already cast on Labour's manifesto.

It seems like only yesterday that I stood as a Republican Socialist in Bermondsey and Old Southwark against Simon Hughes and Neil Coyle. Since Coyle won his seat he has become one of Jeremy Corbyn's chief tormentors and back stabbers. I stood as the first anti-Unionist socialist candidate in England. I started my campaign in Glasgow, one of the best places to highlight the need for English anti-Unionism.

On May Day 2015 I launched the "Manifesto For Democracy" outside parliament calling for the Palace of Westminster to be closed down before it fell down. The democratic message was well received by those who heard it. But it wasn't a vote winner. The opportunist politicians were fanning the flames of English chauvinism, not least Simon Hughes in his infamous article in the *London Evening Standard*. Cameron himself played the anti-Scottish card, a big factor in his victory.

The good people of Bermondsey did not support my campaign with their precious votes. I don't blame them. Somebody claimed that Cameron got the most votes in England and I got the worst. I felt it was a neat juxtaposition of the past and the future. In a conservative country the past is way more popular than the future.

A year later the past was in the bin, no doubt making a small fortune for services rendered, only to be replaced by something even worse. I am pleased to report the future is making steady progress not least when Left Unity adopted an anti-Unionist stance.

Many more socialists have rejected the 1707 Act of Union. I am not surprised that one of Queen Anne's vilest Acts is now hated and despised by anybody who has thought about it. There are hardly any communists and no real democrats left who don't condemn it.

The 1707 Act of Union secured stability for the ruling class at home and the bloody profits from slavery abroad. Queen Anne abolished the Scottish parliament because she did not want it to be used as a platform for rebellious subjects. She wanted to secure the future of the monarchy as a protestant institution. All this was tied up by bribery and access to slave plantations in the West Indies.

This law was intended to make sure Scotland would never have self-determination. Scotland would be welded to England 'forever'. There was no getting away from it. Scotland could only be represented at Westminster where Scottish MPs would be a permanent minority. In 1998 the arrival of a Scottish parliament undermined the 1707 Act. It blew a hole in the great ship 'Britannia'. Now we can see the water flooding in.

Steve Freeman
Left Unity and RISE

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday April 30, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Followed by open discussion Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk; and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

Building the narrative

Friday April 28, 5pm: Workshop, Sunderland Software City, Tavistock Place, Sunderland SR1. Creating political narratives through film, with Ken Loach.

Hosted by Talk Socialism: www.facebook.com/TalkSocialism.

The struggle for Labour

Friday April 28, 7pm: Political discussion, Cock Tavern, 23 Phoenix Road, London NW1. Speakers: Gerry Downing (Socialist Fight), Tony Greenstein (Labour anti-Zionist), Andy Brooks (*New Worker* editor). Organised by New Communist Party: www.newworker.org.

Blood on the streets of Halifax

Friday April 28, 5.30pm: Guided walk through historical sites. Meet Central Library, Northgate, Halifax HX1. With Catherine Howe, author of *Halifax 1842: a year of crisis*. Free - donations welcome. Organised by Calderdale Trades Council: <http://calderdaletuc.org.uk>.

John McDonnell in Liverpool

Friday April 28, 6pm-8pm: Pre-election rally for the Labour party. St George's Hall, Liverpool, L1 1JJ. Sign up at: www.labournorthwest.org.uk/john_mcdonnell_rally.

May Day events

Manchester - Saturday April 29, 11am: Festival, All Saints Park, Oxford Road, Manchester M1.

Organised by Manchester Trades Union Council: <https://mtuc.wordpress.com>.

Newcastle Upon Tyne - Saturday April 29, 11am: Assemble, Princess Square, Newcastle NE1, for march to Exhibition Park, Clarendon Road, NE2.

Hosted by Tyne and Wear Mayday Rally: www.facebook.com/tyneandwearmayday. **London - Monday May 1, 12 noon:** Assemble Clerkenwell Green, London EC1, for march to Trafalgar Square, London WC2. Speakers include John McDonnell and Mark Serwotka.

Organised by London May Day Organising Committee: www.londonmayday.org.

Marx Memorial Library

Monday May 1, 10am to 3pm: Open day, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1.

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

Stop Le Pen

Tuesday May 2, 7pm: Rally, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Organised by Unite Against Fascism: uaf.org.uk.

Glasgow is many

Wednesday May 3, 7pm: Film screening of anti-war documentary 'We Are Many'.

CCA, 350 Sauchiehall St, Glasgow, G2 3JD.

Book tickets online: <https://goo.gl/qPKiLe>.

Organised by Glasgow Stop the War Coalition: <https://www.facebook.com/Glasgow-Stop-the-War-Coalition-123022857777171/>.

A Marxist history of Ireland

Thursday May 4, 7pm: Last of three-part series of talks, Brent Trades and Labour Hall, 375 Willesden High Street (Apollo Club), London NW10. '1923 to present', including 'the troubles', Good Friday agreement, etc.

Organised by Socialist Fight: <https://socialistfight.com>.

Banners for Spain

Friday May 5 to Saturday July 8: Display of socialist/republican banners plus a programme of related activities and events, Islington Museum, 245 St John Street, London EC1.

Organised by Islington Museum: islington.museum@islington.gov.uk.

Critique conference 2017

Saturday May 6, 9.30am to 5.30pm: Annual event sponsored by *Critique* journal, University of London student central, Malet Street, London WC1. Speakers include: Savas Michael-Matzas, Hillel Ticktin, Raquel Valera, Yassamine Mather.

Organised by *Critique* journal: www.critiquejournal.net.

Britain and the Spanish civil war

Tuesday May 9, 6.30pm: Talk, Islington Museum, 245 St John Street, Clerkenwell, London EC1. Speaker: professor Tom Buchanan, University of Oxford.

Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marxlibrary.org.uk.

Violation of Palestinian Rights

Tuesday May 9, 7pm-9pm: Public meeting, SCRSS, 320 Brixton Road, London. With Salma Karmi-Ayyoub. Organised by Lambeth and Wandsworth PSC: <https://www.palestinecampaign.org/events/talk-violation-palestinian-rights-salma-karmi-ayyoub/>.

People's Assembly

Saturday May 13, 10.30am to 6pm: Annual conference, Hamilton House, Mableton Place, London WC1. 'The NHS is in crisis, education is in crisis, the Tories are in crisis'.

Organised by People's Assembly: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Labour, value and capitalist crisis

Tuesday May 16, 7pm: Political economy study, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. One of four classes by Simon Renton in the 'Labour, value and exploitation' series. £5.

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

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Becoming a normal Republican

Trump in transition

Jim Creegan discusses how the bourgeoisie disabuses presidents and high officials of any notion that they are free agents

It is now increasingly apparent that the abrupt reversals of the Trump White House, emerging from behind a curtain of court intrigue, signal a major political shift. The white nationalist platform upon which the parvenu real estate mogul was elected in November seems in the process of being scrapped, plank by plank, in favour of a far more conventional rightwing Republican agenda, at home and abroad.

Far too often, Marxist political writing suffers from a conceptual gap. On the one hand, the bourgeois state is said - as a general theoretical proposition - to be an instrument of capitalist class rule. On the other hand, short to medium-term political events are analysed exclusively in terms of the pronouncements and deeds of political actors, momentary combinations, electoral moods etc., without regard to the interface between politics and class. No attempt is made to uncover the particular pressures and influences through which the interests of the bourgeoisie are brought to bear.

In cases where politics flows through accustomed channels, the challenge is not daunting. Political parties and institutions are headed by individuals who either come from the ruling class themselves, or who are thoroughly venal and have undergone certain vetting procedures for class loyalty. The task of explanation becomes more difficult, however, when extraordinary convulsions - coups or insurrections in authoritarian regimes, or electoral upsets in democracies - put power in the hands of individuals and groups without long-established ruling class

connections, and who may be hostile in important ways to the settled aims and practices of the bourgeoisie.

Hostile takeover?

Donald Trump is a case in point. Although himself a member of the ruling class, he entered the presidential primaries as an *arriviste*, who never before held office, and had no strong links to the Republican establishment or bourgeois policy circles. He was rich enough to rely upon himself and a few other maverick billionaires to finance his run. He was considered a loose cannon not only because of his bigotry, vulgarity, incitements to violence, and gleeful flouting of political conventions. Several of his most successful campaign applause lines - drawn from the repertoire of the white nationalist right - flew in the face of long-entrenched, bipartisan policy commitments. He denounced existing trade pacts - the North American Free Trade Agreement and the now defunct Trans-Pacific Partnership, and called Nato "obsolete". He praised Vladimir Putin as a better leader than Barack Obama, and proclaimed himself in favour of a thaw in relations with Russia. He excoriated China's trade practices, vowing to brand that country as a "currency manipulator" in his first day in office. He promised to abolish the Export-Import Bank, a federal agency that underwrites the export of American goods. Janet Yellen, chair of finance capital's holy shrine, the Federal Reserve Bank, was accused of keeping interest rates low for partisan political purposes. He pledged the imposition of a steep 'border tax' on foreign-manufactured goods sold by American companies in

the US. Instead of seeing multilateral military alliances and trade pacts as the indispensable instruments of US world hegemony that they are, Trump played for easy plaudits by echoing the widespread sentiments of the 'little man' to the effect that the globalist liberals in power were allowing America to be fleeced by unscrupulous foreign governments. When Trump brought two leading proponents of go-it-alone, 'America first' policies into the White House - general Michael Flynn, as national security adviser, and, more ominously, Steve Bannon of Breitbart News, as chief strategist - worries mounted in Washington and Wall Street that the Republican Party, and indeed the American state, had been subjected to a hostile takeover.

Turns

What a difference 100 days make! Over the past several weeks, Trump's reversals of position have flown almost as thick and fast as his earlier outrages against reigning orthodoxies. The earliest white nationalist casualty was Michael Flynn, who Trump was forced to cashier as national security adviser in February, after Flynn admitted to having lied about pre-election meetings with Russian envoys.

The tempo of Trump's retreat quickened dramatically, however, after the humiliating defeat of his effort to fulfil his strongest campaign pledge - to repeal and replace Obamacare (Barack Obama's medical insurance scheme). Not only was this attempt wildly unpopular amongst many of the millions who would have lost government medical subventions

under the radically stripped-down replacement Trumpcare bill. During his first term, Obama was at great pains to acquire the approval for his signature legislation from the medical industry. Hospitals receive subventions under the law, and insurance companies, which also get direct subventions, are the final recipients of government payments to individual insurance purchasers, which wind up on their ledgers as profits. The medical industry thus added its voice to those of the tens of thousands who besieged the town hall meetings of Republican senators and congressmen across the country, in a liberal version of the rightwing Tea Party protests against Obamacare in 2009. The outcry was loud enough to convince several 'moderate' congressional Republicans to withhold their support for Trumpcare for fear of being ejected from office by voters. Their defections, together with those of ultra-right Republicans who held out for the repeal of Obamacare with no replacement at all, caused Trump to withdraw his proposed legislation before it even came to a vote in Congress.

Now, in the wake of this defeat, Trump is saying that he supports Nato; that he will no longer seek to label China a currency manipulator; that he backs the revival of the Ex-Im bank (which greatly aided the exports of the General Electric and Boeing corporations before it was rendered dysfunctional by congressional Republicans in 2014); that he "greatly respects" Janet Yellen, and may very well reappoint her as Federal Reserve chair. Steve Bannon, though still a close adviser, has been barred from

the National Security Council. It was Bannon who orchestrated the White House effort to repeal Obamacare, and was behind Trump's early executive orders excluding Muslims of seven Middle Eastern countries from entering the US - now blocked by federal courts. The media are now serving up an almost daily diet of inside leaks about a raging feud between Bannon and Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, whom Bannon is said to have accused of being a "Democrat" and an "internationalist".

Kushner appears to be winning. Trump made it a point of telling the *Wall Street Journal* that Bannon is hardly the power behind the throne of media conjuring, but "a guy who works for me", and that, "Steve is a good guy, but I told them [Kushner and Bannon] to straighten it out or I will". A rising star in the White House is reportedly Gary Cohn, Trump's chief economic adviser, a former president of Goldman Sachs (where Bannon also worked, along with two other top members of the Trump team). Cohn is a lifelong Democrat, aligned with Kushner against Bannon.

Redemption by airstrike

But it is above all the airstrike on Syria, and the dropping of the "mother of all bombs" on Afghanistan, that have redeemed Trump in the eyes of globalist neoliberals in both parties. Whoever unleashed sarin gas in Hama province on April 4, the attack handed Trump a golden opportunity. With a single launch of 59 Tomahawk missiles, he

went a long way toward looking strong again, and dispelling fears that he was an isolationist who rejects America's world gendarme role. He also put a major crimp in Democratic efforts to paint him as a Kremlin agent.

Hillary Clinton was quick to support the attack, adding only that it was hypocritical to avenge civilians in Syria while rejecting them as refugees. Prominent liberal-centrist media pundit Fareed Zakaria gushed that, with the bombing, Trump had at long last "become president". And, in a touch reminiscent of fascist war aesthetics, Brian Williams, a commentator on the Democratic Party's unofficial television propaganda outlet, MSNBC, displayed what he said was a "beautiful" nighttime film clip of missiles being launched over Syria from a US aircraft carrier. Trump went further to put the kibosh on accusations of collusion with the Kremlin by accusing Putin of having had advance knowledge of the alleged Syrian chemical attack. At a news conference in Moscow at the end of a trip by secretary of state Rex Tillerson, he and Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov could agree on only one thing: US-Russian relations are now at an all-time low. The custodians of the empire now seem more assured that, though his style is more swashbuckling than Obama's, Trump is at least beginning to get friends and enemies right.

Trump's turnabouts are not the manoeuvres of a cynical political hack, who shows one of his faces on the hustings and another in the seat of power (although the end result is largely the same). Trump is a political amateur, an opportunist with no fixed agenda except protecting his profits and projecting his ego. But he soon found out the hard way that what gets kudos on the campaign trail does not necessarily play in the Oval Office. His attempts to keep campaign promises that were objectionable to the ruling class ran into so many institutional barriers - corporations, courts, bought-and-paid-for politicians, the 'intelligence community' and the military - that Trump is now being forced to abandon most of the 'populist' campaign pledges that persuaded rebellious voters to put him in the White House in the first place. Thus does the bourgeoisie disabuse presidents and high officials of any notion that they are free agents. Trump was a shamelessly brazen liar to begin with, but his lies served no-one but himself. Now he is learning to become a liar for his class, and demoting the 'ideologues' in his retinue in favour of the 'pragmatists' (in the *bien pensant* lexicon of Washington insiders).

Team of vandals

Trump has used his majorities in both congressional houses to capture the government's judicial branch for his party. After having refused to confirm Obama's nomination of a centrist judge, Merrick Garland, for the Supreme Court during the last few months of his presidency, Senate Republicans tore up a longstanding rule, which required 60 votes for Supreme Court confirmations, to push through the nominee of Trump's choosing, Neil Gorsuch, with a simple majority. Gorsuch has compiled an impressive record of pro-business decisions in lower courts. In the most notorious case, he was a lone dissenter on a panel of three judges, two of whom ruled that a company had been wrong to fire a lorry driver for abandoning his rig when his extremities were starting to go numb amid semi-arctic temperatures. Gorsuch ruled that the driver was lawfully given the sack for disobeying a company order to stay with his vehicle and die.

Trump's cabinet picks look like a parody of earlier Republican state repression and corporate heists. Readers will by now be familiar with Rex Tillerson, the secretary of state from Exxon Mobil, and Jeff Sessions, the Klan-friendly Alabama senator, who is trying his level best to undo all Obama administration attempts to rein in police brutality against blacks and other minorities. Less well known may be figures like the new treasury secretary, Steve Mnuchin, aka the foreclosure king. Having served for 17 years as a senior executive at Goldman Sachs, Mnuchin struck out on his own after the crisis of 2008, and bought from the government the bankrupt Indy Mac bank, the seventh largest mortgage originator in the US, after it had been seized by the feds.

Republicans in the past, they have once again been taken for a ride.

Home front horrors

If the planks of the Trump platform that unsettled the bourgeoisie are falling one by one, it is the ones they approve of that portend a nightmare for workers and minorities. Trump may be without fixed points in the big world, but he leaves no doubt as to his class loyalties in relation to matters that are closer to home and business holdings. His cabinet and senior staff, with a combined worth of \$12 billion, is the richest in US history. His presidency is deeply entangled in his sprawling real estate empire and countless other business lines. His daughter Ivanka and her husband, Jared Kushner, have both taken up residence in the White House as 'senior advisers'. Kushner has managed Trump's properties, and is also the head of his own multi-million dollar family real estate domain. Another top Trump staff member, Kellyanne Conway, caused a stir in February when she plugged Ivanka's clothing brand in an interview on Rupert Murdoch's Fox News. Ivanka herself has used public appearances to model her company's jewellery and dresses. While Donald and the Kushners dined with Chinese premier Xi Jinping at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida during a recent state visit, Xi's government was granting three new trademarks to Ivanka's wares in China. It is widely understood that the Kushner couple's efforts to avoid 'conflict of interest' laws by renouncing control over their various companies, and placing their assets in 'blind trusts,' is nothing more than a technical expedient. Never has presidential administration more closely resembled a third-world kleptocratic clique, Kennedys and Bushes not excepted. It is therefore no wonder that Trump's initiatives on the home front display an affinity with the most ruthless and predatory elements of his class. They give the complete lie to his campaign rhetoric about standing up for the little guy against corporate power.

Mnuchin then spun the bank off into his own company, One West, which he sold at a profit of \$1.5 billion five years later. A good chunk of this money came from the federal government, which agreed to reimburse Mnuchin for losses over a certain amount as a condition of the sale. During the five years of its existence, One West carried out landlord repossessions of 36,000 homes, including that of a couple in their mid-80s, who had lived at the same address for 50 years.

Trump's other appointments were made, in the words of Steve Bannon, with a view to "deconstructing the administrative state", ie, dismantling the government departments that the appointees were named to head. Rick Perry, former Texas governor and the new energy secretary, pledged to abolish the Energy Department along with two other government agencies when campaigning for president in 2012 (although he could name only two of the three departments he wanted to eliminate, in a famous television debate gaffe that knocked him out of the running). The secretary of education, Betsy DeVos is a member of a far-right billionaire Republican donor family. Her brother, Eric Prince, headed Blackwater, a private 'security' (read: mercenary) outfit, that carried out the Nisour square massacre of 2007, in which 17 Baghdadi civilians were gunned down. DeVos herself has spent most of her adult life attacking public education, which she seeks to replace with private charter schools.

The head of the Environmental Protection Agency is Scott Pruitt, who, as attorney general of Oklahoma, filed numerous lawsuits (one of which is still going on) attempting to block federal environmental regulations in his state. Pruitt was a major recipient of campaign contributions from the oil and gas industry, and has stated on numerous occasions that he does not believe that global warming is caused by carbon dioxide emissions or any other human activity. The head of Health and Human Services, former Georgia Congressman Tom Price, wants to convert Medicare (government old-age medical cover) into a private voucher plan.

Trump has taken aim at the Dodd-Frank law, which established minimum capital reserve requirements for financial institutions in case of emergencies, and places limits on financial speculation by banks. At the time of writing, he is promising to unveil shortly the details of a proposed overhaul of the federal tax code. It is widely expected that this legislative initiative will include a big reduction in corporate tax rates, as well as fulfillment of his pledge to do away with the inheritance tax on the only amounts to which it still applies - fortunes of over \$5 million, accounting for only the top 0.2 % of bequests. Trump's efforts in this field are being hampered by his adamant refusal to release his own federal tax returns, something that every president and presidential candidate has done for decades, and that thousands took to the streets to demand on April 15, the national filing deadline.

By advancing the standard Republican agenda of pro-corporate pillage more audaciously than ever before, Trump seems to be maintaining the allegiance of his party's Congressional leadership, despite whatever misgivings they may have in regard to his more stridently nationalist foreign-policy posture. He hopes, in addition, to keep the support of the party's large base in the religious, 'pro-life' right with an executive order that ended government funding for Planned Parenthood, a private non-profit organization whose clinics provide health services for women, including abortion.

There is no telling to what extent Trump's corporate rape attempts will succeed. But it has usually been the case that, once having become

accomplished fact, deregulations and privatisations are considered a win for the entire ruling class, seldom reversed by either political party.

Digesting defeat

For their part, the Democratic leadership are pulling out all stops to avoid responsibility in the eyes of the party base for November's stunning defeat. This has led them to try to pin the blame on Vladimir Putin, in a campaign of diversion and 'fake news' worthy of the most baldly prevaricating Republican. Even if, as they contend, Russia had attempted to 'interfere with the election' through the release of hacked Democratic campaign documents to Wikileaks, what would the effect have been? The leaked documents exposed the machinations of Democratic national committee chair, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, to defeat Sanders and assure Clinton's victory in the party primaries. Are Democratic leaders asking us to believe that it was this news that made angry rust-belt white workers vote for Trump? Even more palpably absurd is the insinuation - now being dutifully put about by pro-Democratic media - that Trump himself was, or still is, working in collusion with the Russian government. Trump has effectively put paid to these accusations by bombing Syria, Russia's Middle Eastern ally. One purpose of this disinformation campaign is to prevent any critical self-appraisal of the party by leftward-moving supporters. They are taking to the streets in unprecedented numbers to vent their anger not only at Trump, but at any Democrats inclined to compromise with him. The party leadership is determined to rid the ranks of any thoughts of answering Trump's blatant ruling-class assault - and winning back white workers who defected to Trump in November - with some semblance of class demands.

The heir apparent to Schultz as chair of the DNC, the party's governing body, was Keith Ellison, a member of the House of Representatives from Minnesota. A black man, a Muslim and a favourite among the rank-and-file, Ellison was one of three congressional Democrats to back Sanders in the primaries. He even had the support of the middle-of-the-road Senate Democratic minority leader, Charles Schumer of New York, for the chair's job. But before he left office, Obama started beating the bushes for a centrist candidate to oppose Ellison and prevent the party from falling into the hands of the Sanders wing. Prominent Harvard Law School lawyer, and arch-Zionist witch hunter, Alan Dershowitz declared that he would quit the party if Ellison were chosen. (While dutifully voting for Israeli aid appropriations in the House of Representatives, Ellison had emitted some faint noises about Palestinian rights.) The leadership finally settled on Tom Perez, Obama's former Secretary of Labor, as a mainstream alternative to Ellison. Perez won by 35 out of the 435 votes of the DNC.

The committee also defeated a motion to reinstate a ban on donations from corporate political action committees to Democratic campaigns, which had been put in place by Obama in 2008, only to be quietly rescinded by Debbie Wasserman Schultz during Clinton's presidential bid. Speaking against the ban, California committee member Bob Mulholland reminded the assembled that corporations are the source of all good things: "We are in a corporate hotel. We have meals provided by corporations. We drive cars provided by corporations." Perez, however, showed his appreciation of the importance of keeping the left in tow by appointing Ellison deputy chair. Ellison, in turn, put party loyalty over any principles he may have by graciously accepting.

Yet right-left tensions are not easily submerging themselves in hate-Trump harmony, as party bigwigs would like. Perez and Sanders are now on a joint 'unity tour' of nine 'red' (Republican

majority) states, where they think the party's ground game could stand some improvement. Yet unmistakable notes of discord were sounded in a television interview last week. Sanders spoke about the need to "transform the Democratic Party", while no such phrase escaped the lips of Tom Perez. While Sanders talked of the need for single-payer (free government) health care, Perez limited himself to the platitude that "health care is a right". The interviewer, Chris Hayes of MSNBC, then invited each politician to name his main enemy. Sanders had no hesitation about pointing to "the ruling class"; Perez, on the other hand, displayed his mastery of the art of evasion, saying only that the enemy was Trump and the Republicans, who were denying the "hopes and aspirations" of most Americans.

Dissonant chords are also being heard in two closely watched elections. According to a joint survey by Harvard University and the Harris Poll, Bernie Sanders - who works with the Democrats but still calls himself an independent - is the most popular politician in America today. His support, and presence on the hustings with Democratic candidates, is much sought after, and his absence much noted. Sanders recently appeared at a rally for Heath Mello, who is running as a Democrat for mayor of Omaha, Nebraska. Mello has an anti-corporate voting record, but is also a believing Catholic who, as a state senator, voted for a bill to require that abortion-seeking women be notified of their right to a sonogram, which typically projects an image of the foetus onto a screen to remind pregnant women that their unborn babies are already alive. Mello has said that, although he personally opposes abortion, he would uphold women's rights as mayor. Sanders' support for Mello threw women's organizations into an uproar. They insisted that abortion rights, and not class issues, should be the principal criterion for support. Under pressure from NARAL Pro-Choice America' and Planned Parenthood, Tom Perez issued statements harshly critical of Mello.

Conversely, Sanders has pointedly refused to campaign for Jon Ossoff in a by-election, now headed for a run-off, for the House of Representatives in Georgia. Perez and Democratic-allied women's organizations have heartily endorsed him. Ossoff is an abortion-rights supporter running against a strongly anti-choice Republican. But, on economic issues, he cleaves toward the pro-corporate Democratic mainstream.

It goes without saying that any working class party worthy of the name would strongly support women's rights, which should never be counterposed to class demands. But the Democratic leadership is determined to keep the party out of the hands of anyone who advocates even the mildest class-based platform. Identity politics are the most convenient means for the leadership to appear 'progressive' in the eyes of an ever more restive rank-and-file, energised by the election of Donald Trump. It is highly improbable that politicians like Keith Ellison and Bernie Sanders will break with the Democrats under any circumstances. But will the thousands who recently massed outside the Brooklyn flat of the centrist Senate Democratic minority leader Charles Schumer, demanding that he not betray them, the many thousands more roused to action by police killings in the Black Lives Matter movement, or the millions who voted for Sanders continue allow their energies to be diverted, with the help of those they now follow, into support for a minion of big money with a slightly less inhuman face than that of orange-haired ogre of Mar-a-Lago? Time will tell. ●

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Notes

1. NARAL: National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League

PALESTINE

Failed recipes

We must relearn the art of thinking strategically. Jack Conrad joins the debate on Israel-Palestine



No one can deny the huge importance of the Israel-Palestine question - although the combined Jewish and Arab population of Israel is tiny, just over 8.5 million. But, of course, in the late 1960s, the global hegemon came to regard Israel as a "strategic asset" ... in those days against the threat of Arab radicalism to its client states in the Middle East.¹ After the June 1967 Six Day war, and then with the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1979, the United States repeatedly upped its economic and military aid. As a result Israel is today widely compared to ancient Sparta: "Security is king and the army is god" (Gideon Levy).² The country is highly militarised, has a stockpile of some 300 nuclear warheads³ and is equipped with cutting-edge US armoured, naval, airforce and missile hardware. Israel also possesses its own not inconsiderable arms industry.

It hardly needs adding, the Middle East contains around half of the world's easily accessible reserves of oil and gas. The average cost of a barrel of oil in the Middle East is \$10 (in Saudi Arabia it is just \$2). Extracting Russian oil, the "next least costly producer", is around \$20, and it is far higher elsewhere.⁴ Needless to say, the US, including under Donald Trump, is determined that access to and distribution of this vital natural resource is 'defended' (ie, controlled by the US). And, of

course, Israel, not Saudi Arabia, not Turkey, not Egypt, is its most reliable US satrap, enforcer, attack dog in the region. Oil, the life blood of post-World War II capitalism, is what primarily determines the US-Israel 'special relationship', not America's so-called 'Jewish community' (parts of which, of course, serve as a real, but often much exaggerated, pro-Israel lobby group).

So it is easy to understand why the Israel-Palestine question constitutes a modern-day litmus test. Those who support Israel's continuation as a Zionist state, those who automatically reject condemnations of Zionism, those who categorise Zionism as the national liberation movement of the Jewish people, can be considered on-message, potential partners, willing to sell themselves, respectable, etc, by the US state apparatus. The category of on-message, potential partners, etc, includes some who still pass as the 'left' in Britain - eg, Progress, Labour

Israeli Jews constitute a nation, but Zionism necessarily involves the oppression and removal of the Palestinians

Friends of Israel, Jewish Labour Movement, *The Guardian*, Owen Jones, Jon Lansman, Alliance for Workers' Liberty, etc.

By contrast anyone who insists that Zionism does not represent all Jewish people, that Zionism is a colonial-settler project necessarily involving the oppression of the native Arab population, that Zionism is a blood and soil

nationalism, such people, including ourselves, are targeted for vilification and, if possible, ostracism and the outer darkness. Indeed over the last couple of years there has been a highly successful, generously financed, well orchestrated, witch-hunt that has hit the Labour left like a black tornado. With the active connivance of the Tory government, the media, the Israeli embassy and the US Christian right, thousands have found themselves expelled or suspended. The biggest scalp, so far, being former London mayor and National Executive Committee member, Ken Livingstone.

Ideologically there had been a joining together of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. To be anti-Zionist is almost to become a Nazi, or, at the very least, a Nazi apologist. Obvious nonsense, but it brilliantly serves a threefold purpose.

- Firstly, as a weapon against the Corbyn-leadership of the Labour Party. No matter how much he appeases the Labour right, Jeremy Corbyn cannot be allowed to become the prime minister of America's most important Nato ally. His former support for the Palestinian cause is, therefore, made toxic.
- Secondly, if, when, Israel moves to annex the West Bank, those who can be expected to protest will already, that is the calculation, be viewed as highly suspect. Supposedly they are closet anti-Semites (an already established fact according to much of the media).



- Thirdly, the Anglo-American coalition took a real battering with the 2003, second, Iraq war. There were splits in the British establishment and widespread popular outrage. Therefore, as a consequence, in August 2013, the House of Commons failed to sanction British involvement in Syria. Not only a humiliation for David Cameron. It raised serious concerns in US ruling circles about British reliability. Delegitimising the Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions campaign, turning the soft left's stupid infatuation with identity politics against the left, painting the anti-war movement in lurid anti-Semitic colours is about shoring up Britain's position as the number one ally to the number one imperialist power.

Progress ... of a sort

However, apart from the above, the anti-Zionist camp is far from united. For the purposes of this article, I will put aside attitudes towards the Labour Party, consciousness versus economic spontaneity, the severe limitations of protest politics, etc. Instead of these, vital issues, let us concentrate on Israel-Palestine as a strategic question. This brings me to Tony Greenstein and his reply to Moshé Machover's *Weekly Worker* article 'Palestine and Hebrew self-determination'.⁶ I do so, not because of any wish represent comrade Machover. He is more than capable of doing that himself. Nor is my intention to start a flame war. I consider comrade Greenstein a friend of the CPGB. His *Weekly Worker* articles have certainly been full of insights into the sorry history of Zionism, horrible details about current Israeli politics and savage indictments of the current witch-hunt (of which he is himself a prominent victim). No, what I want to do is to revisit and develop my argument.

Comrade Greenstein says he agrees with Moshé when he says that it is "impossible for the Palestinians, by themselves, to overthrow Zionism." In other words the solution to the Palestine-Israel question lies outside the Palestine-Israel box, ie, with the wider Arab world. However, comrade Greenstein rejects socialist revolution as premature. Instead he calls for a bourgeois democratic revolution.

I think this represents progress ... of a sort. Back in 2008 he was equating the CPGB with the AWL and resting his strategy of achieving a single-state Palestine, not only on when the Arab masses "once again" challenge their rulers, but on Malthusian projections of when "the oil runs out". Peak oil, not the end of oil, was once projected for 2030 by the doom mongers. Then, after that, who knows in 2050, in 2070, when oil begins to run out, the "more intelligent Zionists will realise that the game is up".⁷ Why? Because with the end of oil US imperialism will supposedly lose interest in the Middle East and abandon its Israeli "strategic asset" to its fate. Evidentially this was not a well founded analysis, neither of the oil industry nor international relations. Rather a sign of desperation and political despair.

The end of oil was always a complete nonsense. So was peak oil for that matter. In fact the whole thesis - that there is a certain amount of oil in the ground which will at some point begin to run out - takes no account of reserves, demand or price. Eg, if demand increases then one would expect the price to increase and that would make what are now totally unexploited or marginal fields viable. Exploration would also be stimulated and new sources discovered. Besides that you can make oil from a whole range of different substances, eg, tar sands, coal and methane, if you are prepared to pay the financial and environmental cost. Note, in the late 19th century various top minds

in Britain fretted over diminishing reserves of coal.⁸ Actually, if peak oil ever happened - and it won't - in all likelihood, the US would continue its 'special relationship' with Israel, not least to police a region which would still contain the cheapest recoverable oil reserves.

The fact that the Israeli-Jewish population is ever fearful of the internal and external Arab threat - military, economic, political, demographic, etc - means that the alliance with the US has a solid democratic mandate. In no small measure this is what gives the Zionist regime a stability that is so clearly absent in Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, etc.

Are the Jews a nation?

All comrades on our side of the debate over the Israel-Palestine question agree that the Jewish people, taken as a whole, do not constitute a nation. A piece of Zionist fakery. There is a not unfounded suggestion that the Jewish *Shtetl* in late medieval Poland-Lithuania had nation-like features. Yet these semi-autonomous micro-states were long ago swept away by a combination of feudal decay and capitalist development. Equally to the point, they never included any more than a minority of the world's Jewish population within their pinched domains. Jews as a whole constituted not a nation but a people-religion. Another being the Sikhs.

Nation-states typically emerged from the womb of feudalism and are based on the existence of a common territory, language, economy, etc. There are between 12-20 million Jews worldwide today (that includes secular Jews, of course). Living on every inhabited continent they speak a giddy range of native tongues. English, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, Hungarian, Turkish.

Following in the footsteps of Karl Marx and Karl Kautsky, the Belgian Trotskyist Abram Leon famously described the Jews of feudal Europe as a "people-class" in his influential book *The Jewish Question* (1946). Jewishness might once have referred to holding a common faith and in some parts of the world a common legally sanctioned caste position. Eg, in eastern Europe Jews constituted the "sole commercial element in a purely agricultural society."⁹ Nowadays, however, while religion still counts, it is in rapid decline, eg, amongst the Jewish population of Israel 41.4% define themselves as "secular". Nevertheless showing how complex things are when asked "what religion are you?" virtually all Israeli Jews say they are Jewish.¹⁰ Being Jewish is therefore just as much about imagined ancestry, a sense of common cultural identity and how one sees oneself and is seen by others. Economics has nothing to do with it under presentday circumstances.

Are Israeli Jews, by contrast, a non-nation? Are the Jews of Israel nothing but a heterogeneous collection of many different nations? In other words are they still Polish, German, Russian, Iraqi, Moroccan, Indian, etc? Undoubtedly, even generations on, such identities survive as significant political and cultural determinates. Eg, the Ashkenazi - whose main origins lie in eastern Europe - form a colonial aristocracy. But such differences are overlaid by an Israeli commonality. There is an acid test. What are the young men and women of the Israeli Defence Force prepared to die for? The country of their parents or grandparents? Hardly. Their religious sect? A few maybe (on the far right). Or their country? The many wars fought by Israel since 1947-48 surely gives the answer.

Are the Israeli-Jews a nation?

What of the Jews in Israel? I have argued that they are an exception and do constitute a nation. Israeli Jews speak the same language, inhabit the same territory, have a common culture and share a sense of identity.¹¹ Naturally new migrants, such as those from the former Soviet Union in the 1980-90s, stand out as a partial exception, crucially when it comes to language. Many of them, especially if they were over 30 found themselves unable to master the Hebrew language, and, given their relative numbers, were able to stick to Russian in terms of their day-to-day life. There are Russian dominated neighbourhoods. However, their children absorbed Hebrew naturally, assimilated and are nowadays unmistakably Israeli. Comrade Machover calls Israeli Jews the Hebrew nation and I have often used the same designation. Either way, the Hebrew-speaking Jews of Israel are the

sole Jewish nation in the world today.

Over the course of the 20th century millions of Jews have migrated from Europe, Asia and Africa, have learnt Hebrew, and made and remade the Israeli-Jewish nation. This recent historical phenomenon has to be categorically distinguished from the much older and much wider Jewish people-religion. Yes, nations can be formed extraordinarily quickly in historical terms. It does not take hundreds or thousands of years as some nationalist ideologues pretend.

Comrade Greenstein refuses to countenance the palpable fact of the Jewish-Israeli nation. This stance allows him to escape the possibility of calling for national self-determination for the Israel-Jewish nation. If the Israeli Jews are not a nation there can be no national self-determination. Problem solved.

However, it is not so easy. Comrade Greenstein's case rests on jesuitical, not Marxist, reasoning. Hence he tells us that the legal definition of what constitutes one's nationality in Israel is based firstly, on the "myth" of a "previous Jewish political presence" and, secondly, an "imagined ethnicity". Certainly Israeli courts have ruled that there is no "Israeli nation separate from the Jewish nation."¹² There is, in other words, a dichotomy between legal doctrine and socio-political reality. Going back to 1913, Germany had not dissimilar blood and soil legal stipulations.¹³ Till the 1999 reform, so-called ethnic Germans, going back to grandparents, especially in the former "eastern bloc", could obtain German citizenship (a right taken up by many Poles, Russians, Ukrainians ... and Israelis).

But the task of Marxists is precisely to debunk myths, to reveal the reality that exists beneath the surface appearance of all ideological claims. Because that is what we are dealing with. Notions of a common Jewish nationality are false (see above). If that is the case, and comrade Greenstein agrees, then it logically follows that Jews in Israel can be, must be, separated from Jews world-wide when it comes to nation and nationality. Eg, Jews in Britain are part of the British nation, not the "Jewish nation".

Are Israeli Jews, by contrast, a non-nation? Are the Jews of Israel nothing but a heterogeneous collection of many different nations? In other words are they still Polish, German, Russian, Iraqi, Moroccan, Indian, etc? Undoubtedly, even generations on, such identities survive as significant political and cultural determinates. Eg, the Ashkenazi - whose main origins lie in eastern Europe - form a colonial aristocracy. But such differences are overlaid by an Israeli commonality. There is an acid test. What are the young men and women of the Israeli Defence Force prepared to die for? The country of their parents or grandparents? Hardly. Their religious sect? A few maybe (on the far right). Or their country? The many wars fought by Israel since 1947-48 surely gives the answer.

In other words there is compelling indirect evidence that Israeli-Jews are conscious of themselves as a nation. We can also refer to the Pew Research Centre's survey of Israeli opinion. We read that 46% of Israeli Jews see themselves as "Jewish first and then Israeli". The bulk of "Jewish first and then Israeli" being accounted for by the three religious categories, ie, the Haredi, Dati and Masorti. Secular Jews - the Hiloni - see themselves as Israeli first, by 59% to 20%. What this shows is that amongst ultra-Orthodox, Orthodox and Conservative Jews religion is of primary concern. That is hardly news. But as the survey makes plain, they still see themselves as Israeli. There is near unanimity, however, when it comes to the central plank of Zionist ideology. Alike secular and religious Israeli Jews agree that

Israel should be a Jewish state, that Jews world wide should be able to migrate to Israel and be granted full citizenship rights.¹⁴

What of the Israeli courts? Does their remit extend to all Jews? No, there is an Israeli Ministry of Justice, an Israeli high court, Israeli labor, military courts, etc. Their jurisdiction is confined to the state of Israel - and Israeli citizens - alone. That applies to the Rabbinic courts too. Hence we come to Israel's marriage laws. They constitute another of comrade Greenstein's objections to the reality of the Israeli-Jewish nation. These laws - inherited from the Ottoman empire - prohibit intermarriage between confessional sects (there is no provision for civil marriage).

For a marriage to gain full legal recognition it must be carried out within the religious community of which both partners are presumed to belong (a practice which necessitates conversion, entry into a couple union or forces people to travel abroad). When it comes to Jews it is the Chief Rabbinate of Israel that has to preside over all marriages (and cases of divorce, etc). Hence secular, reform, etc, Israeli Jews must go to an orthodox rabbi. A cause of bitter complaint.

But once again comrade Greenstein conflates law with social reality. People of both sexes cohabit and in increasing numbers, enter legal unions or even marry through the Paraguayan embassy.¹⁵ The real point, however, is that despite the reactionary marriage laws, and the feigned *religiosity* forced upon millions, Israel's Jews, be they orthodox, conservative, reform or secular, constitute a nation.

Especially amongst the 41.4% who define themselves as secular, there is a powerful assimilation tendency (much less so with the ultra-Orthodox). Secular Jews who originated from the former USSR marry native Israelis (whose parents or grandparents originated from Germany, Poland, Iraq, Morocco, etc).¹⁶ Secular Jews whose parents and grandparents were born in Israel-Palestine marry incomers from the US, Russia, Ukraine, etc. These couples then have children who use Hebrew as their everyday language (elsewhere amongst Jews, Hebrew is a sacred or liturgical language used like Latin once was by the Catholic church).

Reactionary

While communists have no truck with Zionism and condemn the colonial-settler origins of Israel, we recognise that a definite Israeli Jewish nation has come into existence. Nevertheless, *Zionist* Israel must go. That is a basic democratic demand. Zionism is not "a nationalist movement aimed at empowering" Jews (editorial *Morning Star*).¹⁷ Zionism is an *ongoing* colonial settler project. The aim of Zionism is a Jewish state for Jewish people (from the river to the sea). In other words a greater Israel. Unless it is stopped we should expect the expulsion of Israel's 1.6 million Arab citizens and the ethnic cleansing of the West Bank's 2.7 million Palestinian population. Why? Israel faces a fundamental problem. What to do with the people whose land it is bent on robbing? Zionism cannot permit the more biologically fertile Palestinians to grow into a majority within Israel, that is for sure. Hence the Zionist talk of a demographic time bomb.

On the other hand, to demand the immediate abolition of Israel, not the Zionist regime, and the creation of a single Palestinian state in which Hebrews - whose biggest group consider themselves secular, are to be granted religious, not national rights, is a proposition which I regard as fundamentally undemocratic: a proposition, in truth, if it were put in practice, would reverse the poles of oppression.

There are some 6.1 million Israeli Jews. About 10-11 million Palestinians worldwide; but only 6-7 million of

them live in the occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank, Israel proper and the near abroad of Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. Hence, unless there is the forcible movement of peoples, eg, the deportation of Jews, the rescinding of Palestinian citizenship rights and mass deportation from Jordan (where they are highly integrated), the round-up and expulsion of Palestinian workers from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Lebanon, etc, it is fair to say then, that the projected single Palestinian state would include roughly equivalent numbers of Hebrews and Arabs.

Comrades in the Middle East, in my view, have every reason to include in their programmes specific pledges and assurances which go towards overcoming or at least diminishing Hebrew fears and phobias, and thereby help diminish the antagonism between Hebrews and Palestinians and the wider Arab nation. Branding Israeli-Jews as oppressors and nothing but oppressors, telling them that they will be recognised only in terms of their religious affiliations, that they would have no common national rights, plays into the hands of the worst Zionist scaremongers.

That was true, unfortunately, of the 1968 Palestine National Covenant (or PLO charter). It baldly maintained that Palestine is the "homeland" of the "Palestinian Arab people" who are an "integral part of the Arab nation" (article one). Palestine is defined as having the boundaries of the pre-1947 British mandate territory (article two). The only Jews considered legitimate Palestinians were those "who had normally resided in Palestine until the beginning of the Zionist invasion" (article five).¹⁸

The beginning of the "Zionist invasion" dates back, I presume to the 1880s, when the first European Jewish colonists trickled into the Ottoman controlled Holy Land. So what is to happen to those Jews whose ancestors arrived in Palestine with the "Zionist invasion"? Even if we fast-forward the invasion date that still amounts to the majority of Israeli Jews. In 1948, some 65% of them originated from elsewhere. Today only the tiniest minority could trace their ancestry back to the Jewish inhabitants of 19th century Palestine.

Though many of the formulations contained in the 1968 Palestine National Covenant has since been disowned by the PLO, they are, to all intents and purposes, still upheld by sections of the left (comrade Greenstein included). As I have just remarked above, some are generously prepared to grant Jews religious rights within their proposed single Palestinian state. National rights are an altogether different matter. After all, in the Marxist tradition at least, that would mean countenancing the *right* of Hebrews to some form of autonomy, or in the worst case scenario, even forming their own separate state.

Recognising the existential danger presented by a 6.1 million-strong enemy within - a militarily defeated, oppressed and, one would guess, a bitterly resentful population - others, logically, demand that all post-invasion Jews should be expelled from Palestine. I distinctly remember squeezing through one of the narrow gates to Hyde Park, some time in 2008-09, in order to join one of those huge Gaza solidarity demonstrations and immediately encountering Weyman Bennett, a member of the SWP's central committee. He was noisily megaphoning: "Jews out of Israel ... send them back to where they come from ... New York ... or wherever." I was appalled. True, not sparklingly eloquent. But the message was all too clear. And he is far from unique.

A better expressed example would be Nahuel Moreno (1924-87), the Argentinean Trotskyite leader. He was equally strident. Writing in his journal *Correo Internacional*, Moreno declared that "there is no other way to

PALESTINE

destroy the Zionist state than throwing out the Zionists” (September 1982). And if anyone thought there were “non-Zionist Jewish residents” he made his position quite explicit: “those imaginary inhabitants do not exist.” The destruction of the Zionist state, he continued, “necessarily implies the removal of the present inhabitants”. Otherwise this would mean “accepting the accomplished fact of the Jewish occupation of Israel.”¹⁹

Opposing demands for the removal of the Israeli Jewish population does not mean sliding into Zionist apologies. Those leftwingers such as Max Shachtman, Hal Draper and Al Glotzer, who in the name of Israeli-Jewish self-determination, defended 1948 Israel were clearly wrong precisely because it meant turning a blind eye to *real* oppression and forced removal ... of the Palestinians. Most Jews arrived in Palestine - from Europe - explicitly or implicitly, determined to displace the Palestinian natives. Contrary to Zionist myth the territory was not an empty space lacking permanent inhabitants.

Israel was planned to be what Karl Kautsky categorised as a “work colony”. Not an “exploitation colony”.²⁰ That was the Zionist project - labor, revisionist and religious. Palestinians were therefore not economically required to serve as cheap labour by the conquerors. They were surplus to requirement. An obstacle that one way or the other would have to be cowed, uprooted and dispossessed of their land. Colonists would provide *all* the classes in Zionist Israel.

Maybe in the 1930s and 40s it would have been legitimate to argue that recent Jewish migrants should head back to, throw in their lot with, and bank on a socialist victory in Europe. However, a moment’s reflection shows why not. The abject failure of the working class movement to prevent the Nazi coup wholly mitigates against that approach. Jews were quite justified when they fled continental Europe and demanded that Britain, the US, etc opened their doors. Without that there was Palestine and the Zionist alternative. True, many on the left feared that Palestine itself was a death-trap for escaping Jews. And, of course, it was always right to have fought with every ounce of available strength for the defeat of Nazi barbarism and for working class rule in Europe. Nevertheless, between 1933-45 returning Jews to Europe would have been to make oneself complicit in mass murder. We certainly know that now.

So on balance, at least in terms of the region, it would have been better for the Arab and Jewish left to have unitedly campaigned for the immediate withdrawal of the British and French occupying powers, the termination of the 1922 League of Nations mandates and re-establishing a greater Syria - roughly along the old Ottoman borders and therefore incorporating most of what is today Syria, Jordan, Israel-Palestine and Lebanon. A first step towards pan-Arab unity under working class leadership. Deprived of an imperial sponsor, European Jewish migrants could then be encouraged to develop their culture, contribute their talents and democratically assimilate.

That does not rule out the possibility of a Jewish autonomous area or even a state. Trotsky speculated about such a scenario in the late 1930s. “Once socialism has become master of our planet or at least of its most important sections”, he argued, “it will have unimaginable resources in all domains.” That could encompass “great migrations”. Not “compulsory displacements” and the creation of new ghettos, Trotsky stressed. Rather mass migrations “freely consented to, or rather demanded by certain nationalities or parts of nationalities.”

In particular Trotsky had in mind the “dispersed Jews” who might want to be “reassembled in the same community”. They would, he promised, find “a

sufficiently extensive and rich spot under the sun.”²¹

The ever growing Nazi menace and the imminent prospect that war would bring the extermination of European Jews haunted Trotsky. Holding out the prospect of future mass migrations was clearly in the absence of being able to do anything decisive in the way of stopping Hitler. The bloody shadow of the swastika already hung over much of Europe.

As an aside, in my opinion, socialism will in all likelihood not mean sliding into Zionist myth and terms of the past and present a tall tale symptom of social decay, persecution and desperation. Getting to the desired destination is often very costly and risky for the migrant. Many are ripped off. Not a few die. Life thereafter is often precarious, hard and deeply alienating.

Socialism would do away with all that. Through the mass transfer of *wealth and technique* from the advanced countries to the rest of the world, the standard of living will be quickly evened up everywhere. Doubtless people will travel far and wide for all manner of reasons. Nonetheless, I suspect that mostly they will be more than content to return to their homeland where their families, friends and familiar cultural surroundings are. Far from socialism ushering in another age of mass migrations, it will put an end to them. Global citizens will have rich, deep and enduring local connections.

Either way, while Trotsky remained convinced that the socialist revolution is the only “realistic solution” to the “Jewish question”, in June 1940 he was willing to concede that if “Jewish workers and peasants asked for an independent state”, which they were not being given by Britain in mandate Palestine, “if they want it, the proletariat will give it.”²²

Not that we should completely rule out population movements in the meantime. Under present circumstances a good case can be made for the orderly transfer of Israeli settlers back from the West Bank. They could be relocated in Israel in perfect safety and without too much personal trauma. Yes, I say, Israeli troops, watch towers, check points, special roads, exclusive settlements ... and citizens must go ... and substantial reparations be paid over to the Palestinians.

Certainly if Israeli settlements are allowed to continue to grow and asphyxiatingly spread across the face of the West Bank, a Palestinian state will become as real as the prospects of American natives regaining their lost territories. But it is not too late ... yet.

Two political economies

Incidentally, the position of Rhodesian or South African whites is in no way analogous to that of Israeli Jews. Here, as I, and comrade Machover, have pointed out on numerous occasions, we are dealing with different political economies (I came to this conclusion, second hand, through reading Kautsky; comrade Machover arrived at the same conclusion, through his own empirical investigations).

Because the whites in South Africa presided over an *exploitation* colony, not a *work* colony, they never, nor could they, ever form a nation. They were the supervisors, the police captains, the farm managers, the capitalists, the political and state elite (equivalent in that sense to the Normans in post-1066 England). Nor in any meaningful territorial terms did they form a historically constituted majority. Eg, every ‘white’ area in apartheid South Africa - they predominately spoke Afrikaans or English - was also *permanently* inhabited by numerous house servants, and these little enclaves relied upon a small army of incoming workers who commuted daily from the surrounding townships. And, of course,

around the white areas lived the 80% black and coloured majority, who were decisive to the workings of the overall economy).

The same cannot be said of Israeli Jews. In central Israel, especially along the Tel Aviv-Haifa coastal strip, they form a clear and stable majority. Of course, Jews are the supervisors, the police captains, the farm managers, the capitalists, the political and state elite. But they are also the proletariat. Indeed one of the key aims of Labor Zionism - till the 1970s the dominant strand in Zionism - was the proletarianisation of incoming Jewish migrants. Meanwhile, with the connivance of the Histadrut, the Labor-Zionist trade union confederation, the native Arab-Palestinian population were to be excluded from the economy or made completely marginal (the fate of natives in other work colonies such as Canada, the US and Australia).

A non-Zionist Israel

I think it is now obvious that Palestinians, by their own efforts, in isolation, cannot possibly establish a single state over the whole of pre-1947 Palestine in which the Hebrew speaking Jews have religious but not national rights. They simply lack the military muscle and international connections. Added to which, of course, the Palestinians are debilitatingly split territorially between Hamas in Gaza and Fatah on the West Bank, and therefore cannot achieve anything beyond abject surrender or hopeless resistance.

So we come to the vital question of agency and the determining relationship between means and ends. Agency and solution forming a dialectical unity. There is no realistic possibility of the Palestinians overpowering Israel. It is not only the regional superpower. It is backed by the global superpower. The logical conclusion of this, in Marxist terms, is a working class perspective to overthrow the regimes of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Tunisia, etc. In other words the Arab revolution. Combined with working class leadership, such a perspective can seriously envisage abolishing Zionist Israel and ending the national oppression of the Palestinians.

Obviously, the call for an Arab revolution is a matter of strategy, not a tactic. How things are presented in terms of propaganda and agitation is, of course, tactical. But the Arab revolution is, in its own way, on a par with Polish, Italian, German unification in 19th century Europe. There is an Arab nation and, politically, there is every reason to fight for its unification.

True, there have been various Arab unity projects in recent times. Eg, Nasser’s United Arab Republic and the attempts at Ba’athist unity (Iraq and Syria). All failed. Not only did they involve conflict with other countries in the region, such as Iran. There was the continued oppression of national minorities inbuilt into them too. The Kurds, Berbers, etc were to be permanently subordinated to the Arabs.

Our task, in the 21st century, is not to turn back the clock and revive Arab nationalism. No, what we are looking forwards to is working class leadership within Egypt, Syria, Jordan, etc and beyond. Doubtless the idea of Arab unification is more popular in Egypt than Morocco. The task of communists, however, is not to carry out opinion polls and act according to their ever changing results. We must chart a route map for world revolution. Arab unification is a democratic demand and the working class has every interest in making it their cause, as did Marx and Engels in Germany.

However, having come to the recognition of the impossibility of the Palestinians achieving a one-state solution, and the necessity of an Arab revolution, comrade Greenstein calls

for a limiting “bourgeois revolution”. In other words, if the working class takes the lead, it should stop half-way, hand power to the Arab bourgeois, so that this class can ‘unfreeze’ organic development and allow the Arab world to follow the path blazed by 18th and 19th century Europe. Presumably this bourgeois Arabia then conquers Israel by force and liberates the oppressed Palestinians. A recipe for a bloody, possibly a nuclear war ... and also an elementary failure to recognise the existing imperialist hierarchy. Despite that evolutionist hypothesis, comrade Greenstein blithely informs us that no struggle “can be conducted on the basis of a hypothetical future.”²³ Surely all struggles are. Even the most primitive of our animal ancestors had brains that could project forward to a “hypothetical future” ... eg, I hear you, I smell you, I see you ... I want to eat you.

Nevertheless, if I have got him right, what comrade Greenstein proposes, is a mirror image of Russian Menshevism. What I envisage, by contrast, is an Arab Bolshevism. The revolution must proceed uninterruptedly. Conceivably, if the working class can take the lead in realising Arab unity, it can then lead the Arab socialist revolution *from the position of state power* - one phase overlapping with, feeding into, making way for the other.

Working class forces in the Arab world must stop trailing behind petty bourgeois nationalism and liberal imperialism. That is for sure. Arab unification must become the cause of the *socialist* working class. Then, instead of seeing the Arabs as enemies, there is the realistic possibility of the working class in Israel breaking from their own ruling class, taking power and ending Israel as a Zionist state. Socialist forces outside Israel would certainly lend them support and assistance.

Does this perspective mean perpetuating national oppression? Obviously no, not at all. Does it mean national oppression in a new, reversed, form. Again, obviously no, not at all. Where a national question exists there should be a militant fight to ensure full equality. That must include, where politically necessary, the right to self-determination up to the right to form a separate state. A non-Zionist Israel should, therefore, be offered full unity, associate status or independence. So should the Kurdish and Berber people. However, our preference, almost needless to say, is to maximise unity, in the first place the unity of the working class. So, if the communists were successful, within an Arab Union of States there would be religious, linguistic and national minorities. We certainly want national self-determination to be exercised in favour of unity.

Comrade Machover envisages a federal Arab Union. I have no problem with that as a transitional arrangement. Surely, though, we should wherever possible seek centralised unity. The most effective, the most democratic, the most powerful form of working class rule.

This was the programme of that part of the working class in Germany that acted under the guidance of the Marx-Engels team and the *Rheinische Zeitung* in 1848. Doubtless the demand for German unification was stronger in this petty state compared with some other petty state. There were dozens of them. But communists in Germany did not bow to backward narrow mindedness and local fears and prejudices. No, they took the lead and fought for a single republic and indivisible unity. That did not make them nationalists. Prussian Germany was to be broken up. German Poland was to be separated off and reunited with Austrian and Russian Poland. A two state solution, if you like. Marx and Engels were insistent on that.

Self-determination

Marxists do not deny the right of the Israeli-Jewish nation to self-determination on the basis of some

MOMENTUM

Cohering the Labour left

Carla Roberts of Labour Party Marxists reports on the first meeting of the Grassroots Momentum steering committee on April 22 in London

This was a surprisingly positive and constructive meeting. Surprising for a number of reasons. Firstly, the committee was elected exactly six weeks previously at Grassroots Momentum’s first, fractious conference on March 11.¹ And if “a week is a long time in politics”, these six weeks certainly felt like an eternity. Not a single decision has been made and the only thing the majority of committee members had agreed on was to *oppose* the proposal to intervene at the Momentum “conference” on March 25² with our own leaflet. The rest of the email communications were concerned with an argument over the length of our lunch break (30 minutes, since you ask) and if there should be a pooled fare system (no).

Secondly, Momentum itself is disappearing down the plughole with ever-increasing speed, which naturally has an impact on the left within it. Momentum meetings are becoming smaller and smaller. The demobilisation and depoliticisation of Momentum branches that followed Jon Lansman’s January 10 coup³ has become even worse in the last 10 days. As if most sensible people on the left weren’t disillusioned enough about Labour’s grim chances at the polls, they then received an email from Team Momentum telling them to stand down.

Yes, there are strict electoral rules and laws on election spending (as a bunch of Tory Party MPs has recently found). But to demand that Momentum branches effectively stop meeting in such a heightened political period - because “public meetings” could be seen as Labour Party campaigning - is adding to the sense of demoralisation. The right continues to fight dirty and with every trick they have, but Momentum is concerned about sticking to the letter of the law. Another trap Corbyn has stepped into, unfortunately.

Thirdly, the GM steering committee is made up of a lot of people who - how to put this nicely - really hate each other’s guts. The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty (which has six members and supporters on the SC) have played a deeply disgusting role in the entirely fabricated ‘anti-Semitism scandal’ in the Labour Party, joining into the witch-hunt of Ken Livingstone and, of course, Jackie Walker, who also sits on the GM committee (and also has about half a dozen allies there).

Considering all these factors, I expected a rather fractious, ill-tempered meeting with very little outcome. But I guess we can thank Theresa May for focusing our minds. The fact election, but his 1913 *Marxism and the national question* comes from 1913 and came highly recommended by Lenin. Note, Lenin employed the same ‘objective’ criteria when writing about nations and national self-determination. No less to the point, it provides a highly serviceable checklist of what does and what does not constitute a nation.

Under the experienced chairmanship of Matt Wrack (leader of the Fire Brigade’s Union), the meeting started with a frank and open assessment of the current situation and the general election. There was a healthy sense of realism evident. Everybody in the room agreed that Labour’s chances of winning the election were pretty slim. To the committee’s credit, nobody voiced the moronic idea peddled by the likes of the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party that Theresa May has called this election because of a *weakness* of the Tory Party. Matt Wrack for example admitted to being “quite demoralised when I heard about the election”, because clearly Theresa May has called it for one reason and one reason alone: to crush the Labour Party and increase the Tory majority, aided by the entire media establishment.

Speaker after speaker bemoaned the fact that the right wing in the Labour Party continues with its assault on Corbyn and his leadership. Worse, Corbyn continues to let them to get away with it in the vague hope of ‘party unity’. Clearly, the right has not signed up to any truce, as can be witnessed by the dozen or so MPs who have said they would rather not stand again than run under a Corbyn leadership.

John Woodcock MP took the biscuit when he pronounced that he “will not countenance ever voting to make Jeremy Corbyn Britain’s prime minister”.⁴ In our view, Woodcock should be expelled, along with Tom Watson, Ian McNicol and, of course, good old Tony Blair. Blair has come out the woodwork to call for a “tactical” vote against Labour Party candidates who support Brexit - an offence that would have seen a left-winger expelled immediately by the NEC’s rigged compliance unit. But instead of cleansing the party of its saboteurs, the NEC has decided to prevent Labour Party members from having any say over the choosing of parliamentary candidates - which is of course part of the civil war against the left.

Graham Bash (a member of the Labour Representation Committee) was perhaps the most ‘officially optimistic’ speaker on the day. He thought that “we need to fight to win and we need to give a really positive message. We should say that we can win against the odds. We should not spread demoralisation and fear. Because the cost of failure will be huge and the left will face a carnival of reaction.”

True, of course, it would be pointless to start any fight in order to *lose*. But other speakers pointed to the fact that “demoralisation” will be equally widespread (or worse) if we pretend that we, for example, just need to point to Corbyn’s “10 pledges” (as committee member Jan Pollock suggested) and hope that it will win Labour the elections. Because it will not.

Most on the steering committee thought that the Labour Party would manage to close the current gap in the polls somewhat come June 8 (difficult not to), but that the Tories would very likely win. Which would of course lead to the next leadership challenge, probably fronted by Yvette Cooper, who has done nothing to dispel those rumours. In this situation, “we must convince Corbyn not to give in, not to step down, but hold on and continue to fight to transform the Labour Party”, said Matt Wrack, to the visible agreement of the meeting.

“Any candidate who is not Corbyn or McDonnell will be a defeat for the left”, comrade Wrack added - though some people later questioned if

McDonnell really is still a reliable ally. There aren’t just his various U-turns and cringing apologies - some in the room also have not forgiven him for breaking his promise to send a video message to GM’s launch conference. Clearly, that hope was a bit naive. After all, the Corbyn team (which includes McDonnell) had *sanctioned* the Lansman coup. Why would he then support an organisation that was founded in opposition to that coup? My guess is that McDonnell nodded his head politely when the request was put to him, but never intended to fulfil it.

In any case, most seemed agreed on the need to continue to support Corbyn and McDonnell when they’re being attacked - but to criticise them when they are attacking socialist principles or continuing to try and appease the Labour right.

The meeting went on to decide a couple of concrete actions:

1. GM will publish a weekly email and launch a website, which will “do what Momentum does not do”, as one speaker put it. The intention is, for example, to publish good, political scripts for phone banking sessions; give people ideas on running stalls; working with other campaigns and encouraging Momentum members to go beyond the official Labour canvassing tactic of simply surveying voting intentions and instead have actual political discussions with people on the doorstep. There has been a suggestion that the website should feature comments on disputed issues like Labour’s apparently “united” climb down over immigration. We have to see if that will be picked up by the small team running the website and email bulletin.
2. GM will organise a post-election conference of the ‘Labour left’ on June 17 (or a week later). The idea is to use this meeting to fight against the likely disillusionment of the Labour left post June 8 and to convey the message that - no matter what the outcome of the elections - the key task remains: to transform the Labour Party to make it fit for purpose.

Who is going to prepare it? Will we allow a proper discussion on any amendments?

Should only those groups ‘affiliated’ to GM be allowed to send representatives? Or do we want to encourage those in branches with pro-Lansman majorities to come along? How many per branch? All of these issues are still being discussed. It is no doubt a good idea to get the Labour left together in the same room. Even better if we can actually discuss what we think is the right strategy for transforming the Labour Party. An excellent initiative, in our view. But it should be transparent, politically honest and prepared to openly say what needs to be done to transform the Labour Party in a meaningful way - primarily, to take on the right. Corbyn is being undermined, briefed against and belittled by his ‘colleagues’ every step of the way. Unless we take on the saboteurs, the left will lose this fight and with it the best political opportunity it has had for many decades.

This begs the question as to why we should place such emphasis on the LRC and CLPD. They’ve been around a while, that’s true. But so has cancer. At least one person on the conference arrangements committee wants to make the staging of a conference *dependent* on the active participating of those groups.

But the CLPD - just like Momentum - has consciously decided to support Corbyn *without any criticism*. It has given up the fight for mandatory selection. It shows no interest in taking on the right in the party. The recent CLPD AGM voted against condemning Jon Lansman’s coup in Momentum. Why would they want to get involved in an event initiated by GM, an organisation that was founded *in opposition* to the coup?

We don’t know what the LRC leadership thinks about anything at the moment - maybe even they don’t - but it is probably safe to assume it is along similar lines to those of the CLPD. After all, they have now closed shop and will re-open only after the June 8 election.

The politics of Red Labour are another matter entirely. This group exists only online and does not really have any identifiable politics, as it is made up of people from a variety of political backgrounds. Clearly, while we should invite those organisations to participate in our conference, we should not subordinate ourselves to them or their politics. In particular the CLPD’s ‘strategy’ towards the Labour Party is fatally flawed. And even if the CLPD and LRC agreed to sponsor the conference (very doubtful), it begs the question if they would actually do *anything* with any motions or statements agreed there. It would simply be empty posturing, not the beginning of a real campaign to consciously and actively transform the Labour Party. So what’s the point? ●

Detailed plans for the day have yet to be finalised, but the general idea is to have a smaller ‘strategy meeting’ during the day and a bigger rally in the late afternoon. Of course, those details are the place where the devil likes to hide and the preliminary discussions of the seven comrades planning the event have shown a fair amount of disagreements on how to move forward.

Should the strategy meeting allow motions to be heard? Or encourage groups to bring general position papers on the future of the Labour Party (that are not up for voting)? Should we invite both? Or should there be a general statement instead?

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Notes

1. For a report, see *Weekly Worker* March 16.
2. For a report, see *Weekly Worker* March 30.
3. *Weekly Worker* January 12.
4. <https://www.politicshome.com/news/uk/political-parties/labour-party/news/85170/labour-mp-john-woodcock-i-cant-vote-jeremy-corbyn>.



Matt Wrack:
able chair

weekly worker

Market panic comes to an end

Not back to normal

The centre-right and the centre-left suffered defeat, but the markets are no longer in a panic. **Yassamine Mather** looks at the French ... and the Iranian presidential elections

The sense of relief in the official media and financial markets was tangible on Monday April 24. A pro-EU former investment banker who wants to reduce taxes and increase working hours had secured his position for the next round of French presidential elections. Reporters and analysts were telling us the populist trends of late 2015 and 2016 - Brexit and the election of Donald Trump - were over, the world was back to normal. Of course nothing is further from the truth. The populist extreme right Front National had secured 21 percent of the vote, while the candidates considered to be radical left - Jean-Luc Mélenchon, Philippe Poutou and Nathalie Arthaud - had managed to gain a similar percentage of the vote, but *divided between them*. The two parties which have hitherto dominated the 5th Republic¹, the centre-right Republican Party and the centre-left Socialist Party will not be part of the second and final round of voting, and although Emmanuel Macron is very likely to win on May 7, two weeks is a long time in politics and the final result should not be taken for granted.

Iranians, who are comparing presidential elections in the Islamic Republic of Iran with those in France, praise the absence of vetting of candidates by the Council of Guardians, and the fact that there is no interference by an unelected religious supreme leader in elections in Western Europe. On the face of it Iran's presidential elections are less democratic than those in France, or, for that matter, the coming general election in the United Kingdom. However, for those blinded by the merits of bourgeois democracy, it is worth quoting Alain Badiou in how capital intervenes directly and openly in elections held in Western Europe (not to forget the enormous role of money and electoral funds in US presidential elections).

Writing in March 2017, Badiou writes:

Emmanuel Macron, for his part, is a creature brought out of nothing by our true masters, the latest capitalists, those who have bought up all the papers as a precaution. If he believes and says that Guiana is an island or that Piraeus is a man, it is because he knows that no one in his camp has ever been committed by what they said.²

It is certainly true that capital's control of the mass media determines the news agenda, making elections remarkably biased towards the right:

The conservative and reformist orientations constitute the central parliamentarist bloc in the advanced capitalist societies: the left and right in France, the Republicans and Democrats in the USA, etc ... conservatives and reformists a shared hegemony - mediated by the electoral machinery, the parties and their clientele - that everywhere



Just two candidates left and it is not hard to guess who will win

eliminates any serious prospect of the fascists or communists holding state power. This is the dominant form of the state in what we call "the west". This itself requires a third term, a powerful common contractual base at once both external and internal to the two main orientations. Clearly, in our societies, neoliberal capitalism is this base. Unlimited freedom of enterprise and self-enrichment, absolute respect for private property - guaranteed by the judicial system and heavy policing - confidence in the banks, youth education, competition under the cover of "democracy", appetite for "success", repeated assertions of the harmful and utopian character of equality: such is the matrix of the consensually agreed-upon "freedoms".³

It is worth debating whether this form of 'democracy' is really superior to the one exercised in Iran's Islamic Republic, where we also witness a matrix of consensually agreed-upon "freedoms", albeit within the confines of a Shia version of neoliberal capital.

Going back to the French elections,

who is Emmanuel Macron - this latest darling of the markets and therefore the media. Trained in the prestigious École Nationale d'Administration (ENA), Macron joined the French civil service in 2004, only to leave (paying the severance fee to buy himself out of the civil service contract) in order to join the Rothschild bank as an investment banker, where he managed to make his own fortune. A member of the Socialist Party from 2006 to 2009, rising to deputy secretary-general. By 2014, no longer in the SP, he was nevertheless minister of economics in the Manuel Valls government (2014-16). Always to the right of the SP, his role was clear: he had responsibility for deregulating the French economy, showing great promise in that role, mocking his SP colleagues for "taxing the rich".

By August 2016 the former 'socialist' economic minister was setting up his own political movement, En Marche! (Let's Go!), "open to everyone of progressive views" and "aimed at younger voters". Given Hollande's poll rating in the autumn of 2016, falling to as low as 11% to 15% of the vote, Macron

decided it was time to test his chances, and the press and media in France and indeed throughout Europe have given him their full backing.

Although it is likely that Macron will defeat Marine Le Pen to win the presidency, it is difficult to envisage how this victory will affect the parliamentary elections on June 11 and 18. En Marche! has no party organisation in the country's 577 constituencies, although his 'movement' intends to contest many of these National Assembly seats. Macron will be faced with the unenviable task of selecting candidates from the volunteers of En Marche! He might have defeated Francois Fillon (Republican Party) and Benoit Hamon (Socialist Party) in the first round of the presidential elections, but he is unlikely to achieve a deal with either party before June.

It is amazing that the same media which assures us every day that major political figures, party leaders and heads of state must be charismatic, is so full of praise for Macron. This boring non-entity lacks any personality, clearly

has no views of his own, borrows ideas from the two centre parties, Republican and Socialist, and yet is feted as the saviour of globalisation and EU, for the sole reason that the opponent, Marine Le Pen, is worse.

Of course, like the conservative extreme rightwing clerics in Iran, Marine Le Pen is worse. She represents everything we abhor: intolerance of other religions and races; narrow reactionary nationalism. In the words of Badiou: "Marine Le Pen is the modernised - and thus feminised - version of what the French far right has always been. A tireless Pétainism." Someone who inherited the leadership of the Front National from her father, Jean Marie Le Pen, a man who believes that the "gas chambers used to kill Jews in the holocaust were only a 'detail' of history." Despite her attempts to distance herself from her father, Marine Le Pen's xenophobic language is no better than his. Yet the leader of the 'free world', Donald Trump, and the reactionary dictator in Moscow, Vladimir Putin, are united in supporting her candidacy in both rounds of the presidential elections, and the wonderful press and media we have don't seem to bat an eyelid at this rather bizarre turn of events.

So, to sum up, even without a religious leader to 'advise' candidates if they can or cannot stand, without a guardian council vetting candidates, the next round of presidential elections in France is, even by the standards of bourgeois democracy, a very poor exercise, giving limited choice to the electorate and in many ways no better than presidential elections in Iran's Islamic Republic. As in the May presidential elections in Iran, voters are left with a choice between bad and worse: a neoliberal capitalist candidate promising reform (Macron in France, Hassan Rouhani in Iran) and xenophobic, protectionist nationalists (Marine Le Pen in France, a range of conservative reactionaries in Iran).

We clearly need a different kind of politics if we are to rescue ourselves from the current quagmire ●

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Notes

1. France's current republican system of government, established by Charles de Gaulle on 4 October 1958.
2. <https://www.versobooks.com/authors/77-alain-badiou>.
3. <https://www.versobooks.com/authors/77-alain-badiou>.

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