



weekly **worker**



Widely derided, but does he represent an alternative to the 'equalities agenda'?

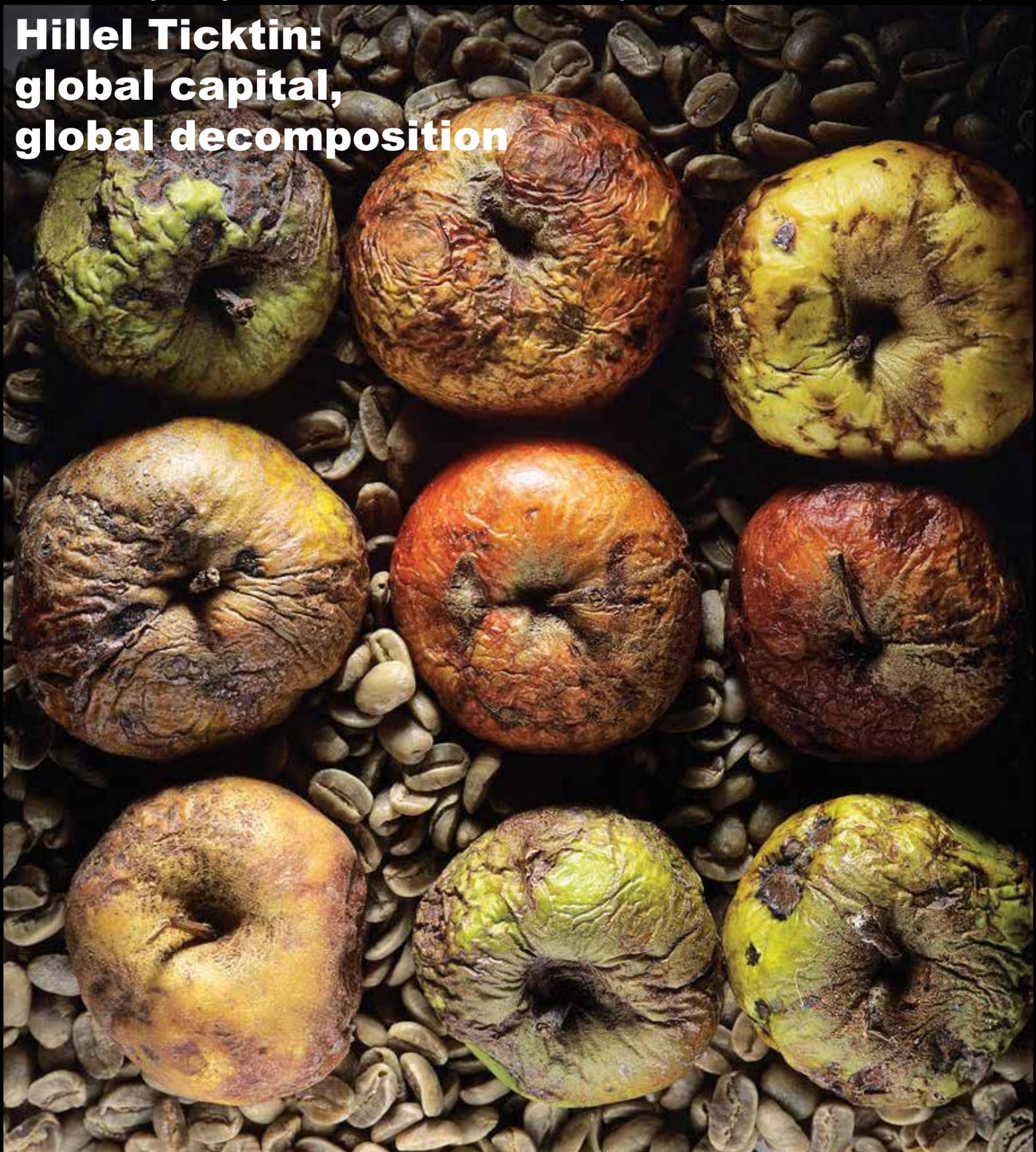
- Letters and debate
- Labour NEC elections
- Poststructuralism
- Italian elections

No 1186 Thursday January 18 2018

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

£1/€1.10

**Hillel Ticktin:
global capital,
global decomposition**



LETTERS

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

Centenaries

It is right and proper that publications such as the *Weekly Worker* have devoted time and space to commemorating the centenary of the Russian Revolution of 1917 with articles, translations and polemics regarding the nature of Bolshevism. Not in order to engage in some kind of historical cheer-leading, but rather as a way of coming to terms with the great successes - and, equally, the mistakes and defeats - of our movement in the past.

As workers' movement partisans look ahead to the new year, 2018 will, of course, bring with it a whole host of other important centenaries in working class history. Perhaps the most significant milestone in this regard will be an event on which the fate of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 hinged - the German revolution of November 1918.

As the Bolsheviks well knew, Russia was a backward country with an overwhelming peasant majority and thus the continued survival of the revolution there hinged on the European revolution - crucially in the form of the German working class taking power. For without a corresponding revolutionary government in Germany the young soviet republic would be condemned to isolation and inevitable defeat. It was surrounded by a sea of hostile imperialist powers and subject to the overarching economic dictates of the world division of labour.

Not only had the Bolsheviks predicted the German revolution, but their seizure of power also provided important inspiration for it. This should perhaps come of little surprise: revolutionary ideas and lessons were always transmitted across the national boundaries of the international workers' movement. As recent historiography in particular has underlined, Lenin and the Bolsheviks had always 'looked west' (and had lived there in exile for significant parts of their lives) for political and strategic guidance - particularly to the inspiration of the mass Marxist parties of the Second International, to which the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party was itself affiliated.

What is fascinating about the German revolution of November 1918 is that, by this point, the poles have in many senses been reversed, with the Germans, Austrians and others in western Europe seeking to do 'what the Russians did'. As I have argued elsewhere, and shall explore in more detail in articles and translations in 2018, this attempt to emulate the Bolsheviks did not come without a fair share of confusion, crucial errors and key mistakes.

Ultimately, of course, the German revolution ended in failure and this failure was a crucial factor in the degeneration of the Russian Revolution into the monstrosity of Stalinism. Getting to grips historically with these failures between 1918 and 1923 will be a focus of my own research in the coming period, and this will hopefully find reflection in further articles, translations of German-language source material and much more besides.

Ben Lewis
Sheffield

Savage paradox

There are no 'conspiracy theories', whether anti-Zionist or anti-Semitic, in the observation that the ruling class of Israel overlaps with that of the USA and several European imperialist powers.

Unless you hold the view that the Marxist theory of the state is itself a conspiracy theory. Marx's view was that each capitalist state does not

belong to the whole population of a capitalist country, but that the state comprises the executive committee of the capitalists of that country for defence of their interests, both against their own working class and against the capitalists of other countries. The citizenship rights of a capitalist in a given capitalist country, therefore, gives them in effect not only the 'normal' rights of citizenship applicable to other classes of the population, but in effect a share of ownership of that capitalist state. The history of inter-capitalist, inter-imperialist wars in Europe, including two world wars, bears this out.

Zionism has introduced a modification of this. The Israeli Law of Return gives citizenship rights to all Jews born in other countries, subject to some conditions that are part religious, part political. This leads to a situation, not on an individual or incidental basis, where a substantial group of bourgeois has citizenship rights - ie, ownership rights - over both the Israeli capitalist state and the US capitalist state or that of some European countries, whichever they are indigenous citizens of, on the basis of their Jewish birth. Therefore, we have overlapping ruling classes between Israel and a number of European and North American capitalist-imperialist states.

Dubbing this theory a 'conspiracy theory' therefore amounts to so dubbing the Marxist theory of the state. For this understanding is simply the application of Marx's theory of the state to an updated set of factual data, including the existence of the Israeli Law of Return and the known fact that the section of the American and European bourgeoisies that are Jewish is far higher, percentage wise, than the percentage of Jews in the general population of these states. This part of the bourgeoisie is substantial, and in North America particularly, quite formidable in size and social power, derived from property.

In proscribing this theory, Labour Against the Witchhunt has not proscribed any conspiracy theory, whether anti-Zionist, anti-Semitic or of any other kind. In fact, it has not proscribed any special theory at all. For this is not a special theory. It is simply Marx's theory of the state applied to the data available today.

Therefore, in proscribing this theory, LAW has proscribed the Marxist theory of the state. It has therefore proscribed one of the core elements of Marxism. The Jewish communalism and chauvinism of some of its leaders, combined with the guilty liberalism of others, has driven it to adopt the kind of anti-communist exclusion clause that the left should be fighting to abolish in the labour movement as a whole.

That is a savage paradox.

Ian Donovan
Socialist Fight

Clark crisis

For the past few years, Tony Clark has been informing readers of the *Weekly Worker* of his journey away from Marxism. In the last issue, for instance, Clark pontificates that: "I have argued that Marxism contains flaws - some of them are quite serious and are of a fundamental nature" (Letters, January 11). Unfortunately, the great man neglects to tell us poor deluded Marxists what these flaws are.

Clark does, however, chastise Marx for failing to realise, as Clark does, that "there is no permanent crisis of capitalism". It is fortuitous that Marx did not theorise a "permanent crisis" because such a 'theory' would be nonsense. A crisis is the culmination of a combination of circumstances, where things reach an intense turning point, such that things cannot carry on as before. To talk of a "permanent crisis" is to totally misunderstand the

concept. It is about time, regarding the veracity of Marxism, that Tony Clark either put up or shut up!

Ted Hankin
email

Wrong ends

With reference to the letter from David John Douglass - blimey, how many wrong ends of how many separate sticks can one comrade grasp at a single point in time, I ask myself (January 11)?

All accompanied by the trundling out of that tired old nonsense about pukka "northern" working class citizens being abused by soft-handed and soft-headed southern liberals (or, otherwise, by somehow 'uniquely' exploitative southerner elites).

Yes, all tired old head-banging baloney, but also disgracefully divisive and destructive stuff. Most notably, by way of anything it offered in place of a sparkling unity of horizons, in the glaring absence of any proposals for adventurously inspirational or genuinely consciousness-raising action.

Probably the kindest thing to be said is: 'Good luck with your ambitions of turning Labour into a genuinely socialist element within society, comrade.' Certainly, going by past evidence of similar escapades, this latest version is going to need all the luck it can rustle up.

Anyway, sorry I can't spend more time on this cosy little chat. I and other like-minded disobedients have got a truly humongous party to organise. It's one dedicated to the development of what might best be summarised as 'eco-communism'. That being not only a force rooted firmly within the soil of Marxism-Leninism, as well as Trotskyism, but also a beautifully modern-world entity. One designed primarily for the overthrow of capitalism, it goes without emphasising, and as a direct corollary also for the elimination of all associated imperialist barbarisms.

A bit of a challenge, as readily we admit. You know, what with the torrent of lies, phony narratives and black agendas being pumped out so relentlessly and so ruthlessly by the ruling class and a multiplicity of their agencies. But, hey, we 'freshly-evolved' eco-communists are confident we'll achieve our objectives in the long run.

That's assuming we manage to retain the necessary patience and are granted the benefit of a fair wind. I say those two things in light of Lenin's wise words that "patience is the essential ingredient for any revolutionary"; in harness with our awareness that other really quite powerful forces are often at work in our cosmos.

If I were allowed to offer a helpful as well as comradely summary, I'd say this: surely, we are all mere fragments of stone? Some day, those fragments might become mosaic flooring within a People's Palace of Universal Communism - one yet to be built. Sadly, however, one to be built by other pioneer craftsmen, rather than any of the current organisations or operatives who lay claim to that self-same 'magnificent destiny'.

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

Fake news

It's a new year and, if South Africa is to have any real hope for a better future, the country probably needs to see the beginnings of at least some radical transformation of our present economic, political and social environment. And that will require sound information and cogent analysis to enable all citizens to play a responsible part.

This, in the first place, requires a media as free as possible of coercion and manipulation; a media that can be relied upon to provide sound, honest information. It should also be an

environment in which whistleblowing on corruption or any malfeasance is wholly protected.

Never, in our globalised world, have these requirements seemed so important and yet so much under threat. There is the twittering lunacy of Donald Trump, who, very worryingly, has a nuclear arsenal at his disposal, facing the infantile bellicosity of a now nuclear-armed Kim Jung Un. The multiple refugee crises are also continuing, accompanied by reports of barbarism, inhumanity and savagery, with details of everything from slave markets to torture, aerial bombardment and "ethnic cleansing" - that common euphemism for genocide.

On the domestic front history also seems likely to repeat itself along all too familiar lines: rhetoric about renewal peppered with promises of turnarounds, improvements and better lives for all providing a flimsy veil for what seems likely to be, at best, more of the same, but perhaps a bit worse. Not the least of this may be another raid on the pockets, particularly of the poor, through a probable hike in value added tax.

One reason that such a move is almost certain to become necessary is the apparently off-the-cuff promise by president Jacob Zuma of freedom from fees for most tertiary students. As a result, the Economic Freedom Fighters' "student command" seized the opportunity to cause possible chaos next week at universities around the country by telling all qualifying matriculants to turn up at any university of their choice and demand to be registered.

This at a time when the governing ANC remains in a general state of turmoil behind a wall of words proclaiming unity; a stonewall clearly in evidence at the January 8 106th birthday rally in East London. Meanwhile, the tensions, fragmentation and financial problems within the trade union movement also show no signs of abating.

That we are aware of such facts and analysis and are able to debate them is because South Africa still enjoys - for all the faults and manipulation that exists - a relatively honest and free media. And the fact that we have available such news and analysis is the work of media workers, of journalists, who act as the eyes and ears of the public at large.

In this, South Africans are fortunate, although attacks on journalists and on whistleblowers are increasing. But the country is a long way from the situation in states such as Turkey, Mexico, China, Syria and Ukraine. As the new year began, the Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ) confirmed that

2017 was "the worst year on record for jailed journalists".

Exactly how many journalists were detained "in connection with the provision of news and information", and how many have been murdered for that reason, is difficult to assess accurately. CPJ was able to trace and confirm that 262 journalists were in prison at the end of last year. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) lists 326, although this number includes 107 "citizen journalists" - individuals using social media and blogs usually in situations where other avenues are closed.

Both organisations ascertained that 17 journalists were murdered because of the work they were doing. But there are also a number of journalists missing or held hostage by armed groups.

And it is not only in authoritarian states that journalism is under threat. As RSF states in its end-of-year message, "Media freedom is proving to be increasingly fragile in democracies as well. Democratic governments are trampling on a freedom that should, in principle, be one of their leading performance indicators."

But the protection of democratic rights that exist, let alone their possible extension, requires more than sound information and analysis: it needs organisation. And it is here that the trade unions have a potentially vital role to play - but only if they are independent, democratic in their organisation, truly accountable to their members and transparent in everything they do.

Unfortunately, this is seldom the case. Yet, without the democratically organised power of workers, democratic norms - and the right to know - can rapidly be smothered.

However, within the labour movement, there often exists considerable animosity toward journalists and - sometimes with justification - the media in general. This is usually promoted by union leaders or factions within the movement with something to hide or agendas to push. Propagandists posing as journalists and the deliberate distortion of facts at editorial level also encourage this animosity.

It is here that workers, inside and outside the media, have crucial roles to play in helping to expose - and agitate against - purveyors of fake news and editorial distortion. Open and transparent debate should be the aim.

My hope for 2018 is that something along these lines will start to emerge in the coming months; that we will not see the reinvention yet again of another old wheel when the opportunity and ability exists to fly above the mire, into which we seem to be sinking.

Terry Bell
Cape Town



Join Labour Against the Witchhunt

£10/year (£5 if unwaged)
BCM Box 8932, London WC1N 3XX
07817 379568

info@labouragainstthewitchhunt.org
www.labouragainstthewitchhunt.org
www.facebook.com/Labouragainstthewitchhunt

LAW lobby of Labour NEC meeting

Tuesday January 23, 11am to 1pm:
Southside, 105 Victoria Street,
London SW1.

NHS

With great skill

James Linney urges resistance to the 'organisation of misery'

A 'British winter' can mean many things - we each have our own experiences and memories, adding to the complex and unique picture, but there will inevitably be many elements that we all share (usually featuring the weather).

But in recent times there has occurred a new, and much more malignant and worrying, shared winter experience. One which also dominates the news, but to a much greater extent than the weather: the annual crisis that affects the national health service. Each year the crisis seems to deepen, and its effects this year have been even more devastating than the last. And last year, we will remember, the situation was so dire that the Red Cross described it as a "humanitarian crisis".¹

So how bad is the current situation? And why is it that the winter, something humans have been able to predict since the birth of our very culture, seems to take the health secretary by surprise every year?

A quick glance at the news each morning gives an impression of how dire the situation in GP surgeries and hospitals is right now. But you only get a real sense of how bad things are if you are unfortunate enough to work in these conditions, where your desire for providing an efficient and high standard of care is virtually impossible to deliver; or if you are even more unfortunate and are seriously unwell, when you will be forced to wait many hours before you get your 'urgent' treatment. For example, in the last week of December, NHS England reported that more than 16,900 people were left waiting in ambulances for more than 30 minutes before being able to even get into accident and emergency departments.² Considering that people who arrive by ambulance are obviously much more likely to require immediate, potentially living-saving treatment, this is a horrific statistic.

When people eventually arrive in A&E, the situation is no better. Patients are regularly having to wait very long periods - in some situations more than 12 hours - just to be assessed. Social media is full of pictures and videos of departments bursting at the seams, people squeezed into overcrowded wards or in trolleys lining the corridors. There are record numbers of people attending A&E. In 2017, nearly 24 million people were seen, an increase of three million compared to 2016 (another record-breaking year³). Of these 89% were reported to have been seen within the four-hour (!) target.

But the number is almost certainly lower than this, as a certain amount of 'creativity' has always been used on the wards to get better scores on targets, ever since they were introduced by Tony Blair in 2004. This is largely due to managerial pressure and threats toward staff, who are told to meet the targets or be disciplined. Meaning that patients are often moved to less well staffed holding wards, discharged home prematurely or admitted into hospital unnecessarily.

A&E is just one department and the overcrowding and bed shortages are affecting all wards. More people than ever are attending with acute illnesses, yet there are fewer hospital beds available. The total number of beds has halved in the past 30 years despite the record number of attendances - the figure has gone down from around 299,000 to 142,000.⁴

And the situation is made far worse by the social care crisis that is taking place in parallel. People who are medically stable but unable to

look after themselves have nowhere to go. Both home care and residential care homes (which have always been hugely underfunded) have been in decline for decades, largely due to their privatisation.

So the bed shortages are a very real and a dangerous reality. In at least one hospital people were forced to sleep on the floor because bed shortages were so acute. Infamously, Tory health minister Philip Donnan has since 'solved' this problem by helpfully pointing out in parliament: "There are seats available in most hospitals where beds are not available." Tory NHS crisis management in all its glory.

Yet, hospital capacity is just a small part of the story - one which is more depressing than a Thomas Hardy novel. Every part of the NHS has suffered nearly a decade of Tory cuts: NHS salaries have been falling, nurses' bursaries have been terminated, there are alarming staff shortages, junior doctors have been forced to accept a contract which they warned would be unsafe for patients and all the time inadequate numbers of overworked and overstressed staff are trying to do their best.

The sum of all this is that there is not just an NHS winter crisis: the NHS is in perpetual crisis, which just gets worse in the winter. Meanwhile the privatisation of the NHS continues, the next step being Accountable Care Organisations. These will open the door for private companies to take over responsibility for health and social-care provision for decade-long contracts.⁵ We are currently being given a demonstration of how this would end up with the collapse of Carillion. But when private healthcare companies go bankrupt then the situation will be unimaginably worse.

Better prepared

The Tory government, of course, wants us to believe that the problems in the NHS are a result of a run of bad luck. Its mantra has been: a spell of cold weather, followed by a bad outbreak of flu, has left hospitals overstretched but coping. OK, NHS England had to cancel 55,000 elective operations, but this was all part of the plan. This may very well be true, but what plan? The one the public are sold (albeit with less and less conviction), where the NHS is, according to Theresa May, "better prepared for winter than ever before", or the plan that got discussed between May and Hunt in 10 Downing Street on the morning of May's pathetic attempt at a distracting reshuffle? Hunt not only retained his job, but was given more control over social care. Whether this was the result of the prime minister's weakness, or because he was simply being rewarded for mismanaging the NHS with great skill, is inconsequential. Either way, as the NHS approaches its 70th birthday, its future is looking more than bleak.

Yet the voices of resistance are growing louder. Some groups within the NHS have started to make strong statements in favour of more funding. For example, a group of 66 A&E consultants sent an open letter to May detailing their "very serious concerns for the safety of our patients", because "the NHS is severely and chronically underfunded".⁶ Similarly, NHS Providers - the body representing front-line trusts - has written to Jeremy Hunt, stating that the levels of underfunding mean:

We have now reached a key watershed moment. Put simply, the NHS can no longer deliver the standards enshrined in its constitution; standards

that were drawn up to reflect safe, decent levels of patient care.

Additionally, there is a group of doctors and NHS activists, led by Allyson Pollard, attempting to force a judicial review to prevent the introduction of Accountable Care Organisations. But it is going to take much more than this to save the NHS.

The NHS is a special industry within Britain. Despite the creeping privatisation over the past two decades it remains in the public's perception a unique service, that does its best to provide care to people independently of bank balance or class. The underfunding of the NHS is also very real and apparent to the working class - ie, those who rely on its services. It is workers who have to queue in A&E and witness the staff desperately trying to keep things going. They are the ones who make up its workforce (the NHS is the fifth largest employer in the world). This immediately exposes the government's lie - that it cares about the NHS.

You still have a group of misguided lumpen who blame immigration or 'benefit scroungers' for the problems, but more than ever the vast majority of people are conscious that underfunding and privatisation are threatening its existence and causing harm on a daily basis. But the situation remains the same as when the NHS was created: it can only become a thriving, effective and democratic institution if the working class wills it. Obviously, will alone is not enough: there also needs to be a political organisation able to express this will.

Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party is clearly the only option for the NHS's survival in the short term. Its pledge to increase NHS spending would be the defining issue if there was a general election this year. We will get a taste of the growing discontent on February 3 when the People's Assembly hosts what is likely to be a very well attended demonstration in defence of the NHS.

However, now more than ever it is important that the left does not settle for just calling for more beds and more funding. Labour's proposed increased funding has so far been pretty underwhelming - even the Institute for Fiscal Studies recognises this.⁷ We need to oppose Tory-led privatisation and demand more funding, of course. But this must run in parallel to our highlighting why people are attending A&E in such large numbers in the first place.

Workers are repeatedly subject to conditions that make them ill. The vast majority of mental-health problems, alcohol dependence, cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, etc result directly from inequality. A&E attendance numbers are like a barometer, measuring how unhealthy capitalism is for the working class. And, to borrow a phrase from the communist poet, Pablo Neruda, to overcome these conditions we need to rise up against this "organisation of misery" ●

Notes

1. www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/nhs-british-red-cross-chief-executive-mike-adamson-defends-humanitarian-crisis-remarks-a7516751.html
2. www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/winter-daily-sitreps/winter-daily-sitrep-2017-18-data
3. <https://fullfact.org/health/accident-and-emergency-attendances-and-performance>
4. www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/nhs-hospital-bed-numbers
5. See 'Planning the final assault' *Weekly Worker* December 7 2017.
6. www.theguardian.com/society/2018/jan/11/nhs-patients-dying-in-hospital-corridors-doctors-tell-theresa-may
7. www.ifs.org.uk/publications/9262

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday January 21, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group: study of August Nimtz's *Lenin's electoral strategy from Marx and Engels through the revolution of 1905*. This meeting: chapter 3, 'The "dress rehearsal" and the first duma' (continued).

Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1.

Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk;

and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

Turkey under the state of emergency

Saturday January 20, 10am to 4pm: Conference, NUT, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1.

Organised by Solidarity with the People of Turkey: www.facebook.com/groups/868318019911351.

Tear down the racist wall

Saturday January 20, 2pm: Picket, US embassy, Grosvenor Square, London W1. No to Trump's racist 'shithole' comments.

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

Labour Against the Witchhunt

Tuesday January 23, from 11am: Picket of Labour's NEC meeting, Southside, 105 Victoria Street, London SW1.

Monday January 29, 6.30pm: Public meeting with Ken Loach, Moshé Machover, Tony Greenstein *et al*, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1.

Tuesday January 30, 7pm: Public meeting with Jackie Walker, Marc Wadsworth *et al*, Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B1.

Organised by LAW: www.labouragainsthewitchhunt.org.

Living under threat of nuclear war

Wednesday January 24, 7.30pm: Public meeting about North Korean tensions, Friends Meeting House, 12 Jesus Lane, Cambridge CB5. With Dr Tim Coles, who will talk on his book: *Fire and fury: How the US isolates North Korea, encircles China and risks nuclear war in Asia*.

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

Air pollution - a union issue

Friday January 26, 1pm to 4pm: Meeting for trade unionists, PCS offices, 3rd floor, Merrion Centre, Leeds LS2. Registration required. For further information contact Janet Newsham: 0161 636 7558; janet@gmhazards.org.uk. Organised by TUC: www.tuc.org.uk/events/air-pollution-%E2%80%93-trade-union-issue.

Discrimination and the law

Friday January 26, 8.45am to 4pm: Conference, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. For trade unions, law centres, etc.

Organised by TUC:

www.tuc.org.uk/events/tuceor-discrimination-law-conference-2018.

Palestine solidarity

Saturday January 27, 9.30am to 5pm: Palestine Solidarity Campaign AGM, London Irish Centre, 50-52 Camden Square, London NW1. Please register by January 20.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign:

www.palestinecampaign.org/events/psc-annual-general-meeting-2018.

Radical Burn's night

Saturday January 27, 1pm: Celebration, Wakefield Labour Club (Red Shed), Vicarage Street, Wakefield WF1. Speakers, live music, haggis, neeps and tatties, real ale. Free admission.

Organised by Wakefield Socialist History Group:

www.facebook.com/groups/542669395814652.

Trade unions, class and power

Tuesday January 30, 7pm: Political lecture and discussion, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Part of a series of four classes delivered by Mary Davis. £20 waged; £12 unwaged.

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

NHS in crisis

Saturday February 3, 12 noon: Demonstration. Assemble Gower Street, London WC1.

Organised by People's Assembly and Health Campaigns Together:

www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Grassroots Black Left

Wednesday February 7, 6.30pm: Launch meeting, Portcullis House, 1 Parliament Street, London SW1.

Organised by Grassroots Black Left: www.facebook.com/GrassrootsBlackLeft.

Starting a co-op

Thursday, February 8, 1pm to 5pm: Information and education event, Cooperatives UK, Holyoake House, Hanover Street, Manchester M1. Free entry.

Organised by Cooperatives UK: www.uk.coop/uniting-co-ops/events-calendar/is-a-co-op-right-for-you-manchester-08-02-18.

Stand Up To Racism

Saturday February 10, 11am to 4.30pm: Trade union conference, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. £10 (£5 unwaged).

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

Britain's housing crisis

Wednesday February 14, 7pm: Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. First in a three-part course. Waged: £15; unwaged: £9.

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

For an anti-war government

Thursday February 15, 7pm: Anti-war rally against Trump visit, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1.

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

CPGB wills

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

LABOUR

Democratise the party

The election of Christine Shawcroft as chair of Labour's disputes panel gives some hope that Jeremy Corbyn and his allies might finally put an end to the witch-hunt, says **Carla Roberts** of Labour Party Marxists

The Momentum-supported candidates in the elections for the three newly-created positions on Labour's national executive committee were always going to be shoe-in. This is good for the left as a whole - which is why we recommended a critical vote for the Momentum team of Jon Lansman, Yasmine Dar and Rachel Garnham.¹

As expected, it was a clean sweep for the trio, with Dar collecting 68,388 votes, Lansman 65,163 and Garnham 62,982. The closest to them came comedian Eddie Izzard, with 39,908 votes - boosted no doubt by his celebrity status and apolitical 'naive nice guy' unity-mongering (in reality, of course, he is firmly on the Labour right).

This Momentum victory underscores (again) the new reality of today's Labour Party: the new mass membership is miles to the left of the Parliamentary Labour Party and the 'old guard': in any clean electoral contest, we will wipe the floor with the right. Which is why they fight so dirty, of course. And which is why, despite rightwingers like Tom Watson letting it be known that Jeremy Corbyn's opponents "are no longer prepared to challenge his authority and believe he has won the right to make the changes he desires",² we do not believe a word of it.

The civil war in the Labour Party continues to rage. The ongoing witch-hunt against the left in the party proves that as much as the media panic in the aftermath of Christine Shawcroft's election as new chair of the important disputes panel (a democratic process that was, in the words of the *Daily Mail*, "a coup by the hard left"³). Then there are the newly-raised "concerns" that Jeremy Corbyn is "too old" to become the next prime minister⁴ and, of course, the rather empty threats by "moderate MPs" to "quit and sit as independents in the Commons if they are deselected, as the left tightens its grip on the party", as *The Times* warns in the aftermath of the NEC election.⁵

The latter is not much of a threat, of course, as there is little chance that they would rein their old seats as independents. It is more of a warning shot by the PLP majority to urge Corbyn not to go 'too far'.

And, unfortunately, he does still listen. Both Jon Lansman and Jeremy Corbyn have firmly come out against mandatory reselection of parliamentary candidates. It is also not part of the "remit" of the so-called Corbyn review,⁶ despite some newspapers claiming the opposite.⁷ Yes, Lansman might write a supportive tweet on the rare occasion of a rightwing MP having been deselected in favour of a Corbyn supporter. But since Corbyn's election as leader, he and his allies have abandoned the fight to enshrine this principled and decades-old demand of the Labour left within Labour's rulebook. And that despite the fact that it used to be the key demand of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, in which Lansman played a leading role for many years. Now that he is finally in a position to make an actual difference, Lansman merely supports moves to raise the threshold an MP needs to be automatically reselected by the local membership and affiliates from the current 50% to 66%.⁸

It seems Corbyn and his advisors still seem to believe that by accommodating to the right on this issue (as on many others) they will finally get their 'party

unity' with the PLP and the right. It will not happen, comrades. Instead of openly fighting for the kind of blindingly obvious changes that are needed to enshrine the 'Corbyn effect' into the rulebook, they are barely tinkering at the edges.

The fact that there is a review of party rules is good, of course. But just take a look at the harmless 32 questions: anybody interested in *transforming* the party will tear their hair out in despair. (Nevertheless, Labour Against the Witchhunt has managed to squeeze its demand for an end to the automatic and instant suspensions and expulsions into one of the more open-ended questions⁹).

Poor choice

Our comrades on the party leadership would also do well to overhaul their *modus operandi* when it comes to choosing candidates for important committees like the NEC. It is no surprise that only around 100,000 members voted in this election. When Jeremy Corbyn defended his leadership against Owen Smith, more than 500,000 cast their vote.¹⁰

There clearly is a serious lack of enthusiasm for the three Momentum candidates. While virtually nobody knows anything about Rachel Garnham, Yasmine Dar is now primarily known for being one of the main speakers at an event in February 2017 in Manchester which "celebrated" the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, her hair modestly covered by a hijab.¹¹ Most notorious is, of course, Momentum honcho Jon Lansman. Almost exactly a year ago, during the now infamous 'Lansman coup',¹² he simply shut down all Momentum's democratic structures and imposed his own constitution on the organisation without any debate.

The latest example of Lansman's undemocratic approach is the high-handed way in which the man has just announced the dissolution of Momentum Youth and Students.¹³ Naturally, there was no transparency with this last bureaucratic move. The letter from Lansman announcing the organisation's abrupt demise simply states that "Momentum's constitution does not specifically provide for the continuation of the entity previously known as 'Momentum Youth and Students (MYS)'. He notes "with regret" that some of these young scamps have "at times ... brought Momentum into disrepute" with some silly baiting of opponents and intemperate language.

So how did these three very poor candidates end up on the Labour Party NEC? As we have reported,¹⁴ there have been serious democratic problems in how they were chosen: On October 4, all Momentum members were invited to submit their application for the three seats. And by October 9, the lucky ones had already been selected: members were informed that a total of 48 applications had been received, which were examined by "a panel of [national coordinating group] officers", who then "interviewed seven candidates", before settling on four that were sent "for recommendations to the Centre Left Grassroots Alliance (CLGA)". All within four days.

The *Huffington Post* reported at the time that "it is understood that Lansman was the popular choice among many."¹⁵ Popular among whom, exactly? Maybe the people working in Momentum's office, being



Christine Shawcroft: on the right of the left

on Jon Lansman's payroll and all that ... Momentum members at least were not asked. A meme was quickly doing the rounds, showing as first "criterion" on the application form the question, "Are you called Jon?"

Add to that the mysterious nature of the CLGA itself - essentially a lash-up of Momentum and the CLPD with right-leaning candidates - and what we saw was a dodgy backroom deal, done totally over the heads of Momentum members. As if that process had not been mocked enough, 'Team Momentum' is employing exactly the same method for the next NEC elections.¹⁶ In the summer, the whole NEC is up for re-election and Labour Party members will have a chance to elect all nine NEC members in the constituency section.

The decision has already been taken that "the final CLGA slate will include at least five women and two BAME candidates, and will improve representation in geographical regions currently underrepresented on the NEC". Who makes these decisions? At what meetings? Well, we know.

Witch-hunt

Readers will know that Ann Black has been removed as chair of the disputes panel by the NEC, its pro-Corbyn majority increased following the election. And deservedly so: she was instrumental in keeping the witch-hunt against the left alive, voting to refer various cases of members suspended for trumped-up anti-Semitism charges to the national constitutional committee (which deals with cases that the disputes panel feels deserve closer investigation). She voted in favour of the suspension of Wallasey CLP and Brighton District Labour Party.

Black was also in favour of the early 'freeze date' in the 2016 leadership elections: instead of the six months of membership required by the rule book, the January 12 freeze date actually meant that members had to be in the party for almost eight months before they were given a vote in the 2016 contest, which took place between August 22 and September 21. Thousands of members who had joined in that period - most no doubt in order to support Corbyn against the ongoing

attacks by the right and the entire establishment - were disenfranchised.

But we should also remember that Ann Black was firmly and uncritically supported by the CLGA at the last NEC elections. Surely, she has not suddenly become a rightwinger with Jeremy Corbyn's election? Her blog is still being advertised on the CLGA's rudimentary website - in fact, she is the only NEC member mentioned.¹⁷ Though that perhaps says more about the nature of the CLGA itself than Ann Black.

So does her removal signal the end of the witch-hunt? Well, we are not holding our breath. Of course, we welcome the election of Christine Shawcroft - she is undoubtedly to the left of Black. But that is not saying much. Yes, she acted as "silent witness" in Tony Greenstein's investigation hearing more than 20 months ago and there is hope that as someone who has been on the receiving end of disputes panel decision-making herself (she was temporarily suspended from the party in 2015 for supporting the former Tower Hamlets mayor, Lutfur Rahman) she will make sure that cases are at least dealt with swiftly.

But she is also known for having voted in favour of referring Jackie Walker's suspension on trumped-up charges of anti-Semitism to the NEC. Having been a long-standing member of the Labour Representation Committee, she split in 2012 because of the organisation's "ultra-leftism" and helped to found a second magazine with the name *Labour Briefing*.¹⁸ The one which is now officially published by the LRC was becoming too leftwing for her and her five co-thinkers. Shawcroft has also been on the wrong side during the 'Lansman coup' and - in a rather pathetic effort to prove that Lansman does not run Momentum - agreed to become the 'director' of the Momentum company on the very day of that coup: January 10 2017.

Even worse though is Jon Lansman's record when it comes to the witch-hunt. He matters, because he is now perhaps Corbyn's most important ally on the NEC. In his efforts to appease the right in the party, Lansman got rid of Jackie Walker as vice chair of Momentum after she was suspended from Labour

on false allegations of anti-Semitism. He has repeatedly spoken about the Labour Party's anti-Semitism "problem" and says he is a friend of the Jewish Labour Movement. He saw to it that Momentum's constitution - written by his lawyer son, we understand - stipulated that all those who have been expelled from the Labour Party (for example for their alleged "support" for groups like the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Socialist Appeal or Labour Party Marxists) are now also barred from joining Momentum.

Rhea Wolfson is another CLGA-supported member on the NEC who does not deserve the support of the left. She is a member of the pro-Zionist Jewish Labour Movement and also voted to refer Jackie Walker's suspension to the NEC. At that meeting, she apparently gave a passionate account of the anti-Semitism she has experienced (not by comrade Walker, it should be added). But it was probably enough to swing some other votes, perhaps even that of comrade Shawcroft.

All this underlines that we must continue to offer *critical* support to the leftwing NEC majority from a position of political independence. We still have a long way to go to transform the party. All the more important that organisations like Labour Against the Witchhunt continue to put pressure not just on the right and the bureaucracy of the Labour Party - but also on Jeremy Corbyn and his allies on the NEC.

Yes, we welcome the election of Christine Shawcroft as chair of the disputes panel and the replacement of Ann Black. But more is needed: now that there is a clear left majority on the NEC, the witch-hunt against the left needs to come to a swift end. All NEC members should be urged to support the following demands to begin the process of democratising the Labour Party:

1. A moratorium on any new NCC witch-hunt cases.
2. The withdrawal of all outstanding NCC witch-hunt cases.
3. The immediate implementation of the Chakrabarti report recommendations on Labour's disciplinary procedures in respect of natural justice and due process ●

Notes

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POLITICS

Is Trumpism the future?

Yes, the US president is widely derided, writes **Mike Macnair**, but does he represent an alternative to the neoliberal 'equalities' agenda?

Donald Trump on January 11 cancelled his intended visit to London to open the new US embassy. His ostensible explanation is that the Obama administration, which sold Grosvenor Square and bought and built the new Vauxhall site, was guilty of a bad real estate deal, selling at an undervalue and buying and building at an overvalue.¹

Given that Trump is a property speculator by trade, and prone both to pique and to blaming the Obama administration wherever possible, this story is not wholly impossible. It is certainly no less plausible than the claim made by the Stop the War Coalition and the Socialist Workers Party that he has been forced to pull out by the threat of protests²: there is no evidence of the STWC being able to mobilise mass forces in anti-Trump protests, and only 1,547 signed the latest petition against him visiting.³

More plausible than either claim is that this is a calculated diplomatic snub to the British government. Probably, it was in retaliation for Boris Johnson on January 11 publicly expressing British alignment with European opposition to the Trump administration's proposals to repudiate the Iran nuclear deal.⁴ It is enough to induce May to take special steps to seek to "mend fences" with the US administration.⁵

It is probably more significant than this diplomatic spat that the British establishment is deeply ambivalent - or embarrassed - about the 'Trump issue'. As well as the Iran nuclear deal, the British media has 'gone after' Trump over reported comments about Haiti and African countries as "shitholes". And while '#MeToo' has had only limited direct impact on Trump as an individual,⁶ the whole media campaign keeps alive in the background the story which ran during the presidential election about Trump as a serial groper.

What lies behind this is that the UK establishment has not ceased, as things now are, to promote official 'anti-racism', 'anti-sexism' and 'anti-discrimination' more generally. Indeed, efforts to reverse 'Iraq syndrome' have taken the form of promoting Israel and falsely witch-hunting opponents of Israeli policy as anti-Semites: ie, racists. This last, of course, had been going on in the USA for at least 15 years. The same goes for 'weaponising' questions of feminism as a 'humanitarian' excuse to drop bombs on people.

These sharp ends are backed up by the shaft of the spear in the form of the Equality Act 2010 and the elaborate bureaucratic apparatus which grew up already before it, but is now endorsed under it. Less overtly state-based is all the rest of the stuff, originated by Eurocommunist academics, central to Blairism (as in the US it was central to Clintonism), addressing any form of discrimination other than class, and other than US and British imperialist operations. To address either of these would - we are told - be old-fashioned in one way or another.

Under the Clinton and Obama administrations, this policy fitted perfectly well with US policy. Indeed, it continued to fit, albeit rather less comfortably, under the intervening GW Bush administration, which continued to use 'anti-discrimination' themes and tropes.

With Trump in the White House it becomes seriously problematic: the man is overtly racist and sexist - and won the presidential election on the

basis of glorying in his being overtly racist and sexist.

Americanisation

And yet what the UK *cannot* do is simply reject its historical so-called 'special relationship' with the US. The UK stands in a particular position in this respect, and it is one of special weakness, not special strength. In spring-summer 1940 the strategic architecture of British world domination fell apart, and the British state core explicitly accepted future subordination to the US for the sake of help with its immediate problem.⁷ In the latter part of the war and in the Bretton Woods discussions Keynes and others endeavoured to promote a global financial architecture which would restore a degree of British freedom of action, but the US said 'no'.⁸

In 1956 the chickens came home to roost when Britain attempted to act independently of the US, but in alliance with France and Israel, in the Suez crisis. The US simply turned the financial taps off and forced Britain to scuttle.⁹ Thereafter, the Kennedy administration in the US demanded that Britain should join the European Economic Community, which it had previously hoped to avoid. The Macmillan government was quick to 'sit up and beg' by applying for EEC membership, though it took the 1968 events to break French Gaullist opposition to British entry.¹⁰

The long-term result is that gradually the idea that Britain is 'America's poodle' has become a commonplace (more than half a million hits on Google).¹¹

The embarrassment and the difficulty may be particularly British, but it is not uniquely British. Official anti-racism and gender equality agendas, and so on, are commonplace across the 'west' and into parts of the 'third world'. For a single example, 'traditionally conservative' Ireland has as prime minister Leo Varadkar, a mixed-race, openly gay *neoliberal* who spent time early in his career in 'leadership training' at the 'Washington Ireland Program' in Washington DC.

Equally, the rest of Europe remains substantially politically subordinate to the US: Angela Merkel took office as an Atlanticist (she supported the Iraq war against the Schröder government, although she has been sharply critical of Trump), and the USA has been able to get 'its man' in the Élysée Palace with the neoliberal banker, Emmanuel Macron. And so on. Europe today stands in relation to the USA as Germany stood to Britain before Bismarck, or as the USA stood to Britain before the civil war destroyed British control of US politics through the southern

sectional interest: as a half-independent subordinate.

It is not just a matter of US political manipulation, though the political manipulation is real. In the late 18th to early 20th centuries, whisky, tweed, Shakespeare and other British products were fashionable among elites in a very wide geographical range, and 'Anglophilia' commonplace. With the US succeeding British world leadership, attachment to US political and cultural forms - Americanophilia or 'Americanisation' - has replaced it and remains current.¹²

The equalities agenda itself is to a considerable extent the product of this background - and of the relatively recent history of the USA. The black civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s fed almost seamlessly into the anti-Vietnam war movement of the 1960s-70s. It was a notable feature of the war that black youth were disproportionately conscripted and sent to the 'sharp end'; and that the US army was marked by a mainly white officer corps presiding over a mixed-race rank and file.¹³ By the 1970s, the extent of general opposition to the war, and the race issue within the US army, were leading to a real crisis - both of the draft and of military discipline in the field.

In April 1975 the US scuttled out of Saigon, and the open recognition of defeat in Vietnam became inevitable. It was in the late Vietnam and post-Vietnam period that the US armed forces began to take seriously the issues of anti-discrimination (beginning with race). If they could not get over the 'wrong war' problem, and had to be cautious with 'Vietnam syndrome', they could at least deal with the race issue, which had radically exacerbated their problems. With the state core, the armed forces, moving on the issue, resistance to formal anti-discrimination measures more widely faced considerable difficulties.

The anti-discrimination agenda also actually fitted well with the more general project of neoliberal financial globalisation and Francis Fukuyama's 1992 *The end of history*, Thomas Friedman's 1999 *The Lexus and the olive tree*, and all the other similar apologetic products. It 'sold' the free market as going along with other forms of 'freedom'.

There was by no means general acceptance of this synthesis. The 1980s saw for a while the promotion of continental European values and structures, and of far-eastern

Confucian ones, as alternatives to free-market liberalism. The 1990s saw the emergence in the US itself of 'communitarianism', most famously peddled by Amitai Etzioni. These lines of reasoning had difficulty in saying so

openly, but they did contain arguments for the traditional family, for in-practice ethnically homogenous 'communities', and for 'values-driven' regulation of various sexual and other victimless behaviours. They have not wholly gone away, but the neoliberal/antidiscrimination synthesis mainly 'won out' as a frame of pro-capitalist apologetics through the 1990s-2000s.

Possible futures

The broad equalities agenda thus began in the USA, and spread *later* to Britain, continental Europe and elsewhere. Now, however, Donald Trump's repudiation of that agenda is producing criticism, embarrassment and difficulty among 'western' political leaders. The question posed is which of three possibilities this difficulty represents.

The first possibility is that the USA may shortly dispose of both Trump and his vice-president, Christianist extremist Mike Pence, and return to the neoliberal globalising and anti-discrimination agenda. The second is that Trumpism may win in the US, but the Brits and Europeans may break with the US to carry the neoliberal globalising and anti-discrimination agenda forward. The third is that the criticisms and embarrassment may represent the same sort of thing as the 1980s resistance to emergent neoliberalism and anti-discrimination: dragging heels on the road to a more generalised culture of nationalism, racialism and patriarchalism, which the US will promote.

My own view - and I stress that this is merely an individual view - is that the third is the most likely possibility: that the US is gradually moving towards overt nationalism, racism, sexism and so on as a framework for capitalist apologetics and will gradually drag the rest of the 'international community' behind it on this path.

The first point is that, for all the excitable media talk and the Mueller inquiry, getting rid of Trump and Trumpism in the short term looks unlikely. In the first place, though Trump is less popular than recent previous presidents, what he has done and the stories about him do not seem to have made his popularity dramatically worse.¹⁴ On the other side: first, he and the Republican Congress have delivered a serious tax cut for the rich and the corporations.

Second, for all the noise, his foreign policy is in substance that of the GW Bush administration, the talk of friendship with Russia having come to nothing.

Third, even if Trump is an egomaniac vulgarian, Pence is on the outer fringes of the Christianist right wing, so that replacing Trump with Pence looks like a bad bargain from the point of US capital: while Trump can be managed through his short attention-span, Pence might well be less manageable.

Meanwhile, Trump *has* got a Christianist extremist and high-prerogative man (Neil Gorsuch) onto the supreme court. The consequences of this can already be seen in the 'Muslim immigration ban' litigation and will feed through even after Trump ceases to be president.

As to the second possibility, for Europe to break with the US in order to maintain neoliberal financial globalisation and the associated anti-discrimination agenda would be a completely illusory policy. Neoliberal globalisation was and is a policy *in the interests of the US and UK* and at the

expense of the continental Europeans (as well as everyone else). For Europe to break with the US would need a 'Bismarckian' unification or an equivalent of the US civil war of 1861-65 to overthrow the US's institutional controls on European politics (set up in the aftermath of 1945). That such a turn could be conducted under the banner of neoliberalism would be a delusion. Indeed, Europe's geopolitical interest is to get the US embroiled in a serious war *in the far east*, which could expose the weakening of US military production capability by 'offshoring' and financialisation (as happened to the UK in 1914-18, to the benefit of the US). But this means that if the US turns towards nationalism, and so on, the interest of the Europeans is to defer any immediate conflict with the US over the issue.

As to the third possibility, the point is that the *underlying trend* is towards rightwing, nationalist populism. That was already the character of the Islamists and of the Putin regime in Russia. It has been an increasing theme of Chinese politics. It is the character of Abe's government in Japan. It is that of the Hindutva BJP government in India. It is the character of the Hungarian and Polish regimes in eastern Europe. Rightwing populists have also played a major role in France, with the Front National opening the way to the US-backed Bonaparte, Macron; in Germany with the role of the Alternative für Deutschland; and in the UK with the brief flourishing of Ukip and the more important role of the Tory Brexiters.

We should not assume that the neoliberal/'equalities' synthesis will buck that trend. The trend is there because of the failures of neoliberalism as an economic policy and the fact that the left has subordinated offering an alternative policy to *tailending* the neoliberal equalities agenda. As long as the left continues to do this, the dynamic towards right populism will also continue ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

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10. W Kaiser, *Using Europe, abusing the Europeans: Britain and European integration, 1945-63* London 1996, chapter 6.
11. A few decades ago, 'America's pit bull terrier' would have been a better description (1968 was the only 20th-century year in which British forces were not engaged in overseas military operations). But British military capabilities have declined markedly since the 1980s, so 'poodle' really does now seem right.
12. Interestingly, Googling 'Anglophilia' produces about 455,000 results, 'Americanophilia' only about 1,500. 'Americanization' gets about 1,670,000.
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Racist, sexist ... a representative of where capitalism may be heading

ECONOMY

Process of decomposition

How can the ruling class extricate itself from the current impasse? Hillel Ticktin reviews the state of global capital

The immediate period seems to be one of increasing confusion, disintegration and the growth of youth militancy. The elections in Germany have led to the possibility of a new coalition, with Social Democrat leader Martin Schulz talking of full European Union integration, which is closer to the position of president Emmanuel Macron in France. Macron clearly expresses the interests of the bourgeoisie, so there seems a possibility that there will be a Franco-German alliance to integrate the EU on a platform of containing the working class. Meanwhile the depression continues.

In essence the rich have become richer and the poor of this world have become poorer, either subjectively or objectively or both. Outside of South Korea and Japan no 'underdeveloped' capitalist country has made the transition to full developed status. Indeed, the ordinary people of the countries of eastern Europe have taken a step backward, in these terms. Their Stalinist-type industry was largely destroyed, and replacement is taking a long time. True, the changes have been beneficial in providing more opportunities or potential for free speech, study, travel and overall freedom of opportunity. However, the point remains that the ruling class of the imperial powers has not only maintained itself, but increased its wealth.

There is, however, a hierarchy of countries or of ruling classes, with the USA being dominant in terms of business, economic power, as well as military, technological and consequently political might. The American ruling class prefers to pretend that it is only the strongest amongst states, not the imperial master. Donald Trump has produced a ludicrous tale of an America being taken advantage of by other countries, like China, Mexico, Canada and Germany. One is tempted to say that he is too stupid to see that a mercantilist stance - ie, protecting native industry to get a surplus of exports over imports - actually entails a loss of wealth, in return for monetary holdings. The deeper argument is that an international division of labour - ignoring the balance of payments if possible - yields higher returns and more developed technology, thus raising everyone's wealth potentially. That used to be the justification given for an imperial power, whether the old colonial powers or the USA, failing to aid the development of the 'third world' countries. The issue becomes more interesting and complex if one pursues this last line of thought, but the intention here is simply to illustrate the folly of the Trump line, and its reversal of the old imperial viewpoint.

One can argue that the reversal of the free trade viewpoint and the concomitant strongly nationalist and even xenophobic outlook is a direct result of the decline of the United States as the dominant capitalist power, at the same time as the crisis of 2007 onwards has allowed the decline of capitalism to take a more open form.

Response of capital

In the first place, the capitalist class took a series of steps in the late 70s to deal with its political and economic problems. The onward and inexorable tendency towards the socialisation of both the means and relations of production was opposed through a series of privatisation

measures in many countries. The purpose at the time was to raise the rate of profit and to limit or destroy the power of the unions. The measures were successful in redistributing income from 'the poor to the rich'. (It is slightly more complicated, in that skilled white-collar workers, as in the professions, have been increasingly proletarianised. The loss of trade-union power has coincided with the proletariat becoming increasingly white-collar.) The ruling class has taken advantage of the superficial appearance of employment and income to declare that it supports the really poor, but that it will not help the better-off, who are not deserving. The cost of paying money to charities, etc for the poor is very much less than redistributing income from the rich to the majority. Thus, the ruling class opposes free university education for all in favour of the odd scholarships for the poor.

The de-nationalisation has been extreme and in places anything but sensible. Thus, privatisation of prisons has caused considerable trouble and certainly acted against the stated purpose of imprisonment itself. In the UK, privatisation of utilities and public transport is highly unpopular and probably less efficient. As Mariana Mazzucato has shown, the development of technology has generally required an important role for government-financed or controlled entities.¹

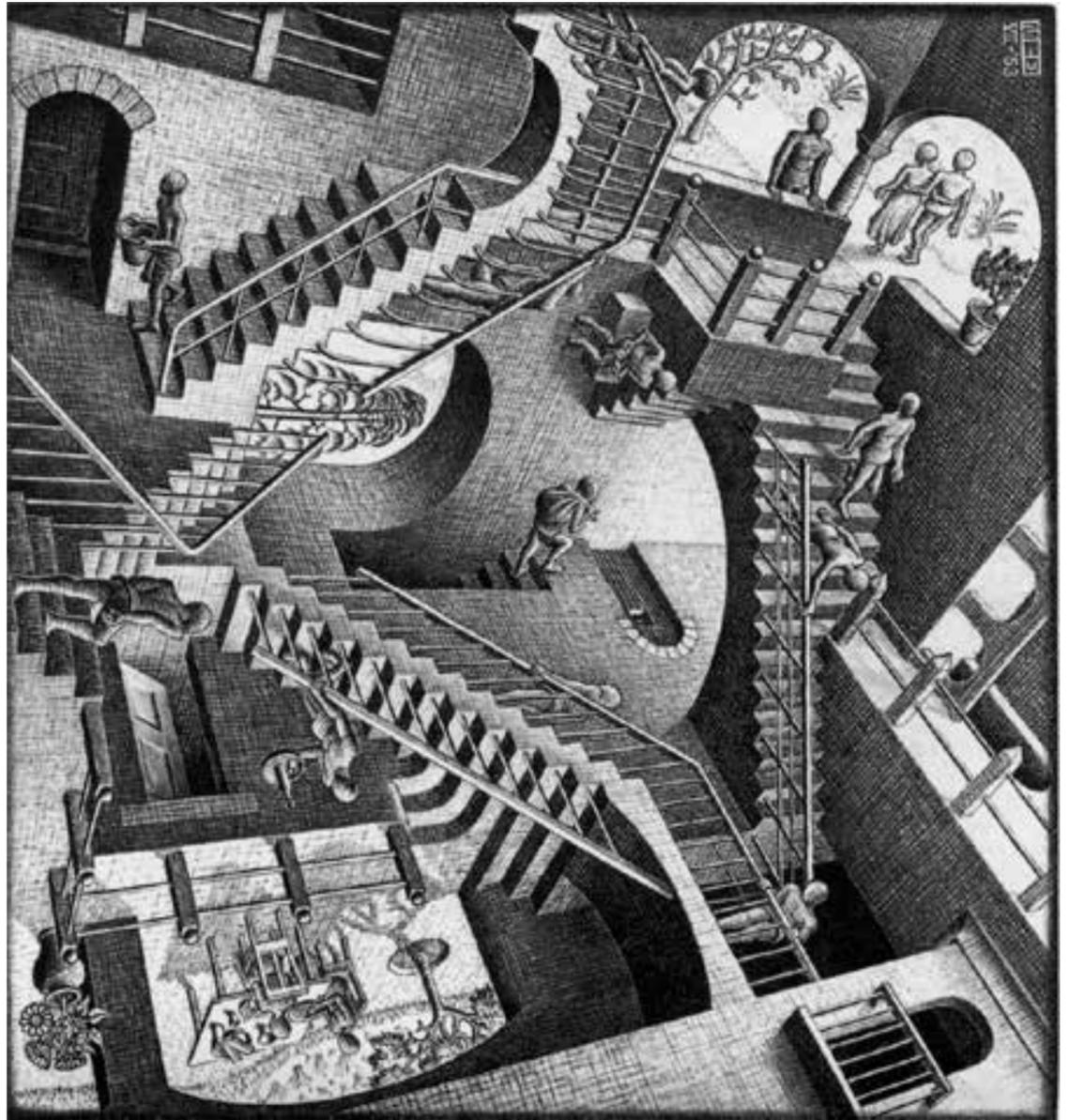
The increasing time required for research and development, combined with the often very large costs of construction, etc, requires considerable sums of capital that are only held by large enterprises, finance capital or the state. In the extreme case, only the latter can sustain the development of a commodity or good which will not make money - such as a new medicine, which in its success destroys its future. As is well known, that is the case with new antibiotics, of which there is a shortage.

In the second place, the ruling class went for 'austerity' following the crisis of 2007 onwards, and hence reduced state expenditure as far as it could, particularly on infrastructure and workers' benefits. The combined effect has been to help perpetuate the downturn, but raise the overall level of discontent.

In effect the downturn combined with the ruling class austerity strategy to produce a devastating blow to the earlier 'Thatcher-Reagan' policy. In the UK, the latter relied partly on a series of nonsensical ideas like the so-called Laffer effect, where the redistribution of income to the rich would lead to increased investment, increased employment and higher salaries. The money would 'trickle down'. It also used real, but time-limited, strategies, as in the privatisation of council houses, at low prices, allowing the new owners to make money. Shares were issued to investors in building societies, etc, and thousands bought shares in denationalised industries, which rose in the initial period after flotation.

The reckoning

Given that the ruling class was afraid to return to the post-war settlement, which brought with it powerful unions and a strong, if social democratic, opposition, the only alternative to the post-1979 line was to go further to the right, which is what happened under successive prime ministers and presidents. This was obvious in the case of the Conservative Party under David Cameron and George Osborne,



Maurits Escher, 'Relativity' (1953). Capitalism has many solutions - but none of them viable

which under the banner of austerity implemented high student fees and a draconian benefits policy. (It was masked by the liberal social policy towards gays and other groups who had been cruelly discriminated against.) Trump is doing something parallel, even if in a crass and extremist form, by reducing access to medicine, while trying to protect selected US industries and groups in economic terms.

The Brexit policy is a recognition by a section of the ruling class that it needs to provide a sop to the unemployed and vast numbers of underemployed. The fact that EU withdrawal is a reactionary utopia has not yet hit home to the majority of the Brexiteers. It acts as diversion from the struggle against the ruling class itself. This was all the more the case, in that the British government has tied itself in knots trying to find a solution supported by its cabinet and MPs. The spectacle has acted as a long-lasting diversion from a real critique of the crisis and the policies surrounding it.

How do we understand the movement of history? There are several underlying themes and one has recently come to the fore. It is the stress on the subjective in contemporary history. In other words, I have been arguing that the ruling class has become increasingly conscious of its position and historical role in deciding policy. The ruling class does not read Marxism or see itself in such terms, but its members do meet and at times agree on policy. However inchoate that organisation might be, it does result in support for

politicians and policies.

However, what is different today is the increasing control over the economy, society and lives of ordinary people by those in political-economic power, whether through the market or the state. This is partly a result of the increasing development of the means of communication and transport, and more generally through the increasing overall integration of the different aspects of the economy and the society itself. It is also a deliberate change, in that human society today is consciously controlled, developed and shaped by a series of political, social and economic institutions through education and newspapers, TV, radio, etc.

This has been driven home by the devastating effect of two world wars and by the numbers wiped out by Stalinism in China and the USSR. There are two issues here. We have come to a point in the development of human society where we can decide our own future to an ever-increasing degree. A planned society, as in socialism, would enshrine equality and the right of all to take part in decision-making. Humanity would increasingly determine its own future in more and more aspects.

The point of this exercise is to understand that, though we are at an early stage in this process, we are within it. Hence the subjective is playing an increasing role in the development of society. This is important because within Marxism there is often a general bias towards looking at objective developments,

and downplaying the subjective, which is critical in understanding this or that phenomenon. The ruling class is conscious of the need to defend itself and consequently adopts policies which can be crucial in changing the course of history, at least for a time, through a process of conscious consultation internal to itself. Its interaction with the working class is multi-layered and both objective and subjective.

Brexit

An obvious example is that of Brexit. How can we understand the British ruling class adopting a policy which was called suicidal by the former president of France? In fact, we can only deduce that it did not want it, but went along with it. How is it that the ruling class let it get this far? It is patently clear that the City of London is crucial to the British capitalist economy and indeed plays an important role in the world economy. Of course, it is subordinate to US capital, but it is closely intertwined with the US banks, which are indeed fundamental to the City of London today. It is an integral part of a European division of labour. It has made clear that it does not want to leave the EU. Why then is the process of separation continuing?

Is the tail wagging the dog? Most of the Tory Party is in favour of Brexit, and its membership belongs to the one section of the ruling class - small business - that is in favour of withdrawal. It used to be the case that the leadership of the Tory Party was appointed from above. That only

really came to an end with the election of Edward Heath, some 50 years ago. Clearly, big business cannot dispense with the Tory Party itself, whether by refusing to finance it or by using its connections to create trouble. It therefore has to find a different method. There are several possibilities.

The first has been to create pressure through political forums. Two earlier prime ministers have spoken out against Brexit, but the effect has been minimal. Another is to produce a result in leaving the EU which comes near to duplicating the 'status quo ante'. Such a possibility is outlined by one commentator² as a real possibility, with the cabinet divided between such a view and others wanting a stronger break. If the UK leaves the EU and strikes out on a separate path, it will have the greatest trouble re-establishing its economy. Worse, it seems that the divisions in the Tory Party will make it dysfunctional and it will need a new prime minister. One commentator says of the current situation: "We have the weakest PM in living memory." He goes on to argue that she should go to be replaced by a cabinet which will do much more to please finance and London business.³

The chances of an end result totally abhorrent to the bourgeoisie are small. However, the end result is not predetermined, and the different levers that can be pulled by the bourgeoisie may be tried each in turn - from a new prime minister to another referendum.

In fact, the process is reflecting the difficulties that the bourgeoisie has under conditions of a transitional world. It has to recognise that it has to make concessions. It then makes a concession which in the end is more apparent than real. It gives the discontented the joy of winning a referendum and the spectacle of a fight over the issue, but in the end it concedes very little, while pretending to have given up a lot.

Part of the interest and absurdity is not only that the bourgeoisie may well lose nothing, and the apparent gains will be illusory. The idea that patriotism and the shunning of the European Court of Justice, with common economic regulation replacing individual standards, will raise either the standard of living of workers or their degree of freedom is simply absurd. It is unlikely that most people would have voted this way out of conviction but rather as a blind blow at the capitalist system itself. The bourgeoisie knows that and hence wants to make a show of concessions, which are not real. The problem is that it does not have the personnel for the job. In a sense it is too weak itself.

At the end of the first section of the negotiations, it appeared as if the 'game was over'.⁴ The surprise was not that the negotiations turned in favour of the expressed wishes of big business, but that the leading Brexiters accepted the resolution so tamely.⁵ The EU apparently helped, possibly because it did not want May to fall and be replaced by a leftwinged Labour Party, as some speculated.

In short, the class struggle was carried out through a process of obfuscation, dire warnings and a tolerance of a long drawn-out, ridiculous negotiation, in which neither the EU nor the UK really understood what they were doing. It was a charade intended to preserve the political economic status quo a bit longer.

Southern Africa

The ruling class conceded nothing in South Africa, when Nelson Mandela became president in 1994. He was essentially a liberal nationalist, supported by the Communist Party. The African National Congress was founded in 1912 as a mild, middle class organisation. It effectively did very little until the mid-50s. The miners' union was founded by Max Gordon,

a Trotskyist, in the early 40s. During World War II he was taken into custody and he handed over the union to the CP, which then led the great black miners' strike of 1946. One of its top personnel - Jack Simons - was put on trial. When the National Party banned the Communist Party in 1950 it went underground, and a coup d'état led Michael Harmel to become the *de facto* leader, representing those in the CP who believed that the struggle was nationalist in form and hence composed of two stages. Jack Simons took a back seat in the CP, which effectively took over the ANC. However, one could argue that the ANC took over the CP, in that the latter never pushed for a socialist solution, unlike even Fidel Castro in Cuba or Hugo Chávez in Venezuela.

The CP's organisational ability, ties with the USSR and connections with the capitalist world gave nationalist leaders the basis to form a semi-competent leadership. Dissidence was dealt with ruthlessly. The Soviet Union in the late 80s came to a deal with the USA over South Africa and the CP accepted it. Amazingly, the ANC accepted the terms of the International Monetary Fund - not under pressure, but willingly - and from 1994 there was no better borrower.

Far from nationalising or socialising production or society, the ANC privatised. Effectively a black bourgeoisie was created, while the white bourgeoisie could export its capital and externalise itself. The development of industry has stalled. Industries like clothing and shoes lost their protection and could not compete. Real levels of unemployment are much greater than the 25% that appears in official statistics.

The newly elected president of the ANC (and hence the prospective president of South Africa), Cyril Ramaphosa, is a leading exemplar of the new bourgeoisie. His role in the 2012 Marikana massacre, where he took a hawkish line towards the miners, is, of course, very well known. There is no surprise in the welcome accorded to the decision by the Johannesburg stock exchange and South African big business.

The South African economy has been hit by one blow after another. The controls over the export of capital were effectively removed and big business left the country. Anglo-American almost owned the country and quickly moved its headquarters to London - and registration at the London Stock Exchange. Others followed. The upper and middle class did its best to take its capital out of the country. Protection accorded to industry was removed in the face of globalisation. Industry fell relatively behind its comparators, Australia, Canada, etc. Educational standards remained at low levels - or even declined in some instances. Workers' pay did not rise much, if at all. For the majority of the population, the new regime was an economic failure. The Communist Party claimed just under 300,000 members at its July 2017 congress, and it has been in government throughout the period since 1994. Like the Chinese Communist Party its membership runs across class, and not just among intellectuals.

We live in a world in transition from capitalism, and much of that transition so far has been blind, unrecognised and brutal. The founder of the Trotskyist movement in South Africa had no illusions in a rapid shift to socialism. A new genuinely Marxist party has yet to be formed but the ground is clearly being prepared.

In Zimbabwe there was a different situation, in that the white minority was much smaller and the country less industrialised. There was also no Communist Party or leftwing

party of any significance, in spite of the terminology used. However, Robert Mugabe and his Zanu-PF sought assistance from the Chinese - something which is still forthcoming to this day.

It is interesting to note the acceptance of the legitimacy of the anti-colonial struggle in today's formerly imperial press, when discussing the past of the crucial characters in the succession drama in Harare. Dictatorial or semi-dictatorial rule is a feature of much of Africa. Under conditions where there is a dominant rightwing, private or government-controlled press, limited educational facilities, low incomes and no believable alternative, it is not surprising.

The failure of the electoral scene in Kenya has been played out in 2017. Between the expropriation of the surplus above consumption for export or payment to foreign owners and creditors and the local elite paying themselves exorbitant salaries and fees, a part of which is sent abroad, the majority have insufficient to sustain themselves.

Stalinism of different varieties has played a role in a series of African countries, like Angola and Ethiopia, including Zimbabwe.

China

The role of the Chinese has been crucial since Mugabe sought help from them in the 70s. However,

... writing in the influential state media tabloid *Global Times* on Friday, Wang Hongyi, an associate research fellow at the Institute of West-Asian and African Studies, said concerns had begun to grow over the long-term safety of Beijing's investment in its African partner.

"Chinese investment in Zimbabwe has also fallen victim to Mugabe's policy and some projects were forced to close down or move to other countries in recent years, bringing huge losses," said Wang. "Bilateral cooperation did not realize its potential under Mugabe's rule."⁶

The Chinese investments are crucial to the Zimbabwean economy, some \$450 billion dollars in 2015.⁷

The head of the army was in China shortly before the *de facto* coup displacing Mugabe, and the Chinese denied any connection, but quickly congratulated the new president.⁸

There obviously is a far deeper problem than the immediate question of succession and the economic issue of further investment.

Socialism in one country is impossible, as the USSR amply demonstrated, and Stalinism in one country can only last so long. What exists in Zimbabwe is one thing and what can come to exist is another question. The same applies to South Africa. The overall global strategy is provided by the imperial hegemon, the USA.

The USA has assisted two countries to reach fully industrialised, modern status - South Korea and Japan. In practice, it orchestrated debt relief/war reparation relief for Germany, while continuing to occupy the country and assist its industrial revival. Malaysia was helped by the UK, when British troops fought the insurgency. Outside of these countries there are no other third-world or ruined countries which have reached the level of UK or France in terms of industry or income. The relatively uncompetitive nature of Stalinist-type industry has doomed the eastern European countries to a secondary status within the European Union, given that they have had to upgrade their industry in the context of a world market.

China may prove to be the exception, in that a state-capitalist industry, combined with the

Communist Party, has managed high rates of growth, together with the spread of education and skills in the population. It has only done so, however, by being integrated into the world market, with US investment. Its own indigenous industry, as with cars, tends to have lower productivity and be less competitive in critical industrial areas. The giant firm, Hon Hai Foxconn Technology Group, has its head quarters in Taiwan, but has more than a million employees in China, working on Apple and other US firms' products.

Nonetheless, there are no other countries like China, and its contradictions seem likely to lead to change sooner rather than later. Countries dependent on China like Zimbabwe have not been able to get out of their economic trap.

The fault lies partly with the capitalist class, which through the United States government and US firms enforces a boycott on non-market-based countries. The World Trade Organisation has refused to remove China from the list of non-market economies. New or patented technology is closely guarded. The Chinese have tried to get around the problem by buying up western firms. However, a number of governments have refused to give permission to the Chinese to buy their firms. Germany, Switzerland and the USA are among them. In effect, the Chinese have refused to carry out part of their bargain with global capitalism. They have refused or perhaps delayed the introduction of total privatisation.

The problem also lies with the nature of the regimes which have come into being, in that they are inherently unviable, and their ruling personnel quickly deteriorate into a privileged layer eager to maintain their status and privileges. A dictatorial form then becomes inevitable in the context of failure and massive shortages in all spheres. However, the ultimate source of the failure lies in the need of an imperial form to maintain economic and political control, albeit through intermediaries. Those areas which do not conform are punished through sanctions and military measures, when required.

The so-called liberation movements, led by such as Mugabe, have nothing to do with socialism, even though they proclaim themselves to be Marxist or socialist, usually with some prefix, as in 'African socialism'. They were (or are) able to found a national bourgeoisie or ruling elite, with a strong party which goes along with it. The absolute poverty of the masses, when combined with the flamboyant living of the ruling group, as exemplified by the Mugabe family, engenders a national cynicism even more intense than what existed under Stalinism. The structure is at one and the same time brittle and strong. It is apparently strong, because there appears no genuine alternative party on the horizon; and brittle, because the vast majority want something better.

Where there is a proletariat, as in South Africa, the failure of the existing Stalinist forms has led to some movement, and we can expect that at some point a new non-sectarian Marxist party will form, but that has yet to happen anywhere, although it may be on the horizon. So the situation looks hopeful, but over a longer term.

Disintegration

The downturn - variously called a recession, crisis or depression - continues in spite of various attempts to declare it at an end. Investment in relation to savings remains low, as is productivity, while real levels of unemployment remain high. In the UK the standard of living continues to fall. Much of the country has lost its employment opportunities, and factories, shops and whole industries have closed in most places north of London. The same is true, up to a point, in other

developed countries. The logic of this situation is for the successful parts of countries to pull away from the rest. That is partly expressed through the revival of an older nationalism leading to demands for autonomy or independence. Brexit is a peculiar form of the same phenomenon.

The ruling class has turned to such nationalism, usually expressed through the forms of the dominant nationality. However, the ruling class today has global holdings, so that nationalism does not serve its interests, nor can it be believed. The paradox then is that sections of the working class have taken a chauvinist line, particularly in opposing immigration. Some on the liberal left have become disheartened at the lack of workers' internationalism. But the truth is somewhat more complicated.

In the first instance, there is no reason to glorify unskilled workers above other workers. Trump has appealed particularly to relatively less skilled workers in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin, who like his line on building a wall on the Mexican border and excluding goods that could be made in the USA. This section of workers is something like 5% of those employed in the USA. Over three quarters of those employed are white-collar workers. This proportion is likely to increase with automation.

The conditions under which a substantial proportion of the workforce is unskilled are likely to change in developed countries. At the same time the nature of white-collar work is being transformed into a fully proletarian type. Pay has been held relatively static for a long time in the USA. What needs to change is the form in which the modern working class organises (or rather does not organise). Trump is doing a good job in forcing people to think politically.

At the same time, although the political-economic interest of the ruling class is global, it is forced politically to use division as a mode of support and control, given that it lacks other potentially useful instruments. The resurgence of racism and anti-Semitism and the organisations associated with such forms as the AfD in Germany and KKK in the south of the United States have produced parallel organisations in other countries. Trump's implicit support in his tweets for such organisations, even as he declares himself even-handed, is a sign of the times ●

Notes

1. Professor Mazzucato was awarded the Leontief prize in economics for 2018. Tufts University's Global Development and Environment Institute (GDAE), makes the awards. GDAE co-director Neva Goodwin said: "The topic of innovation receives a lot of attention these days. What has been insufficiently recognised, before the work of Mariana Mazzucato, is the critical role of governments in innovation. As Mazzucato points out, taxpayers have been the real venture capitalists, funding the riskiest investments in the knowledge economy. It is to be hoped that her work will result in a more equitable sharing of the recognition and the rewards for this important activity undertaken by government for the people." (www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/public-purpose/news/2017/oct/iipp-director-awarded-2018-leontief-economics-prize).
2. L Kuennsberg, "Big 'end state' Brexit discussion looming for PM" (www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-42255840).
3. I Martine: "We have the weakest PM in living memory. The time has come to acknowledge that Theresa May is unsuited to leadership and must be replaced urgently" (*The Times* December 7 2017).
4. "EU divorce deal involves serious concessions" *Financial Times* December 8 2017: "This concession will come as a delight to Philip Hammond, the chancellor, and those who want a business-friendly Brexit" (www.ft.com/content/cfac4ca-dc12-11e7-a039-c64b1c09b482).
5. *Ibid.* The author gives various reasons for their apparent capitulation.
6. B Westcott and S George, "The Chinese connection to the Zimbabwe 'coup'", CNN, November 18 2017 (<http://edition.cnn.com/2017/11/17/africa/china-zimbabwe-mugabe-diplomacy/index.html>).
7. *Ibid.* "In 2015 alone, Chinese investment topped \$450 million, accounting for more than half of all foreign investment into Zimbabwe."
8. www.news24.com/Leader/Zimbabwe/china-hails-new-zimbabwe-leader-denies-role-in-transition-20171127.

POLEMIC

Foundations in sand

Is poststructuralism purely a reaction to Stalinism? Paul Demarty responds to Rex Dunn

Rex Dunn follows up his previous polemic against so-called 'post-structuralism' with another, similar in its essential theses to his previous efforts.¹

The basic difficulty with Rex's account of poststructuralism and its relationship to political history is that he has a very specific story he wants to tell, and continues to repeat doggedly, despite Mike Macnair's subsequent criticisms. Comrade Dunn's contends that Marxist theory was poisoned by Stalinist 'diamat', that this theoretical legacy, combined with the Parti Communiste Français betrayal of the 1968 insurrection, explains the appeal of poststructuralism to the next generations of radical intellectuals - and that the explicit 'anti-foundationalism' of this philosophical outlook in turn authorises forms of feminism and identity politics that do not assign sufficient (or any) weight to human nature. The result is modern forms of political correctness that argue that 'men are the problem' and not capitalist class society.²

Indeed, comrade Dunn's response to criticism seems to be mainly to increase the level of detail in his descriptions of 'poststructuralism' and related phenomena - which, however, does not in the end justify his interpretations. Rex labours under fundamental misunderstandings of the milieu that gave birth to 'poststructuralism', the significance of the May 1968 *événements*, and indeed the causal structures of highly abstract ideas like those of the 'poststructuralists'. Increasing the level of detail might have been a worthwhile approach if he had sat down and read (or reread), *in depth*, the authors he criticises; instead, we get in the great majority citations from polemicists against them, and polemicists against them *en groupe*.

I have been careful so far to put scare-quotes around every mention of the word 'poststructuralism', for beyond the usual difficulties of naming philosophical schools (participants tend to reject the presumption to 'put them in a box'), poststructuralism is one of those things that is defined negatively against what it is not, or at least not exactly. There clearly is a unity between them, but there are many kinds of unity; and what kind we are dealing with here is hardly incidental to matters.

Cliffnotes

So we ought to begin with some cliffnotes intellectual history. There are four essential intellectual contexts for 'poststructuralism':

- firstly, structuralism itself - a school of linguistic theory that fell prey to mission creep after 1930;
- secondly, phenomenology - an idealist orientation in central European philosophy, whose pre-eminent exponents were Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, but which gained traction among French radicals in the work of Jean-Paul Sartre and his wing of the existentialists;
- thirdly, the libertine-nihilist current in especially French intellectual culture (Sade, Bataille and so on);
- and finally Marxism, in the form of the prestige granted to the PCF by its central participation in the anti-fascist resistance of the Vichy regime and Nazi occupation.

Rex weirdly describes structuralism as a "western philosophical offshoot" of "Stalinist 'diamat'", "epitomised by the work of [Louis] Althusser" - basically none of this is true except the word 'western'. Structuralism



Structuralism cannot be neatly pinned down as one thing. It is many things: a linguistic theory, an idealist philosophy, a libertine-nihilist current and finally a dissident PCF version of 'Marxism'. It not only long predates Stalinism, but the fall of tsarism; its epitomes, in the usual enumeration, would be Saussure, Roman Jakobson, Emile Benveniste and Claude Lévi-Strauss

The 'structuralist Marxism' of Louis Althusser should be treated more as an exotic piece of fusion cuisine. His political failures in 1968 are important not merely because he was a PCF member, but because he was supposed to be a leftwing rebel



is a linguistic theory, not exactly a philosophy, though much philosophy drew on it later; its founding expression, Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in general linguistics*, predates not only Stalinism, but the fall of tsarism; its epitomes, in the usual enumeration, would be Saussure, Roman Jakobson, Emile Benveniste and Claude Lévi-Strauss, with Althusser treated more as an exotic piece of fusion cuisine - a 'structural Marxist'.

The basic idea of structuralism is that no scientific theory is possible of the historical development of language, but it might instead be studied through the systematic relationships between utterances. It is of no consequence how we came to associate the word 'cat' with the furry creature made so famous by the internet; but we might come to understand something about humankind in the various differences in signification between it and the word 'dog'. Jakobson and Benveniste wasted no time in describing some of the more abstruse such structural relationships; Lévi-Strauss, an anthropologist, applied the general method to kinship relations and myths. The result, after World War II, was a powerful bourgeois trend in French academic circles, *in competition with* Marxism, or 'Stalinist diamat', according to taste - not a perverted offshoot of it. (There was also cross-pollination - we have mentioned Althusser, but the early work of Roland Barthes is also relevant.)

Phenomenology, on the other hand, clearly was a school of philosophy rather than some other human science; its founder, in the sense we are concerned with here, was Edmund Husserl, a mathematician and philosopher, and his project consisted of deep introspection into the *forms* of consciousness in abstraction from its content. In Husserl, this endeavour had an almost campily rationalist flavour to it, with a whole Latin vocabulary concocted for the study of mental phenomena. His student, Martin Heidegger, pulled things in a radically different direction. In his thought, phenomenology merges with ultra-reactionary *Kulturpessimismus*, in a picture of a world whose fundamental experience of things is mutilated by the technocratic banality of modernity. The mission of philosophy is to dig away through these structures of thought, revealing their hidden contradictions, and attempt to live in an authentic pre-rational relationship with the world around us.

I will not discuss in detail this libertine-nihilism, except to emphasise the prominence in poststructuralism of a sort of Dionysiac edge: many of the systems elaborated by structuralism turn out to have, as their unmentionable complement, a core of sex and violence; conversely, such a primitivism of pleasure serves as a destination for thought. We think of Roland Barthes' 'The pleasure of the text', or Lacan's 'Kant with Sade' (frankly, most of Lacan), or Foucault's 'research' for the *History of sexuality* in the bath houses of San Francisco.

The Marxism of the French scene in this period is presented in Rex's telling as a matter of 'Stalinist diamat' -

... summed up as: history is on the side of the proletariat and the achievement of communism is inevitable, regardless of mistakes by the leadership (ie, the Soviet party). History cannot be pushed by subjective factors, such as leftwing adventurism.

Certainly, the electoral success and deep organisation of the PCF lent its own intellectual culture pre-eminence within French Marxism; but Rex's account is radically incomplete if it is supposed to account for the pioneering poststructuralists, who were not in great numbers drawn from the immediate orbit of the PCF. Many came from the ultra-leftist milieu around the Socialisme ou Barbarie group (Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard and Cornelius Castoriadis all served time in 'SouB'), and many others from Maoist groups like Gauche Prolétarienne (the Maoist wing of the 'official communist' student organisation was also a fertile breeding ground, under the influence of Althusser)³.

Here we must offer a very sharp corrective. Apropos of another matter (feminism), Rex remarks of Maoism that "[it] is a variant of Stalinism. No wonder they got it wrong theoretically!" From the point of view of 20th century history, indeed, we must call Maoism a variant of Stalinism. The trouble is that his criticisms of Stalinism are criticisms that do not apply to Maoism. He excoriates Stalinism for selling out in May 1968; but the Maoists were on the streets. He criticises the anti-subjective bias in 'Stalinist diamat' - but surely nobody can accuse Maoists of 'neglecting the subjective factor', however numerous their sins. (Indeed, Mao already objects to such 'diamat' in his criticism of Stalin's *Economic problems of socialism in the USSR*,⁴ before the cultural revolution that provided the immediate context for poststructuralism).

The too-easy dismissal of Maoists as just another bunch of Stalinists, then, leaves Rex guilty of what is called the 'no true Scotsman' fallacy, whereby the terms of debate are craftily redefined during its course. It also leads him to misunderstand the relationship between formal leftwing politics and the emergence of poststructuralism as a phenomenon in the 1960s and 70s. Its initial advocates were not, on the whole, dissidents from the official Stalinist party's philosophical mainstream, but former devotees of other Marxist trends. Althusser's political failures in 1968 are important not merely because he was a PCF member, but because he was supposed to be a leftwing rebel.

Rex clings to the idea of 1968 as an opportunity squandered by Stalinist treachery, but, quite apart from the fact that this is merely an empty counterfactual ('if your mother had balls, she'd be your father'), the spontaneist terms in which he couches this criticism would leave the Maoists, within and without the PCF, as perfectly adequate historical agents; instead of talking about Althusser as a devil figure, he should wish that he had been a more effective factional operator for his politics ... and so on. Clearly that was not the case: there were plenty of organisations in favour of 'going all the way'.

Shaky foundations

Rex gets himself into hotter water still by adopting the flag of philosophical foundationalism for himself:

Foundationalism is associated with the ideas of Descartes and Kant, as well as Hegel and Marx, although those can be traced back to the Aristotelian tradition. It may be summarised as follows: (i) An objective theory of knowledge is possible. Basic insights cannot be called into question, unless proved false by reason and empirical facts. The laws and categories of a body of ideas correspond to those of nature. (ii) On the basis of these insights, "more general propositions can be inferred". (iii) Therefore we have the foundation of a philosophical system. (iv) Philosophy itself is foundational,

being grounded in reason.

This may seem hopelessly vague and overbroad, not to say contradictory - we do not know what an objective theory of knowledge would be, but presumably he means "realist" (the philosophical position that the entities identified by knowledge exist independently of the knower). "Basic insights" being "proved false by reason" must by definition be "called into question"; otherwise, how could the exercise of reason begin? Clause (ii) is a banality; clause (iii) begins "therefore" but the possibility of inference does not imply necessarily a systematic approach to philosophy. Philosophy is "foundational" by virtue of being "grounded in reason", that is to say, having reason as a foundation, and therefore not being foundational at all.

Yet it all looks very familiar to an old hand at reading the poststructuralists, for this is exactly the amalgam constructed by 'anti-foundationalists' in order to lump together Marx, Hegel, Descartes and the pope into one neat package. Rex seems to get his definition from a textbook-style dictionary of critical theory, whereby it is to be expected that poststructuralism will be treated as the state of the art and more 'advanced'.

On the face of it, this is a quite extraordinary concession to the 'anti-foundationalists'. The essential untruth of anti-foundationalism is that it is opposed to an amalgam, whereby a host of utterly disparate and entirely incompatible positions are lumped together to make it easier to smear them all *en bloc*. To take up your position in favour of foundations in general - with the pope, against Lyotard! - is utterly untenable.

When Nazis state that the movement of human society is grounded ultimately in the differences and Darwinian struggle between races, Catholics that human society is grounded ultimately in the supererogatory creative act of an absolute deity, and Marxists that human society is grounded in material nature and fundamental economic relationships between groups of human individuals, it is not the case that all are united on the general point that human affairs are determined by some real thing or another that can be known, or at least identified, but differ on the details: *they in fact disagree fundamentally on what it is for something to be founded on or grounded in something else*, despite all equally fitting into the big tent of foundationalism. From the point of view of a materialist and realist view of the world, such as orthodox Marxism, Foucauldian discourse analysis and religious cosmology are equally wrong.

It is unfortunately the case that Rex's errors on this point are not merely a bizarre accident. His explicit polemical support for 'foundationalism' is, on one level, a matter of fidelity to the arguments of Scott Mickle and others that Marx is fundamentally 'Aristotelian' in his outlook, in which causation must include both the relationships between entities and their inner essences in a dialectical relationship: a defensible Marxological-philosophical position. Yet it is also related to the proximate cause of his objections to 'anti-foundationalism': the idea, implied in the poststructuralist progenitors and explicit in their more flamboyant followers, of a radical social constructionism: that human nature exists entirely at the level of discourse, which Rex diagnoses as authorising the current ascendancy of transgender identity politics.

Opposition to the latter is his immediate political point. Yet it does not follow from the fact that there are natural grounds for human relations (in this case gender identity) that those natural grounds are exactly what we think they are, or operate exactly as immediately as we think they do.

For the Nazis, transgenderism is a matter of degeneration in the racial stock. For Catholics, it is a matter of insensitivity to the natural law created by God. Among Marxists, there is a great deal of debate as to the sources of gender identity, but surely neither of the previous positions would be acceptable. Yet they (especially the latter) have, at one time or another (and today, in some places), enjoyed the benefits of 'obvious' truths.

The foundations of a given phenomenon may not be transparent to us, then. Marxists have the classic example of the fetishism of the commodity: we discover that the essence of the commodity is not at all what we thought it was. Some input to the phenomenon of gender identification must 'follow the chromosomes'; but we know that much of our picture of gender does not. The crucible in which we sort these things out is *the criticism of foundations*. We should not be afraid to accompany the 'anti-foundationalists' when they demonstrate the unsoundness of some apparent foundation or another. (It is a shame they so often do a poor job.) Whisper it quietly, but they may even be able to teach us a trick or two.

Rex, on the other hand, seems to view these ideas as resulting ultimately in a "danger to man as a 'species being'" in the form of anti-men 'political correctness'; but if the realist theory of human species-being is correct, this is simply impossible - one cannot theorise it away. Only by invalidating our successive conceptions of human species-being can we fully understand and indeed become it. Erecting a philosophical fortress around some particular understanding of it is the wrong approach.

The telos

It is worth returning to our earlier discussion of the French scene, for there is a question left unanswered. Why should the 'three sources and component parts' - spontaneist libertarianism, both Marxist and decadent-nihilist; the most anti-rationalistic wing of the phenomenologists; the ultra-systematic nostrums of structuralism - have proven such an intellectually combustible mixture?

In truth, there is not much specific to these ideas - other than that they were newish and audacious - that should have caused such a stir. We must think about phenomena such as the emergence of philosophical schools at a much higher level of abstraction than Rex does, hinging everything on the single historical event of May 1968. That said, we must work our way up to that level. There is, as Rex says, a basically invariant human biological nature, in which even the most audacious intellectuals participate; therefore, intellectuals also must eat, and thus must find a place for themselves in the class structure of society.

In capitalist society, that position is - crudely speaking - that of the petty bourgeoisie. (We leave aside the 'organic intellectuals' of the working class - surely irrelevant to a discussion of Foucault, Derrida and co.) The petty bourgeoisie, however, is a highly protean class ideologically; its continual dissolution by the automatic mechanism of capitalism, and reconstitution by the painstaking effort of the capitalist state for political reasons, lends a great deal of uncertainty to its outlook, and the possibility of wild political lurches and philosophical positions.

We have spent a great deal of space on the specific intellectual genealogy (to use a favoured term of Foucault's) of the poststructuralists. Yet Foucault chooses *genealogy* to emphasise the provisionality of his conclusions, and assert the illegitimacy of more abstract, historical and - *quelle horreur!* - teleological conceptions of ideological analysis. As Marxists, we

have no such qualms. The ideas of poststructuralism are in the end another bracing, fascinating product of a social class whose existence is an unending enactment of Lévi-Strauss's 'one myth only': something dies, and comes back to life again. We should file it with Heidegger, yes, but also theosophy and Russian formalism and Frankfurt School critical theory and Tübingen Catholic nationalism and Methodism and ... *in origin*, Marxism. We cannot know, in advance, what new ideas will truly revolutionise the intellectual scene, but we expect that new ideas will continue to come forth, without fear, even if many amount merely to quackery. (We can, of course, do our best to build institutions of the working class such that a different and better intellectual culture should emerge.)

We should then ask ourselves honestly whether we should expect poststructuralism to disappear in the event of the proletarian conquest of power - in other words, place ourselves on the other side of Rex's counterfactual, and wonder whether a European revolution in 1968 would have crushed deconstruction in the egg. Frankly, the historical evidence points elsewhere - reread Trotsky's *Literature and revolution* for a picture of the bizarre literary trends unleashed by socialist revolution, even given the severe jeopardy of things at the moment of Trotsky's writing.⁵

A truly successful revolution would have a more vibrant and chaotic literary culture still; and no doubt the remaining petty bourgeois intellectuals would make even more interesting moves, as they, slowly, are euthanised as a separate historical layer, and society itself becomes more ludic and intellectually adventurous ("The average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx," Trotsky writes, "and above this ridge new peaks will rise"⁶).

It is from this point of view - unforgivably teleological, eschatological, etc, as it is - that I, as an individual, evaluate poststructuralism: as a literary tradition, whose great value and most fundamental weaknesses are identical: that is, an unconcern for rigour and consequences. In this regard, Rex is very wrong about Althusser. He is not the epitome of structuralism at all, but a poststructuralist through and through: it is his teaching that philosophy is in the end a matter of the tactical taking of positions, in the fond hope that more knowledge might happen to fall out the other end.⁷ Such is also the basic orientation

of his peers.

Thus the paradox that the very things that make Derrida, Foucault and co a useless guide to political action (the impossibility of assessing the validity of some of their claims, the clear falsity of many of the others, and their apparent unconcern for either of these issues) make for great *aesthetic* rewards for the generous reader. (It may help to think of Derrida's works as a vast science-fiction novel about a world in which Derrida's philosophy is true.)

Poststructuralism conquered the literary academy in the 1970s and 1980s partly as a result of successive political reversals against the Marxist left, partly (it is odd that Rex does not mention this) as a result of major changes in the cultural policy of the US state department, as it shifted its money towards the new right, and partly because, if we want a restricted sphere of human activity where these philosophers' nostrums about endless signifying chains and perpetually deferred meaning have the most purchase, literature is exactly it. As a school of literary or aesthetic theory, it is surely of no negative consequence: in those other respects, agency lies elsewhere. Rex concludes with the statement that "we have to build strong Marxist parties", so we do not squander the next 1968. We could not disagree.

But to do so, we need at least some of the spirit of those French oddballs, which they actually inherit from Marx and Hegel and Descartes - the *refusal* to take the world as it appears for granted, the urge always to turn over the next rock to see what squirms beneath ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. 'Understanding poststructuralism', January 11. His previous article on the subject was 'Poststructuralism and decline', November 23.
2. 'Historical inaccuracies and theoretical overkill', November 30.
3. Here might be the moment to point out that there were also those among the leading poststructuralists with no leftwing political affiliations - Jacques Derrida only began toying with Marxism a quarter of a century after 1968, and Jacques Lacan was a male-chauvinist Gaullist. The 'treachery of the PCF' was surely a matter of indifference, if not relief, to such figures.
4. www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8_66.htm. The very first words state: "Stalin's book from first to last says nothing about the superstructure. It is not concerned with people; it considers things, not people."
5. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/lit-revo/index.htm - see especially chapters 2 to 5.
6. *Ibid* chapter 8.
7. See B Brewster (translator), 'Lenin and philosophy' in *Lenin and philosophy and other essays* New York 2001.

Fighting fund

Small windfall

Comrade EW decided to "share a small windfall" with the *Weekly Worker* to the tune of £50 at the very end of last year - but for some reason we only received his letter after last week's paper went to press.

So it didn't quite make it for December's fighting fund, as he intended! But, of course, we hit our target last month, so that £50 will come in very handy for the first fund of 2018, which, as usual, is aiming for that same target of £1,750.

Another cheque for £20 came in from comrade JM, while DB clicked on our PayPal button to donate £7. He was the only one of our online readers to donate by that method last week, even though there were no less than 3,985 of them - in other words, around 1,000

higher than the usual readership over the recent period. They must have been making up for those two weeks when there was no *Weekly Worker* over the Christmas period!

But the biggest single donation was a standing order - a brilliant £280 from KB. Added to this were other SOs from MM (£75), DG and TR (£40 each) and RK (£10).

All that came to £522, taking our running total to £959. Meaning we've got exactly two weeks to raise the remaining £791. But after the successes of the last few months I'm absolutely confident that we'll do it once more! ●

Robbie Rix

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

ITALY

The price of neoliberalism

The continuing decline of the left will be confirmed by the results of the March 4 general election, predicts **Toby Abse**



Matteo Renzi:
running far behind



The Italian parliament was dissolved on December 28, and the next general election will take place on Sunday March 4. Although both the dissolution and the date of the election were announced slightly earlier than expected, it would be an exaggeration to suggest that the outgoing, 17th, legislature did not run for a full five-year term, even if the events of its final day (December 23), discussed later in this article, did it absolutely no credit.

At present, the 'centre-right'¹ coalition, led by Silvio Berlusconi - despite the ban on this convicted felon either standing for or being appointed to public office within the time-frame of the current election campaign - has a clear lead in the opinion polls,² with the right-populist Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S - Five Star Movement) in second place on 27.5%. The 'centre-left' coalition, dominated by Matteo Renzi's Partito Democratico (PD) is in third place; the PD itself is down to 24.1% - below its February 2013 general election score - and its minor allies only add a couple of percentage points at best.³

Left challengers

The only other force certain to gain some parliamentary representation is Pietro

Grasso's left social democratic Liberi e Uguali (LeU - Free and Equal People), currently scoring 6.8%. Its adoption on January 7 of the slogan, '*Per i molti, non per i pochi*' ('For the many, not the few'), together with its call for the abolition of university tuition fees, illustrates its Corbynite politics, which are more than just a way of annoying the self-consciously Blairite Renzi. The new electoral law - the *Rosatellum* - requires the party to pass a 3% threshold to gain parliamentary representation in the proportional section (which accounts for 63% of the total seats). The 'first past the post' single-member constituencies (37% of the total - 232 in the Chamber and 116 in the Senate) will all see a three-way fight between the centre-right, centre-left and M5S. LeU, let alone weaker groupings, stands no chance of winning any such seats.

However, the *Rosatellum* compels any force outside the coalitions to stand in all the FPTP seats, since voters are not allowed to split their vote in the way they can in, say, the Greater London Assembly elections. There is no current likelihood that any of the groups to the left of LeU which are contemplating standing in the election will pass the threshold, even if

they succeed in collecting the requisite number of signatures - only required of forces without representation in the outgoing parliament - needed to stand in the first place.

The grouping that is likely to succeed in standing candidates is Potere al Popolo ('Power to the People'). This cartel includes the Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (PRC), the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI - formerly known as the Partito dei Comunisti Italiani - the party founded by Armando Cossutta when he split from the PRC in 1998) and Sinistra Anticapitalista (the main heirs of Sinistra Critica, the soft Trotskyist group linked to the Mandeliste Fourth International), as well as some smaller and more obscure factions. The precise purpose of this initiative is unclear, since the blatantly populist, cross-class name chosen by the cartel does not put 'communism' on the ballot paper (or even make any symbolic reference to 'socialism', 'workers' or 'revolution' either). Whilst some of its demands may place it to the left of LeU, and many of its members do have a more consistent record in opposing neoliberalism than some of the LeU leadership, it seems

perilously close to what some other writers for this paper would term 'an unpopular popular front'.

It is worth noting that Luciana Castellina, a veteran of Italy's far left - one of the Manifesto Group expelled from the PCI back in 1969 - who supported the Lista Tsipras (largely composed of the PRC and the now defunct Socialismo, Ecologia e Libertà) at the last European election (2014), has made it plain that she thinks LeU is a more fruitful project than Potere al Popolo.

Needless to say, some of the more sectarian left groupings have rejected both LeU and Potere al Popolo. The hard Trotskyists of Marco Ferrando's Partito Comunista dei Lavoratori have formed an alliance with another smaller outfit, and are proposing to stand as 'Socialismo Rivoluzionario' or something similar. The hard Stalinists of Marco Rizzo's Partito Comunista, who split from the softer Stalinist of the PdCi/PCI some years ago,⁴ are also discussing standing, but, given their failure to bypass rules about collecting signatures in Italy by proudly proclaiming their links with various eastern European Stalinist parties at the 2014 European elections, voters may well hear no more from these boastful enthusiasts for North Korea.

What we fight for

At the other end of the spectrum, some neo-fascists regard the FdI as far too soft, and are considering standing in the elections. Forza Nuova has made an alliance with Fiamma Tricolore, which has a more direct link with those in the MSI who rejected the name change to 'Alleanza Nazionale' in 1994. However, this particular set of racist thugs may not even get the required signatures, let alone stand any chance of entering parliament. A somewhat more serious threat comes from Casa Pound, which has recently scored quite well in local elections in Lucca and Ostia, reaching 9% in the latter case. Casa Pound is more likely to get on the ballot paper, but its secretary, Simone Di Stefano's boastful remarks - "They are afraid and they are right to be. Because we shall enter parliament and we shall be their worst nightmare"⁵ will probably remain unfulfilled.

Migrant rights

Returning to the political mainstream, it is worth discussing the parliamentary events of December 23, the day when there was no forum in the Senate to even discuss the *Ius Soli* ('Right of the Soil') - the draft law that would have given Italian citizenship to about 800,000 children of migrant descent born and educated in Italy.

The PD's decision to postpone the discussion to the very end of the parliamentary timetable, after the final votes on the budget, had already given rise to understandable cynicism - many had assumed that other debates would overrun and the *Ius Soli* would drop off the agenda. The PD had certainly calculated that they would only have had any chance of passing the controversial measure by resorting to a vote of confidence and did not want to risk the defeat of Paolo Gentiloni's government at the very end of a parliamentary session, when the PD Senate majority was evaporating - many members of Angelino Alfano's Alleanza Popolare, always an unreliable ally, were running back towards Berlusconi's electoral coalition, from which they had defected earlier in the parliament, when it looked as if their old master was in his political death agony.

Nonetheless, the PD could have at least tried to put the matter to an ordinary vote, if not a vote of confidence, to make a symbolic gesture in favour of extending Italian citizenship and to expose the racism of their opponents, including M5S. It was always likely that there would be some absentees among the senators, given the approach of Christmas, but arguably a more combative and principled PD might have been able to take advantage of senatorial absentees on the right - particularly amongst Forza Italia - to pass the measure in a poorly attended session, provided there was still a quorum in the Chamber.

Whilst the M5S decision to leave the parliament building *en bloc* may indeed have been the decisive factor, the 29 absentees amongst the PD senators also played a role in providing the rabidly racist Lega with a moment of ecstatic triumph, once a quick-thinking Lega senator called for a head count. We shall never know exactly how many of the numerous senators, who left the building with their suitcases almost as soon as the budget was passed, were just more concerned to join their families for Christmas than with their parliamentary duties, and how many took a conscious political decision to sabotage the bill. However, M5S has made it very plain where it stands - with the racists and xenophobes and against the 800,000 children of legal migrants educated in Italy who would have benefited from the bill.

M5S was the only political group totally absent from the chamber, so it is quite clear that the majority took a collective and thoroughly political decision to walk out and sabotage the bill by depriving it of a quorum.

M5S had originally planned to abstain in person, which counts towards the quorum as a negative vote in the Senate (unlike the Chamber of Deputies, where an abstention in person is treated in the conventional manner: ie, as an actual abstention), so running away from the vote was a very cowardly way of appealing to racist voters torn between M5S and the Lega.⁶ The dishonest claims by 31-year-old M5S candidate premier and political leader Luigi Di Maio⁷ and other leading M5S figures - that they believed that the question of citizenship rights should be solved at the European, rather than the national, level - make no sense at all, given their Europhobic outlook (which was made particularly obvious by the way their MEPs joined Nigel Farage's grouping very soon after their arrival in Brussels in 2014).

Whilst Di Maio showed no hesitation in opposing the reception of migrants crossing the Mediterranean and defaming various NGOs as tools of human traffickers in 2017, there is probably enough residual guilt amongst a minority of the more liberal M5S parliamentarians for it to be impossible for Di Maio to openly back Matteo Salvini and the Lega in their outright refusal to extend citizenship rights to the children of migrants in any circumstances.⁸ It is to be hoped that ambiguous statements by leading figures in LeU - particularly Pietro Grasso and to a lesser extent Pierluigi Bersani - about a willingness to back a potential M5S minority government on an agreed common programme do not represent LeU's collective view.⁹

Within M5S, according to *Corriere della Sera* (January 10), there is a division between Di Battista, who favours a deal with LeU, and Di Maio, who favours a deal with the Lega, if M5S is the largest single party, but needs a post-electoral alliance to form a majority government. Although recent M5S calls for the restoration of article 18 (of the Workers' Statute of 1970), protecting workers against dismissal 'without just cause', shows that the organisation is still capable of a degree of left demagoguery in a bid to win disillusioned former PD voters during the current election campaign, this pro-workers' stance is undermined by M5S's hostility to trade unions, which is in marked contrast to LeU's links with the CGIL, the most leftwing of the major trade union confederations.

Reactionary

The early days of the election campaign have been marked by reactionary and demagogic proposals from all three of the major players. The 'centre-right' - or at least the Lega and Forza Italia, its major components - are calling for a 'flat tax': a single lower rate for the Italian equivalent of income tax. Given the bitter rivalry between the Lega and Forza Italia - and Matteo Salvini's un concealed ambition to become centre-right premier¹⁰ - it is hardly surprising that they differ on the rate at which to set this 'flat tax', with Salvini calling for it to be even lower than Berlusconi's target.¹¹ Berlusconi, perhaps for personal reasons, is keener to abolish the inheritance tax and to remove the tax on a very small number of extremely large first homes that did not benefit from the more general abolition of taxation on first homes implemented by Renzi.

In any event, such proposals would destroy any remaining principle of progressive taxation - a principle which has already been eroded in recent years¹². Moreover, such reductions in the state's revenue would lead either to further cuts in public services or to substantial increases in Italy's annual deficit and long-term national debt, with all the conflicts with the European Commission and the European Central Bank that these would entail.

Renzi too, aping the ideas of the right in typically zombie-Blairite fashion, is promising lower taxes. His latest proposal is to abolish the

television licence fee and allow RAI (state television) to greatly increase the percentage of its airtime given over to advertising. In the short term, he proposes that RAI's loss of revenue would be covered from general taxation; in reality, if no new taxes were imposed, this would imply further cuts in other public services. Carlo Calenda - one of the more centrist and technocratic of the ministers in Paolo Gentiloni's cabinet - has pointed out that Renzi's proposal makes no economic sense, but has called for RAI's privatisation instead, an even worse idea. Gentiloni has introduced a note of rationality, suggesting an extension in the poorer categories exempt from the licence fee.

M5S is calling for a variant of Universal Basic Income that it calls 'Citizens Income', but is extremely vague as to how it would be paid for. Moreover, some on the left have argued that the M5S proposal, when analysed in detail, is closer to workfare than it might seem at first glance to the young unemployed, who are probably the main target audience for this electoral demagoguery.

Whilst Italy's growth rate and average Italian incomes rose slightly in 2017 - the first year since 2010 when growth has been more than 1% - Italy's GNP is still below the level it was at before the 2007-08 world financial crisis. Small rises in average incomes will probably be eroded by the 5% rises in gas and electricity tariffs announced at the start of 2018. Youth unemployment (between the ages of 15 and 24) has fallen to 32.7%, but it is much higher than the 20% of 2007, even if it is lower than the 43.6% of March 2014.¹³

Such youth unemployment would be higher if it were not for a relatively large amount of labour migration by young people who see no future in Italy. Between September and November 2017, the number of workers in employment rose by 85,000, but those on short-term contracts increased by 101,000, whilst those in permanent employment fell by 16,000. In short, the Jobs Act, as the genuine left predicted, has worsened the long-term trend towards casualisation. It is not surprising that there is widespread discontent, which can be channelled by rightwing demagogues, as we have seen elsewhere in the last couple of years with Brexit, Trump, Le Pen and the Freedom Party of Austria.

And, of course, the PD's neoliberal policies have lost it working class support, as a series of disastrous results in local elections in former PCI strongholds (eg, Livorno, Turin, Sesto San Giovanni and Genoa) has repeatedly shown. The willingness of the PD - particularly interior minister Marco Minniti - to capitulate to racism and xenophobia has not paid off: as Romani Prodi pointed out a few months ago, voters with these attitudes find the original (Lega, FdI, M5S) more attractive than the copy.

Rightwing victory

At this stage, it looks as if no clear winner with an overall majority will emerge on March 4, although Berlusconi and the 'centre-right' are far more likely to get a majority than the other contenders, particularly given the notorious willingness of Italian parliamentarians to defect (there were 546 changes of party during the 17th legislature¹⁴) in search of office, or in some cases large bribes in cash¹⁵. Some journalists suggest that the 'centre-right' coalition might disintegrate after the election, either through Berlusconi doing a deal with the PD to form a 'grand coalition' or the Lega doing a deal with M5S on a racist and Europhobic programme. The neo-fascist FdI leader, Giorgia Meloni, seems distrustful of both her allies, calling on them to make it clear that there will be no deal with either of what she calls "the two lefts" (the PD and M5S).

In short, the PD's further degeneration under Renzi, intensifying the neoliberal turn that had allowed it to prop up Mario

Monti's viciously anti-working class technocratic government of 2011-13, has guaranteed a rightwing victory, whatever form this takes. The best we can hope for is a good vote for the social democratic LeU, which at least will provide some sort of genuine working class representation in parliament - the epoch during which the communists of the PRC could get 8.6% of the vote (1996) ended in 2008, and the surprising solidity of M5S over the last five years¹⁶ has so far proved an insuperable barrier to a revival of the radical left ●

Notes

- Two of its main components could be described as far right - the Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) is a neo-fascist grouping in the tradition of the old Movimento Sociale Italiana (MSI) and the Lega (whose leader, Matteo Salvini, recently dropped the regionalist adjective 'Nord' from its title) is allied with Marine Le Pen's Front National. Even some of Forza Italia's leading figures, such as Marizio Gasparri, are former MSI members.
- Its main components, Forza Italia and the Lega, are on 15.8% and 13.7% respectively, according to a poll reported in *L'Espresso* (January 7). Its third component, the FdI, is scoring around 5% and its centrist ally, Noi Con l'Italia ('With Italy'), may add a percentage point or two to the global total.
- The PD's minor allies include Insieme (Together) - a last-minute amalgam of the Greens, the Partito Socialista Italiano and the Area Civica. Insieme is supposed to be the 'left' ally of the PD, whilst Civica Popolare is the 'centrist' one, including a mish-mash of Christian Democratic fragments and the rump of Italia dei Valori, which started life as a left-populist party and was the PD's 'left' ally in the 2008 general election. Despite some melodramatic rows with Renzi and PD interior minister Marco Minniti, it seems likely that '+Europa' - led by Emma Bonino, a former foreign minister and European commissioner - will be the fourth component of the coalition. None of these groupings are likely to exceed the 3% threshold required to gain seats in the proportional section, and are therefore reliant on the PD giving them a handful of 'centre-left' coalition candidatures in allegedly safe 'first past the post' constituencies.
- If some comrades feel this is too harsh a description of the PdCI/PCI, I suggest they examine the work of its leading intellectual, Domenico Losurdo, recently discussed by David Broder in the *New Left Review*. It is not my intention to unhelpfully throw the word 'Stalinist' around to describe anybody who was ever a member of the original 'official communist' pre-1991 PCI in the way the Italy correspondent of the *Alliance for Workers' Liberty's Solidarity* does.
- La Repubblica* January 10.
- There is clearly some overlap between the electorates of the two parties - M5S is weaker in the regions of northern Italy like Lombardy and the Veneto, where the Lega is strong.
- Beppe Grillo is still the 'Guarantor', and can remove the 'political leader', but he appears to have taken a step back compared with his 'tsunami tour' during the 2013 general election campaign.
- The stance taken on these issues by both Di Maio and leading M5S orator Alessandro Di Battista probably owes quite a bit to their family backgrounds - both men's fathers, both still living, are repentant neo-fascists. Obviously this was not the only factor - Beppe Grillo's authoritarian leadership meant that he could easily impose a racist line on a parliamentary group, most of whom originally had more tolerant and liberal attitudes on this question, whatever other idiosyncrasies they may have possessed.
- Such a deal has been vigorously opposed by Laura Boldrini, whose United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees background makes her particularly sensitive to such questions. Boldrini has stated: "It is hard to find points of agreement with M5S, given what they think on NGOs, migrants, anti-fascism and trade unions, for example" (*La Repubblica* January 14). Boldrini has been the consistent target of personalised and slanderous abuse, often of a racist and misogynist nature, from Beppe Grillo and his huge army of internet trolls. Such a deal is also opposed by Massimo d'Alema, probably for pragmatic rather than principled reasons.
- Until November 2017, the Lega had been ahead of Forza Italia in the opinion polls for some months, and Salvini still hopes to overtake the old felon in votes or seats - or both - on March 4.
- It is worth noting that Berlusconi, in a bid for international credibility - after all, he seems to have got the grudging endorsement of former *Economist* editor and old foe Bill Emmott as the lesser evil - ascribes such proposals to "the Nobel laureate, Milton Friedman".
- LeU, unlike the PD, is calling for a much more progressive taxation system.
- See *Corriere della Sera* January 10.
- Some deputies and senators have changed party more than once, but even so the number of individuals involved is extraordinary, and relatively few are principled defectors from the PD to the parties that now make up LeU.
- In the past, Berlusconi has been accused, although never convicted, of buying parliamentarians both to bring down centre-left governments and to curb rebellions inside his own coalitions. Since a number of recipients of bribes have been convicted of receiving them, it is hard to believe that Berlusconi did not give them.
- Initially, it seemed reasonable to assume that it would be as short-lived as *L'uomo qualunque* in Italy in the late 1940s, or Pierre Poujade's movement in France between 1956 and 1958.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly worker

**Membership
figures are
completely
bogus**

Not even Menshevism

Three quarters of the new recruits pay nothing, writes Peter Manson

The Socialist Workers Party annual conference took place over the weekend of January 5-7 in London and, according to the SWP's *Party Notes* (January 9), "hundreds of delegates" were present. So what is the SWP's actual membership and how committed are they to the organisation?

Well, the "post-conference special" which came as an attachment to *Party Notes* states:

Our total party membership currently stands at just under 6,000, with just under 2,000 paying a regular sub. During 2017, 511 joined the party, with 128 of those taking out a regular sub by direct debit.



Martin Smith: still haunts SWP

No, you did not misread that. Only around one third of SWP 'members' pay a subscription, while the proportion for comrades recruited in 2017 was even worse, standing at almost exactly a quarter.

The obvious question this poses is, just how real are those 6,000 members? How committed to the SWP are they? In fact, as just about every local organiser could tell you, the majority *never* attend a meeting or take part in local actions, such as selling *Socialist Worker* or helping to run a stall. They are 'paper members' - comrades who have usually done no more than fill in an application form.

Of course, every political organisation needs to have a list of contacts - people who have expressed an interest in the organisation's works and political aims, and who may be persuaded to support a particular campaign or turn up at a particular public event, before hopefully being drawn into membership. But for a Marxist organisation such contacts are totally different from members, for whom a level of commitment is essential.

For us, actual members have responsibilities as well as rights. Those responsibilities include working in a cell and acting under its discipline, as well as paying the requisite membership dues. For the CPGB, those dues are set at 10% of the member's income - only in exceptional circumstances (such as extreme financial difficulties) is it acceptable for CPGB members to pay less than that.

Our approach goes back to the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party and in particular its Bolshevik faction. At the famous 2nd Congress a dispute over membership criteria split the *Iskra* grouping. Lenin proposed the following formulation: "A party member is one who accepts the party's programme and supports the party both financially and by personal participation in one of its organisations." Martov sought a somewhat looser arrangement; hence his formulation: "A member of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party is one who accepts the party's programme, supports the party financially, and renders it regular personal assistance under the direction of one of its organisations." Martov - with the help of seven Bundists and economists who went on to leave the congress - won the day. The delegate vote was 28:23. Either way, what was at

issue was not the programme (the SWP eschews drawing up a programme). Nor was it paying dues. It was whether members should act under the discipline of one of the RSDLP's organisations.

Throughout this year the SWP has been making much - too much - of its commitment to the Bolsheviks and the heritage of October 1917. The reality is that the SWP has very little, if anything, in common with the Bolsheviks. Indeed it would be an insult to call them Mensheviks.

Obviously the leadership has been under some pressure from rank-and-file activists. They resent the whole farrago of being forced by Charlie Kimber, Amy Leather and the whole SE11 apparatus to recruit people who know bugger all about the politics of the SWP, have no intention of paying a penny to the SWP and will certainly never act under the discipline of the SWP. And yet formally these non-member 'members' are entitled to turn up at a membership aggregate and cast their vote!

But the SWP works on the basis of full-timers, branches and districts fulfilling their quota of recruits. And branches and districts (and their full-timers) are deemed to have failed if membership figures stagnate, let alone fall. Quantity is what counts. Not quality. It is, in fact, eerily reminiscent of the sort of 'planning' that used to operate in the Soviet Union after the first five-year plan.

Bending to rank-and-file pressure, the leadership stipulated before the conference (for the first time, as far as I know): "Please note that all delegates to conference must be paying a regular sub to the SWP" (*Internal Bulletin* No3, December 2017 - original emphasis). And a similar change has now been agreed in relation to 'party council', the SWP's national delegate body that

usually meets twice a year. The same bulletin explained: "In recent years the delegate entitlement has been two per branch or student group." However, the central committee recommended that "in future the delegate entitlement should be based on *subs-paying members*" (my emphasis).

In other words, those who do not pay subscriptions should not enjoy full membership rights. But the idea of non-paying members should be as absurd as members who are not active in one of its branches - at least for those who claim to subscribe to the Bolshevik tradition.

The CC states in the January 9 *Party Notes*: "We should go back to the 350 people who joined last year who are not yet paying a sub and ask if they would be willing to do so." However, it adds pathetically: "But we should start the conversation about what we are doing and how they can get involved." In other words, don't frighten them away by talking about membership responsibilities. Just slip it into the conversation when the moment seems right. But if they are not keen - well, never mind, at least we asked. And if they don't want to pay anything, not to worry - they're still a member.

As usual, the SWP launched its annual "subs drive" at conference. In the pre-conference edition of *Party Notes* (January 2), the CC explained:

We are asking all comrades to think about increasing their subs... If you are already paying by direct debit could you increase your subs by £5 a month? If you are working full-time and currently pay less than £25 a month - could you make a bigger increase? If you are not yet paying subs could you take out a direct debit?

All very polite, but once again it is clear that the payment of dues is not compulsory for members. Which is very strange, since in the final *Pre-conference Bulletin* the CC, having reminded readers that only "around a quarter of members who joined in the last year pay subs, compared to around a third of all members", went on to state:

This indicates that perhaps new members are not being asked to pay subs by direct debit. This will involve a political discussion, but *most people know they have to pay when they join something*, and we will not hold on to new members if we shy away from asking them (my emphasis).

Yes, "most people know they have to pay when they join something" - a trade union, the Labour Party, even your local chess club. But, in fact, *Party Notes* makes it clear that new recruits will still not "have to pay when they join". Incredibly it reported: "This year conference agreed to set ourselves the task of recruiting at least 750 new members, of whom at least 250 pay regular subs" (January 9, my emphasis).

Racism

As many readers will know, the SWP insists that its most important priority right now is building its 'united front', Stand Up To Racism. *Party Notes* states:

The thread running through conference was the increasing polarisation across the globe, the rise of racism and how we confront it. Racism is the key issue in British society and responding to it by building a mass anti-racist movement is the priority for the SWP (January 9).

And the latest *Socialist Worker* notes that SUTR is "a crucial initiative to win unity in the working class and resist all forms of racism". That is because, apparently, "Racism frames every aspect of political life, and the fight against it is a central part of anti-austerity work."

Yes, the SWP is seriously claiming that in 2018 racism "frames every aspect of political life" - despite the obvious adoption of official anti-racism by every section of the bourgeoisie, including even the UK Independence Party. As I have previously reported, no-one in the SWP dares to publicly challenge this nonsense, although in *IB* No2 (November) a number of comrades expressed their disquiet that anti-austerity has been downgraded as a result of the priority given to SUTR.

But in *IB* No3 (December 2017) the CC replied in a submission pointedly entitled 'Fighting racism and austerity'. According to the leadership,

The danger at present is not that the SWP does too much to build SUTR, but that we do too little. In many places our leading comrades are too dispersed across many campaigns and therefore do not have the impact in the local area that is possible.

In other words, if necessary drop campaigning against austerity - prioritise the SWP's most important 'united front'. The idea is that (despite what the leadership says publicly) opposition to racism is so widely felt throughout society that large numbers can be pulled into SUTR and a proportion of them can be recruited as SWP 'members'.

Interestingly, in the same *IB* "Maxine and Amy (Sheffield)" claimed: "no-one can get away with any argument about SUTR being an SWP front - our delegation to SUTR conference this year included nine Asian women". Admittedly, "we were probably still in a majority..." Hmm.

By the way, the SWP has confirmed that the new CC is exactly the same as it was last year - except that Judith Orr has now stepped down (she did not explain why), so that the CC now consists of 12 instead of 13 members. But, along with Harvey Weinstein, the memory of a certain Martin Smith weighs heavy on the present generation. After all, how can SWP student activists jump on the #metoo bandwagon when they still have the SWP's very own rape scandal still to be properly accounted for. *Party Notes* reports,

... conference agreed for the need to formally set out the behaviour we expect from our members in regards to oppressive behaviour. It was agreed to elect a group of five comrades at the next national committee to look at this further over the next year.

This is also mentioned in *Socialist Worker*, which noted that "a statement of expected behaviour of members" has been prepared "in addition to the SWP's existing policy and procedure against sexual harassment". Was that the "existing policy and procedure" that was used in 2010 to defend Martin Smith, the SWP's national organiser, and to silence his alleged victims? ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.co.uk

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