



weekly **worker**



**Zuma's last days ... but will
Ramaphosa put an end to
corruption and cronyism?**

- Trump's economy
- Tory Brexit chaos
- Israel and feminism
- Italy's parties

No 1189 Thursday February 8 2018

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

£1/€1.10

Iran's anti-hijab protests



LETTERS



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

Flimsy

Ian Donovan alleges that US policy towards Israel, the Middle East and beyond is largely driven by Jewish capitalists, who form a disproportionately large part of the American ruling class.

They are, he claims, part of a worldwide Jewish bourgeois class. But as a would-be Marxist he needs to invent a materialist motive driving these Jewish capitalists to promote Israel's interests and override alternative US interests. His answer is: "The Israeli Law of Return gives citizenship rights to all Jews born in other countries ... This leads to a situation ... 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" (Letters, January 18).

In my letter of January 25, I debunked this flimsy argument, which elides potential citizenship rights with actual ownership of a country; but Ian's reply (February 1) shows that he has not grasped the point. Yes, Israeli law does allow any Jew to immigrate to Israel and become an Israeli citizen. It also bestows significant, substantial privilege on Jews who are of poor or modest means, and is mainly designed to facilitate mass Jewish immigration to Israel, in order to deal with what Zionists regard as the 'demographic peril' of the Hebrew settler nation being 'swamped' by Palestinian Arabs. But this law makes very little substantial material difference to rich diaspora Jews: they, like all wealthy persons of any religion or none, can in any case easily acquire citizenship in many countries (including the UK, a favourite residence of the very rich). My tongue-in-cheek remark that, according to Ian's logic, "perhaps it is correct to say that the capitalist ruling class, irrespective of religion, is international" was seized by him as evidence that I am - *quelle horreur* - a Kautskyist.

Of course, the main flaw in the pseudo-Marxist theory of Jewish-capitalist-driven US policy is failure to explain why the non-Jewish majority of the American ruling class meekly accepts the line allegedly laid down by the Jewish capitalists, who are a minority (albeit an 'overrepresented' one) within that class.

Readers who seek a rather better explanation of US policy are advised to read the article, 'Demystifying US and Israeli power', by Susan Cain and Mark Mason.

Moshé Machover
email

Sparkling

What a superbly informative article from James Linney, within a generally sparkling edition ('Health service we need', February 1). As far as I'm aware, the comrade is alone in providing overviews of the national health service that recognise the necessity of holistic restructuring. A sophisticated as well as root-and-branch redesign springing from truly socialist soil, it might be said.

The only negative aspect to these matters at hand stems from the fact that the comrade's insights, experience and expertise are not being expressed via a consolidated/unified communist media outlet, here in the UK. What a crying shame! Just imagine what would be achievable if there was a pooling of all skills, knowledge and resources on the Marxist-Leninist left. As the saying goes, the world would be our oyster; anyway, its shell would be a damned sight easier to prise open, and so the 'pearl' of making communism attractive to the mass of our co-citizens far more likely to end up nestling in the palm of our hand. But

that's just to thrash an idealism-saddled hobbyhorse of mine.

Nevertheless, one thing is for certain. Elsewhere in nature, tension between conflicting interests often results in advantageous and consequently healthy change. Remarkable rewards accrue from apparently 'unwelcome' mutations within life-forces, followed by dynamic resolution. Progress and newness sometimes are entirely dependent upon that near-magical process. It goes by the name, evolution - conveniently summarised as 'adapt or die'.

When thinking about what is required of 21st century Marxist-Leninist revolutionary politics in order to provide it with far greater appeal, with far more meaningful traction, surely just such an evolutionary leap forward should be recognised as both unavoidable and essential. In fact, that evolutionary (or paradoxically even revolutionary) change required is a perfect echo of the scenario comrade Linney outlines in relation to the NHS.

On a more light-hearted note, I'd say this. By dedicating their time and intellect into 'higher form' rewards available from the *Weekly Worker* - such as those provided by James Linney and others - your readers will be saved the somewhat hideous task of wading through far less dynamic and immeasurably less productive subject matter: topics such as the seemingly inescapable question of whether all Jews are part of an internationally formulated 'crypto-bourgeoisie', one nefariously out to manipulate and then plunder the world.

Well, may either the bony fingers of the Grim Reaper or a splash of summer sunshine arrive to save us all from that overblown, cyclical and obsessive nonsense!

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

Old chestnut

Given that the letters page has been given over to those that not only believe in, but actually care about, a 'witch-hunt', within the Labour Party against the left, I just wondered if you would be entertaining discussions on other conspiracy theories? Did they fake the moon landings? Who shot JFK? Is Elvis really still alive? And, finally, who really runs the EU? My money is on the freemasons, but other readers may disagree.

Though I did laugh at Stan Keable quoting Ken Loach on that old chestnut - that Labour lost the election as they were not leftwing enough. Yep, that would explain why the Conservatives are in office, propped up by the Democratic Unionist Party. Or is that just another conspiracy?

Steven Johnston
email

Good laugh

Your report on the Communist Party of Great Britain's annual general meeting is absolutely hilarious ('No easy road to popularity', February 1). I refer to the sections where you talk about the *Weekly Worker*. Apparently, it's your "peacock", which was "excellent in 2017" and you are "pleased with the overall standard of the paper". It's a bit ironic that this has been presented with a really, really big picture of god knows what symbolic meaning - were you struggling to fill the space this week, comrades?

I know exactly why you amateurs don't want short articles. More difficult to design, isn't it, lots of small ones? Come on, own up - you don't fool me.

Let me tell you a little non-secret. My organisation, the Socialist Party, has a serious debate about its paper every year and it is free of the hubris and self-justificatory crap you jokers put about. Comrades are honest about what is good and what is bad.

And it would have been good that the *Weekly Worker* produced all that Lars T Lih stuff in 2017 ... if, unfortunately, most of those interested in the topic hadn't already read it on John Riddell's website,

where you lifted it from. Why bother waiting for your crack production team to make it look shit?

But thanks for a good laugh. Made my day.

Victor Jenkins
email

Hands off Sadie

I was quite disgusted by Paul Demarty's attack on comrade Sadie Robinson ('All the president's men', February 1) for her January 24 *Socialist Worker* article.

Firstly, if it is the same person from Leeds I remember from when I was in the Socialist Workers Party, she was a principled Marxist who fought for working class rule. I doubt anything has changed in all these years. If she has kept with the SWP - good. That shows loyalty, and loyalty is a positive human attribute. Back then it was the time of the European Social Forum - I was recruited to the SWP after the Global Gathering Conference in Leeds and marched in Genoa soon after.

Sadie saw working class rule as the basis for overcoming class society as a whole and thereby destroying absolute need and poverty in the process. She played an instrumental part in recruiting to the Socialist Alliance and the Anti-Nazi League.

Secondly, the *Socialist Worker* article was obviously commissioned by the editor, who is subordinate to the central committee. The CC in turn is a subordinate of the party as a whole during conference time. So when a reporter reports, it doesn't mean it is completely them - just like when the editor of the *Weekly Worker* commissions an article, it will also reflect his voice, and the editor is subordinate to the apparatus at hand. It is a great pity that this news-sheet decided to take their anger out on Sadie.

It is sad the SWP got so mashed up over this 'comrade Delta' fiasco. You live, you learn. The SWP had always fought against male chauvinism, but I'm sure like a lot of organisations found it hard when it is happening in their own back yard - and even harder in their front yard.

The organised political left is in retreat the world over. It is decomposing into more and more informal groupings and I find it a pity that this section of the Marxist left has found itself having to actually deal with such a drop in membership. It is very sad - a reverse needs to happen, but it's hard. The smaller the identity of an organisation, the more in-breeding occurs.

When the International Socialists were born, comrades saw themselves as a global community; nationally they would constantly be in the non-socialist press - and if you were lucky in a pub where you were drinking, because you were at a political event.

This has long gone and we are all now in little pools - in the UK sometimes just in a room with a couple of consenting adults trying to resolve 'Where now?' I do not see any one organised Marxist force having the weapons at its disposal to reverse the retreat - minimal weapons being programme, organisation and depth of influence in the working class.

The CPGB has an excellent minimum-maximum *Draft programme*, while the Labour Party is organised everywhere and it is at the head of the working class both politically (through the party as a whole) and economically (through trade union organisation/affiliation). Jeremy Corbyn is the leader of the working class in this country (whether he wants to be or not). Still we live with another six billion people in the world and opening our road to general human freedom will need to involve every single one of them.

Through Trotsky the Fourth International found its feet. But Trotskyists were in a very awkward position, which arose from the fact that they were shunned out of the Stalinist 'second world' and capitalist 'first world'. Following historic retreats in the Third International, the Trotskyists found themselves just reacting to what was in their face and constantly comparing themselves to the Third

International. Politically the working class in the Soviet Union was being smashed from the October Revolution on. We saw this defeat in the shape of increased poverty, actual invasion and then permanent encirclement.

Over the last 12 months I have travelled in the US, Canada, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Austria, Hungary and Croatia. For all practical purposes, we have seen a reversion to imperialist, capitalist practices everywhere and the SWP's 'second world' no longer exists as a bastard societal form. What is our approach? And what, for example, can comrade Hillel Ticktin tell us about what has happened on territories that were in the Soviet Union's sphere of influence?

Anyway, hands off Sadie: she has loyally fought with organised Marxists as long as I have been an adult.

Sachin Sharma
Leeds

Momentum

I have submitted a proposal to the *My Momentum* website stating that Constituency Labour Parties should be allocated a much greater proportion of individual members' dues. I would ask that all Momentum members please consider nominating my proposal. If it gets enough nominations, then Momentum will propose it as part of the Labour Party's democracy review.

You can nominate or comment on my proposal at <https://my.peoplesmomentum.com/review/theme/4>. I have also submitted a proposal regarding the Labour Party establishing its own press. See <https://my.peoplesmomentum.com/review/theme/10>.

Mark Stott
email

End austerity

The Rugby Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition has criticised the budget just agreed by Warwickshire County Council. We are outraged that the Tory majority council today confirmed a further £25 million of public spending cuts over the next two years, whilst adding 5% to the average council tax bill. Local people will be hit twice. It is disgraceful that householders are having to pay even more for deteriorating services. The most vulnerable will be the most affected by further public service cuts, particularly children with additional needs.

Warwickshire has already cut £100 million from its spending on public services since 2010. This has seen the closure of libraries, fire stations, youth

clubs and care homes. Cuts to street lighting have made our pathways and roads less safe, and cuts to bus services have had a serious effect on local public transport. The latest round of cuts will further decimate services. The Tory-led Warwickshire council has already decided that half the proposed £25 million cuts over the next two years - £12.3 million - will be to fund redundancy payments: an admittance that a large number of local authority workers will lose their jobs. The number looks as if it will be in the hundreds, given the money being put aside. Every worker made redundant will see the closure or deterioration of a service.

Increasing council tax, as Warwickshire is also doing, is not the answer either. People already pay for local services and the majority have no spare cash at all. Over 13 million people officially live in poverty and numbers are rising annually.

We realise the Tory government is the main culprit, having cut what it gives to local councils every year. However, councils could and should say, 'Enough is enough' and refuse to implement the cuts. Warwickshire County Council should buy time by using its reserves and, if necessary, its ability to borrow money at preferential rates - called prudential borrowing. The council should then set a budget that meets the needs of the local community and join with other local councils to demand the government makes up the shortfall.

Cutting public expenditure is a political choice. Britain is the sixth wealthiest country in the world, and there is plenty of money available to protect services. At national level, we have been saying for years that there are other ways to meet the country's economic deficit, such as:

- A 5% wealth tax on the richest 10%, which, alone, would resolve the debt.
- Reclaiming the £120 billion per year of unpaid tax that rich individuals and companies avoid or evade.
- The banks, building societies and financial institutions, which make massive profits, could be nationalised, with profits used to maintain and improve our public services.

Austerity is not the answer. It disproportionately hits the poor and the vulnerable, who rely on public services. Hundreds will lose their jobs in Warwickshire. There are alternatives, as we have consistently pointed out: we call on Warwickshire County Council to seriously consider them.

Pete McLaren
Rugby Tusc

Fighting fund

Much appreciated!

Pride of place when it comes to donations this week is comrade BK, who transferred to the *Weekly Worker* bank account the unusual - but most definitely generous - sum of £86. But, when it clicked that this was the exact amount of January's shortfall, it all started to make sense! And this from a comrade who recently expressed regret at having to cut down on his regular donations. Never has the phrase, 'Much appreciated', been more appropriate!

Another handy gift was from comrade TB, who donated £50 via PayPal, having been "encouraged" by the report of the CPGB's annual general meeting in last week's paper. Another PayPal donor was US comrade PM, who came up with his usual £15.

But the largest number of contributors to this week's fighting fund were those who paid by standing order - there were 19 of them, whose donations varied

from £5 to £30 and totalled £282. Altogether we've raised £433 in the first week of February - despite the fact that a problem with our mail delivery means that I've got no news to report of any contributions by cheque. But don't worry if you sent one in - all will be revealed next week!

Despite that, though, I can't help feeling a little concerned by the fact that, seeing this is February, the end of the first week means that exactly a quarter of the month has gone by, and four times £433 doesn't quite total the £1,750 we need. Especially when you take into account the fact that BK's £86 really belonged to January!

Please do what you can to help out ●

Robbie Rix

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

USA

Earthquakes and H-bombs

Paul Demarty reports on the heightening drama of US politics

It falls to us to wonder how lucky Donald Trump is feeling just this second.

Last week has to be called a pretty good one for him, with a 'state of the union' address that managed to play to the core of his appeal without turning into a screaming tantrum, and a slew of economic good news - employment and hourly wages up, stock market riding high ... To say that the 'springtime in America' shtick was a little short-lived this time around would be quite an unTrumpian understatement. On Monday, the Dow Jones industrial average - a decrepit, but still influential, stock index - suffered a record single-day drop, with the misery following the sun to Asia and then Europe. Things seem to have stabilised for now - the Dow and Standard & Poor's 500 have, at time of writing, rebounded somewhat, though it is a rough ride. The picture is not, however, one of a strong economy thriving under the leadership of its perma-tanned helmsman.

What we can say, indeed, is that this little wobble - if a wobble it remains - is symptomatic of the broader situation in which Trump finds himself, and which he has done so much to create. There is a dangerous and pervasive uncertainty surrounding the president on numerous fronts, of which the economy is only one: the outcome of the two great political challenges before him - the 'Russiagate' investigations and this autumn's midterm elections - are another. In another sphere, meanwhile - that of defence and foreign policy - he is very much more securely in power, more's the pity, for the result is that the rest of us stand at the edge of a shift towards much more aggressive nuclear doctrines on the part of America.

Irrational exuberance

Let us look at the stock market chaos in more detail, then.

There is no shortage of bourgeois economists - wise after the fact in the usual fashion - lining up to tell us that this was a long time coming. The American stock market was overvalued; low interest rates shifted investment from 'safe' bonds to speculation of one sort or another - the most absurd example being the crypto-currency asset bubble (Bitcoin, we note, is at something of a low ebb - at time of writing, again, for it may well soar back up to \$20,000 in the next 20 minutes, for all anyone knows).

Trump has staked a lot on the dramatic rise in equity values since he took the reins, for which he naturally claims all the credit. It is likely that this made things worse: it promoted to Wall Street the idea that Trump was treating the Dow and the S&P as vanity metrics, and thus would be inclined to artificially prop them up. The proximate cause for Monday's 'correction' was the appointment of a new chair of the Federal Reserve of unknown opinions, and it was merely the possibility that Jerome Powell might be more of an interest rate hawk than Janet Yellen that set all this chaos in motion.

What began as a desperate rearguard action to get money circulating again after the 2007-08 banking crisis - rock-bottom interest rates and money-printing - has ended up persisting for the best part of a decade, because any pace of normalisation higher than the excruciatingly glacial leads to the first whisperm of panic in major investors. The result is the situation before us, with enormously leveraged financial



Finger on the button

instruments like exchange-traded funds (indexed-linked securities traded like stocks) proliferating.

This is the situation Trump was boasting about until February 4, as if it were not the case that the stock market was roaring in mid-1929. It is axiomatic for Marxists that capitalist crises shall inevitably recur - in theory, it is also axiomatic for most schools of bourgeois economics, although they seem to be very good at talking themselves out of it when things are looking up. That kind of cyclical naivety was revealed in the February 5 trading, and it cannot be long before a more serious blow to the world economy is struck. Carl Icahn, the notorious financier and inspiration for Gordon Gekko, suggested that this was the first rumbling before the earthquake; he has his own interests, of course, but it is difficult to disagree.

The question for Trump is whether it comes before or after the November midterms - especially added to his other worries. Another piece of last week's good news, from his point of view, was the concession that it was ultimately the Democrats' opposition research department that fed the highly dubious Steele dossier to the authorities, thus beginning the chain of events leading to the present investigations of Trump-Putin collusion in 2016. In the end, the substance of the question - whether he or his associates actually did collude, and on what scale, with the Russian state, is left unresolved; but it is certainly a stark reminder that there is more than the stubborn civic duty of America's three-letter agents at work in the Russiagate controversy. Yet this has been just one news cycle on the issue - others are still to come before Americans go to the polls to elect congressmen and women.

Bloodbath

Those midterms are quite the most uncertain thing of all; on average, the party of the incumbent president loses 30 seats in the House of Representatives, and four in the Senate (only a third or so of the latter seats are up for grabs), which would be more than enough to put both houses in the hands of the Democrats. It is hardly surprising: just as the campaign trail is a place of overpromising and grand vistas of national renewal, so the actual slog of government in America's paralytic constitutional set-up must tip eager voters into the trough of disillusionment.

Today, of course, we are not in a

'normal' American political cycle. We have a president elected in the teeth of the most violent opposition the establishment can reasonably offer a man who might actually win, whose reign has been as mercurial as his campaign. The spectre of another economic crisis looms, but we are only now truly feeling the political consequences of the last one.

On the blue benches, and despite the best efforts of the world's most well-groomed professional politicians, things are hardly a picture of unity of purpose. The left of the Democratic Party - sidelined for so long by the permanent Clintonite yuppocracy - received a large and unexpected shot in the arm with Bernie Sanders's insurgent campaign for the presidential nomination in 2016, and all the signs are that the congressional primaries are going to be hard-fought affairs. The Democrat right wing currently looks almost bereft of purpose - the ones who pitch themselves as the smartest guys and gals in the room, with their finger on the pulse of history, and yet their great champion was bested by an absurd charlatan - but it is not at all bereft of institutional power within the party. A bloodbath beckons - another variable in an already incomprehensible midterm equation.

Nuclear threat

It is in this context - war being politics by other means - that we must evaluate the results of America's latest 'nuclear posture review', which had been heavily trailed for weeks.

Most nuclear arsenals are old; the battle in this country over Trident is worth fighting, in part, because there will come a point after which the existing missiles are effectively inoperable - the last possessors of the operational folk-knowledge necessary to keep them ready to launch over decades having died out. Failure to renew is to decommission by default. The USA is certainly not ready to give up its nuclear capabilities and a programme of renewal was thus quite inevitable.

What is interesting is the *shape* of the proposed renewal. The idea is to increase the number of 'small' warheads - bombs with a modest Hiroshima-esque yield - in the United States arsenal. This is very worrying, for reasons that might have been lifted directly from *Dr Strangelove*. The trouble with the real world-ender sort of bomb is that ... well, it is a world-ender. It is effectively unusable without triggering a conflagration that will effectively wipe out the human species. In that light, however, it is not terribly useful as a deterrent, since nobody takes seriously the idea that you will use it. Small bombs, however - America *has* used them! They might be used again, on battlefields rather than over cities. Deterrence is restored, and peace is safe!

We live now in an age where it cannot be taken for granted that things will be left at the level of 'deterrence', however (not that it ever could be - 'mutually assured destruction' having always been a rotten example of the complacency of the 'strategic doctrine' wonk). Trump is not the only overtly nationalist executive to be elected in the recent period and the danger of war, like economic crisis, is that it is never going to happen, until it does. And it happens because it is in people's interests - people like unpopular presidents.

America's fate is uncertain indeed: it may be decided by politics, or by politics by other means ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday February 11, 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.

Britain-Palestine friendship

Saturday February 10, 9.15am to 5pm: Twinning and friendship conference, Quaker Meeting House, 22 School Lane, Liverpool L1. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org/events/britain-palestine-friendship-twinning-network-annual-conference.

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.

Stockton Momentum

Monday February 12, 7pm: Meeting to discuss Labour's democracy review, Newtown Community Resource Centre, 123 Durham Road, Stockton-on-Tees TS19. Including a motion from Labour Against the Witchhunt. Organised by Momentum: www.facebook.com/events/424429657989773.

Nottingham against war

Monday February 12, 7pm: Public meeting, St Peter's Church, St Peter's Gate, Nottingham NG1. Organised by Nottingham Stop the War: www.facebook.com/Nottinghamstopthewar.

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.

Does socialism have a future?

Friday February 16, 7pm, Saturday February 17, 11am to 8pm: Conference, Goldsmiths College, Lewisham Way, London SE14. 'The world and the left since 1968'. Speakers include Frank Furedi, Boris Kagarlitsky, Lindsey German, Hillel Ticktin. Organised by Platypus Goldsmiths: www.facebook.com/events/2004171789837809/.

No to governments of war

Saturday February 17, 2pm: Public meeting, Mechanics Institute, 103 Princess Street, Manchester M1. Organised by Manchester Stop the War: www.facebook.com/Greater-Manchester-Stop-the-War-Coalition-262524980601747.

Coventry Momentum

Tuesday February 27, 7.30pm: Meeting to discuss Labour's democracy review, United Reformed Church, Warwick Road, Coventry CV1. Organised by Momentum: www.peoplesmomentum.com/coventry_momentum_meeting_to_discuss_the_democracy_review.

Defend education

Wednesday February 28, 12 noon: March for pensions and pay. Assemble ULU, Malet Street, London WC1. Organised by UCU London region: www.facebook.com/UCULondon.

Labour Against the Witchhunt

Saturday March 3, 1pm to 4pm: Organising meeting, Union Tavern, 52 Lloyd Baker Street, London WC1. Organised by Labour Against the Witchhunt: www.labouragainsthewitchhunt.org.

Stand Up To Racism

Rallies to mobilise support for March 17 UN anti-racism day protests:
Bristol: Tuesday February 13, 7pm, Hamilton House, 80 Stokes Croft, Bristol BS1.
Liverpool: Sunday February 18, 2pm, Jack Jones House, Unite the Union, 1 Islington, Liverpool L3.
West London: Wednesday February 21, 7pm, Maxilla Social Club, 2 Maxilla Walk, London W10.
Nottingham: Wednesday February 28, 7pm, Nottingham Mechanics, 3 North Sherwood Street, Nottingham NG1.
York: Wednesday February 28, 7.30pm, Friends Meeting House, Lower Friargate, York YO1.
Birmingham: Thursday March 1, 7pm, Priory Rooms, 40 Bull Street, Birmingham B4.
Oxford: Thursday March 1, 7pm, town hall, St Aldate's, Oxford OX1.
Manchester: Thursday March 1, 7pm, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2.
Sheffield: Wednesday March 7, 7pm, Central United Reformed Church, 60 Norfolk Street, Sheffield S1.
South London: Wednesday March 7, 7pm, Karibu Education Centre, 7 Gresham Road, London SW9.
Newcastle: Saturday March 10, 1pm, Arts Centre, Black Swan Yard, 39 Westgate Road, Newcastle NE1.
Organised by Stand Up To Racism: www.standuptoracism.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**NEC readmits leftwingers**

But hopes that this might mark the beginning of the end of the witch-hunt could be premature, warns
Carla Roberts

One of the biggest problems the Labour Party has today is its lack of a media outlet. Apart from the occasional email and snazzy produced video, we receive very little unfiltered, unbiased news from Jeremy Corbyn.

Having said that, it is, of course, far from certain that he and his allies would indeed always be prepared to share important decisions and developments with the membership. Take the last meeting of the party's national executive committee, on January 23 in London - its first meeting since its expansion following the election of three pro-Corbyn members. We all know of the decision of the NEC to request a "pause" in the housing development in Haringey (we will come that later). But apparently the meeting also took the decision to readmit a number of members previously suspended or expelled from the party. An important and potentially very positive development, that we were informed of through an acridly skewed report in *The Sunday Times*:

A holocaust denier and a leading member of Militant during its takeover of Liverpool council are among a first wave of expelled hard-left activists who have been readmitted to the Labour Party. Activists have been allowed to rejoin despite still belonging to organisations 'proscribed' by Labour - including a Trotskyist group, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. Others stood against Labour for hard-left parties as recently as 2016.¹

Clearly, the information was leaked by a rightwinger on the NEC, with the intention of inflicting damage on Jeremy Corbyn. There are no official reports or records of these decisions to be found anywhere. In fact, we still do not know how many members have actually been suspended since Corbyn's election (and how many remain suspended) or how many have been expelled for 'supporting' non-Labour organisations. *The Times* last week wrote that the party "had to suspend 18 members for anti-Semitism".² If this figure is true, that immediately begs the question: how on earth can the right can get away with continuing to claim that anti-Semitism is a huge problem in the party?

We also do not know if *The Sunday Times* is correct when it claims that "the appointment of leftwing members to review leftwing activists' membership appeals was part of an understanding that would allow centrist members to review their own allies' disciplinary cases". It seems rather unlikely that the right of the party - which, of course, initiated the expulsion and suspension of so many leftwing members - would now simply leave everything to the pro-Corbyn NEC left to deal with. Also, how many disciplinary cases are there against "centrist" members? Not many, presumably. But we have to guess here, of course.

Even the latest, extensive report sent out by veteran NEC leftie Pete Willsman (Campaign for Labour Party Democracy) does not mention any of this. We cannot even be sure if the January 23 decisions on disciplinary matters are in any way unusual, as we do not know how many cases have been dealt with at previous meetings.

The Sunday Times (and those leaking to it) does, however, present the decisions of the meeting as highly unusual, as the outcome apparently "shows the extent of the resurgent

left's control over the party after recent elections to its governing body, where Momentum candidates won a 'clean sweep' of new positions".

With a bit of detective work, we can gather that the NEC on January 23 decided that the membership requests from three applicants should come "under NEC review": They are Ken Livingstone's "race tsar", Lee Jasper, who stood against the Labour Party for George Galloway's Respect in 2012; Kingsley Abrams, who stood for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in the 2015 general election; and a man convicted for fraud in 1981, for which he served a seven-year sentence.

The NEC also decided to reinstate one member suspended for anti-Semitism (under certain conditions - see below) and that the membership applications of two previously expelled activists should be accepted. Here are the cases the NEC dealt with:

- Alan Fogg was a Labour councillor in Liverpool, when he was expelled from the party in 1985 for supporting the Militant Tendency (today's Socialist Party). He stood for Tusc in the 2016 local elections. The acceptance of his membership application is good news for a number of leftwingers who have been denied membership on the grounds that they have stood for Tusc or Left Unity. It is also an indication that Lee Jasper and Kingsley Abrams will probably be reinstated, too. Good.

- Author Mike Sivier, according to *The Times*, is a "holocaust denier" and was suspended last year for "comments about Jews and Zionism": On his website, Sivier, 48, said it "may be entirely justified" to say Tony Blair had been "unduly influenced by a cabal of Jewish advisors". He also said he was "not pretending it was a big problem" if Jews were omitted from a list of holocaust survivors, and claimed "I'm not going to comment" on whether thousands or millions of Jews died in the holocaust, as "I don't know".

Mike Sivier has commented at length³ on the "libellous article" and, while this writer did not have the time to investigate the whole case or all of the man's writings, it seems pretty clear that his few words above - which have been taken from a single Facebook thread and seem to form the entire case against him - were presented to the Labour Party by the truly vile 'Campaign Against Anti-Semitism' out of context, out of sequence and in a seriously misleading way.

Take his most problematic comments about the holocaust - I mean, how can you pretend not to know about it? Sivier explains the context: a Facebook conversation with somebody called "Ben", who seemed intent on setting him up. Ben sent him a link to an article in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty's publication *Workers' Liberty*, which stated:

In 2008, the SWP issued an explanation of the holocaust that referred to "thousands" (not 'millions') of victims and omitted any reference to Jews. Whether this was 'organised' or 'just a mistake' seems irrelevant.⁴

Workers' Liberty featured alongside it a picture of a scruffy *Socialist Worker* petition against the "Nazi BNP". And one of the points on the petition does indeed read: "They [the BNP] deny the holocaust, where thousands of LGBT people, trade unionists and disabled people were slaughtered." Sivier explains:

I responded: "I'm not going to comment on 'thousands' instead of 'millions', because I don't know" - meaning, of course, I don't know why the SWP had said that. I have always used the 'high' figure of six million Jews who were killed in the Nazi holocaust. Perhaps your reporter should have read my recent articles on Holocaust Memorial Day before typing that reference into his piece? Or, indeed, any of my articles.

Clearly, this man is no David Irving, problematic formulations like the "high figure" above notwithstanding. Understandably, the NEC felt it needed to let him back in. According to *The Times*, "the NEC voted by 12 to 10 to issue Sivier a 'warning', but not to expel him, suggesting the new arithmetic on the body had a decisive impact." Indeed. We also know that Jon Lansman in particular is a firm believer in the anti-Semitism "problem" in the Labour Party, so it is more than doubtful that he would vote for the readmission of somebody who is indeed a "holocaust denier". We simply presume, of course, that it was the NEC left voting in favour of his readmission, rather than the right - but who knows?

As an aside, we also wonder if the voting figure is correct, seeing as there are 39 members of the NEC and the fact that *The Sunday Times* got another thing wrong: Sivier has actually not (yet) been readmitted, because he is refusing to attend the NEC-instructed "anti-Semitism awareness training". ● Janine Booth, senior member of the AWL, has seemingly learned nothing from her own expulsion or those of her comrades. On Facebook, she replied "Indeed" to a comment that repeated the description of Mike Sivier as a "holocaust denier". The writer

continued: "Extraordinary to put you in the same article as a holocaust-denier. How utterly appalling. I hope he is not readmitted." Underneath Janine approvingly posted a tweet by Richard Angell, leader of Progress, who wrote: "Why the leadership on the verge of winning an election would want to be associated with holocaust deniers and the like?" She comments: "Richard Angell (Progress) makes an even stronger connection."

Well he would, wouldn't he? No doubt it was his Progress friends on the NEC who leaked the decisions to *The Sunday Times* - in order, of course, to harm Jeremy Corbyn.

One really has to wonder sometimes about the pro-Zionist AWL. In its blind mission to label everybody on the "fake left" anti-Semitic, it fails to grasp some pretty basic political truths. The witch-hunt against the left in the party has nothing whatsoever to do with wanting to stamp out anti-Semitism, real or imaginary - it has everything to do with weakening Jeremy Corbyn by tainting his supporters on the left. Which is, of course, why the witch-hunt is also directed against members of the AWL.

Janine Booth also proudly posted a tweet by Jeremy Newark, leader of the Jewish Labour Movement, who wrote: "Putting other politics aside, I know that Janine Booth's readmission means the Labour Party gains a robust and fearless voice against anti-Semitism - much needed right now."

Her lack of political astuteness (acquired through years of membership in the AWL) aside, we do, of course, welcome Janine's readmission into the Labour Party. The party should be the home of all socialists and trade unionists - and there will be plenty of members with perhaps even funnier ideas.

Her reinstatement gives *some* hope

that we might be seeing the beginning of the end of the witch-hunt against the Marxist left in the Labour Party. Her case is, however, quite different to that of the dozens (hundreds?) who have been expelled from the party for their alleged support for groups like Socialist Appeal and Labour Party Marxists. It does, however, highlight how the rules are being used, abused and even ignored, depending on who is applying them and for what reason.

Janine was expelled from Labour in 2003, after having stood as a candidate for the Socialist Alliance in Hackney in the general election of 2001 and the local elections of 2002. She was expelled under rule 2.1.4.A, according to which "a member who stands for election ... in opposition to a Labour candidate shall automatically be ineligible to be or remain a party member". It carries an automatic ban of five years.

She applied to rejoin in 2015, when the (not yet Corbyn-dominated) NEC ruled that it had no objections to her readmission and that it was solely up to her CLP (Hackney South and Shoreditch) to decide on the matter. The CLP "objected on the grounds that (a) I (allegedly) support Tusc and (b) I'm a member of Workers' Liberty."

The first accusation is quite funny, of course, because it shows how little the witch-hunters know about the left. The AWL never did more than back a few individual Tusc candidates.⁵ She "freely admitted the second, arguing that there are plenty of factions in the Labour Party and that is part of healthy debate".⁶ A week later, she received an official letter refusing her application to rejoin. It mentioned, however, that she could reapply in two years' time.

Which Janine did again last year, when once more the NEC ruled that it was up to her CLP to make the decision. This time, the local party agreed - no doubt a reflection of the dramatic political changes in its membership.

Bans and proscriptions

The Sunday Times complains about her re-admittance: "Activists have been allowed to rejoin despite still belonging to organisations proscribed by Labour - including a Trotskyist group, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty." Further on though, the same article quotes "a senior party source" as saying that the party

no longer recognised the list of proscribed organisations, so people linked to them could not be banned. "There is a debate about whether these existed at points in Labour history," the source said. "Our view is that they no longer exist."

Labour has not had an official list of proscribed organisations since 1973. In 1930, the party leadership produced its first 'proscribed list', squarely aimed at the Communist Party of Great Britain, which included organisations and unions influenced by the CPGB.⁷ In 1939 the NEC added the Socialist

Jeremy Corbyn: they are still out to get him



League to the list, then in 1942 the Labour Research Department (which had originally been founded in 1912 as the Fabian Research Department, an offshoot of the Fabian Society). In the McCarthyite atmosphere of the 1950s, a few more organisations and publications were added, including *Socialist Outlook* and the Socialist Labour League (of which Gerry Healy was a leading member).

In 1973, general secretary Ron Hayward abolished the list, because "Difficulties have been experienced in keeping a current record of the many political organisations that are established, many of which are of short life, change their names or merge with other organisations."⁸ In other words, it was not a democratic policy - quite the opposite. The list had been viewed more and more like an entry visa for all those organisations *not* featured on it.

For the Militant Tendency (today's Socialist Party in England and Wales), the bureaucrats had to think of a new trick: after various failed attempts to kick it out, in 1982 they proposed the establishment of a register of non-affiliated groups that would be allowed to operate in the Labour Party. Militant was invited to apply - and was rejected. Not a few of its members were expelled over the next few years.

The bans continued. In 1990, a proposal to ban the newspaper *Socialist Organiser* was confirmed at Labour's annual conference. In response, the Socialist Organiser Alliance dissolved and in 1992 launched a new grouping: the Alliance for Workers' Liberty! Some people claim that this means the AWL and the Socialist Party remain the only two organisations that are featured on the (unofficial) list of organisations proscribed by the Labour Party.

Of course, we welcome the news that the list seems no longer to be "recognised". It has always been a tool of the right to keep the party 'safe'.

Whose rules?

While Marxists today are not being excluded for membership of explicitly "proscribed" organisations, they *are*, of course, still being expelled. In the wake of the publication of Tom Watson's ridiculous 'Reds under the beds' dossier of 2016,⁹ supporters - and alleged supporters - of Labour Party Marxists, *Red Flag* and the AWL have received a standard expulsion letter, which reads:

It has been brought to our attention that you have been closely involved with and supported [named organisation], whose *programme, principles and policies are not compatible* with those of the Labour Party. Chapter 2.1.4.B of the Labour Party's rules states:

"A member of the party who joins and/or supports a political organisation other than an official Labour group or unit of the party ... shall automatically be ineligible to be or remain a party member" (my emphasis).

The first paragraph does, of course, give the impression that there is - perhaps in some well guarded location - a secret list of dangerous organisations or some sort of overview of banned terms (like 'revolutionary') that could explain what makes a group *incompatible* with the Labour Party.

It seems not. More likely the bureaucrats have been picking and choosing from the rulebook as they see fit. According to the constitution, it does not actually matter if the programme of the organisation you are deemed to be supporting is "incompatible" with that of the Labour Party. Indeed, the organisation in question does not even *have to have* a programme to lead to the instant expulsion of any "supporter". The witch-hunters have mangled up 2.1.4.B with rule 1.2.5.A, which deals with organisations wanting to *affiliate*:

Political organisations not affiliated or associated under a national agreement with the party, *having their own*

programme, principles and policy; or distinctive and separate propaganda, or possessing branches in the constituencies, or engaged in the promotion of parliamentary or local government candidates, or having allegiance to any political organisation situated abroad, shall be ineligible for affiliation to the party (my emphasis).

Neither the AWL, Socialist Appeal, *Red Flag* nor LPM have applied for affiliation - though we are very much looking forward to the day when socialist organisations can do so again - an absolute necessity in the fight to transform Labour into a real party of the whole class.

It goes without saying that both rules should be abolished (along with a few others!) as part of the long process of transformation ahead of us. According to rule 2.1.4.B, Janine Booth would now have to be expelled again, because she openly admits to being an active member of the AWL.

While it obviously makes sense to stop Labour Party members from standing against the party, rule 2.1.4.B has to go. It is wide open to abuse. Notoriously, Moshé Machover was expelled for having articles published in *Labour Party Marxists* and the *Weekly Worker*. That, apparently, was enough to prove his "support" for a non-Labour organisation. After a national campaign, in which dozens of Labour Party branches and CLPs issued statements in opposition, he had to be reinstated within three weeks. How different from the case of Mike Palin, who remains expelled under the same rule - simply for *sharing* Facebook posts that included a handful of articles from *Labour Party Marxists* and the *Weekly Worker*.¹⁰

All this proves that the problem is not the rules in and of themselves. The problem arises from those in charge of applying them. Of course, we will continue to demand the abolition of the various witch-hunting rules (like 2.1.4.B and 1.2.5.A), but an important part of that fight is to get Labour Party members and branches across the country to protest publicly. The active involvement of the largely pro-Corbyn membership is the best way to aid this necessary transformation - as will continuing pressure from campaigns like Labour Against the Witchhunt ●

Notes

1. *The Sunday Times* February 4.
2. *The Times* February 2.
3. <https://voxpoliticalonline.com/2018/02/04/my-complaint-to-the-sunday-times-about-its-libellous-article>.
4. www.workersliberty.org/story/2008/08/18/has-swp-discovered-jew-free-holocaust.
5. www.workersliberty.org/story/2010/03/05/awl-and-trade-unionist-and-socialist-coalition.
6. www.janinebooth.com/content/my-exclusion-labour-party.
7. www.labourpains.group.shef.ac.uk/dust.
8. R Hayward, 'Discontinuation of the proscribed list' (circular to secretaries of affiliates and Labour Party organisations, July 1973).
9. <http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk/trotspotting-a-field-guide>.
10. www.labouragainsthewitchhunt.org/suspensions-and-expulsions/mike-palming-expelled-for-sharing-facebook-posts.

LAW

BCM Box 8932,
London WC1N 3XX
Tel: 07817 379 568

Email: info@labouragainsthewitchhunt.org

Web: www.labouragainsthewitchhunt.org

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Labouragainsthewitchhunt/>

Twitter: @LabourAW

Individual membership: £10 per annum, £5 (unwaged).

Affiliates: Local or Regional: £25pa. National: £100pa



Suffragettes: doing their best to shock and terrorise

'I feel intimidated'

Not everybody likes it when people get too 'active' in politics though. Today's MPs and councillors do not just have to endure having their speeches being dissected, voting records analysed and actions questioned by the media. Thanks to Facebook and Twitter, they now also get plenty of 'commentary' from normal folk. And no doubt, much of it is not very nice.

In case you have not guessed, I am referring to this week's announcement by Theresa May that she would engage in consultations on the possible introduction of a specific offence of "intimidating a political candidate". Rather incredibly, she squeezed this move into her much-publicised speech on the 100th anniversary of the Representation of People Act, which gave all men over 21 and some women (those over 30 and "with property qualifications") the right to vote and be elected to parliament. (It took until 1928 for women to be granted the same voting rights as men.)

Like most newspapers, May falsely claimed that the introduction of the legislation in 1918 was the result almost entirely of the campaign by the militant suffragettes, ignoring not only the labour movement and the far larger and peaceful "suffragists", but also the small matter of the Russian Revolution of 1917. The Women's Social and Political Union in fact suspended its campaign at the beginning of World War I, rallying patriotically behind the British troops (as did the Labour Party, of course). The WSPU formally dissolved in 1917. It was to a large degree the fear of the 'red threat' spreading to western Europe that forced bourgeois leaders across the continent to grant a range of social and political reforms.

May also applauded the "heroism" of the suffragettes,¹ while Scottish Tory leader Ruth Davidson enthusiastically joined calls by various newspapers (and Jeremy Corbyn) to pardon them all. Home secretary Amber Rudd has since put a damper on this campaign, referring to the militant history of the women as "more complicated".

Just a bit. Even the most cursory glance at the actions employed by the women - in line with their motto, "Deeds, not words" - would lead anyone to suspect that the suffragettes would today be vilified as "terrorists"

(just like Nelson Mandela was by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s). We wonder how many politicians at the time might have felt "intimidated" by having their windows smashed in or the letterboxes outside parliament firebombed? Suffragettes did not just throw themselves under horses: they also planted bombs outside the Bank of England and St Paul's Cathedral.

Still, Theresa May has been enthusiastically supported by some members of the Parliamentary Labour Party, including, unsurprisingly, John Mann and Stella Creasy. Miraculously, their contributions to this week's - closed - meeting of the PLP made their way into the bourgeois press. Creasy in particular was as outspoken as ever on the "abuse" she claims to have received - mainly from pro-Corbyn members of her own party, naturally. She will happily jump on Theresa May's bandwagon if it means she can get one over on Jeremy Corbyn. Apparently, "Creasy made an impassioned plea for action, as she detailed how she and her family had been targeted for over 20 months and demanded to know *why the party had allowed suspended members to continue with misconduct*" (my emphasis).²

As the term "misconduct" remains unqualified and undefined (just as "intimidation" is in Theresa May's plans), it is safe to assume that she is referring to suspended members like Tony Greenstein, David Watson and Jackie Walker simply contacting and/or criticising her. If anything more had happened, we would surely have been told by now.

Jackie Walker in particular has indeed been trying to contact Stella Creasy for the whole of last week, in order to get her to comment on the now infamous recent tweet by her boyfriend, Dan Fox, a former director of Labour Friends of Israel, which reads: "Jackie Walker - so thick, if you tried to drink her through a straw, your ears would bleed." The story even made it into the *Daily Mail*, who will happily print Creasy's anti-Corbyn tirades, but will also have no qualms turning on her when it suits the *Mail's* much broader agenda. Needless to say, Theresa May's dream legislation would not be for the likes of Jackie Walker, who is of course one of the bad guys in this story.

The *Huffington Post* claims that

the PLP meeting also heard MPs criticise the "harassment received by Haringey council's outgoing leader, Claire Kober, who this weekend revealed she'd been subjected to stalking threats, intimidation and sexist and anti-Semitic abuse".

Kober is another politician who mixes up "intimidation" and "abuse" with 'criticism of me' - in order to damage Jeremy Corbyn and the left in the party. She feebly tried to explain as much in an interview with the deliciously sceptical *Guardian* journalist, Decca Aitkenhead:

Why did Kober cite "sexism and bullying" in her resignation letter? "Well, I don't think the argument that I'm incompetent would even have been marshalled if I was a man. Because I think it's incredible - absolutely incredible. I almost wince in saying this, because I'm not trying to say I'm great, but I'm the chair of London councils, I'm the most senior councillor in London, I lead on finance in the Local Government Association nationally, I've led a borough for 10 years - yet the national executive of my party has people in it saying I'm incompetent." She's sure this would not have been said to a man? "Utterly inconceivable. I cannot for the life of me, in any way, think a man would be bullied in that way."³

This episode beautifully sums up who this type of legislation would be designed to serve - and why: parliamentarians threatened with deselection; councillors criticised for signing one PFI contract after another; politicians expecting to go about their daily business without being criticised for their actions.

Most likely, it will not be implemented any time soon. In truth, it is merely a symbolic gesture by May - which also serves to support the right in the Labour Party in its ongoing civil war against Jeremy Corbyn ●

Notes

1. www.itv.com/news/2018-02-06/vote-100-representation-of-the-people-act-centenary.
2. www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/plp-labour-mps-stella-creasy-and-john-mann-urge-nec-to-get-tougher-with-online-abuse-haringey-theresa-may_uk_5a78e699e4b018ad894f0bae.
3. www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/feb/02/haringey-boss-claire-kober-the-argument-that-im-incompetent-would-not-have-been-used-if-i-were-a-man.

EUROPE

21st century global reality

Eddie Ford looks at the growing Tory infighting over Brexit

This week saw the 11-strong Brexit cabinet sub-committee (or 'war cabinet') get together to draw up the UK's negotiating position on its "future relationship" with the European Union, in preparation for four days of intensive talks from February 13 with their European counterparts. Sub-committee members include Boris Johnson, the improbable foreign secretary, and the even more improbable environment secretary, Michael 'Brutus' Gove - both leading figures in the 'leave' campaign. And from the solidly 'remain' camp there is chancellor Philip Hammond and home secretary Amber Rudd.

Of course, many people find it incredible that the British government has not sat down and formally discussed this matter of vital importance before - yet again giving the impression that UK officials are bumbling around like amateurs in the Brexit dark 19 months after the referendum, unclear as to what it wants or what is possible.

The sub-committee's main focus is on Northern Ireland, immigration and trade, but Theresa May is facing increasing calls to "clarify" her position on Brexit - with businesses, big and small alike, becoming increasingly unhappy about what they see as constant dithering. The British Chambers of Commerce has written to the prime minister asking for a "clear, unequivocal statement of intent", as the "perception" is one of "continued division" - even "amongst the many optimistic, future-oriented" firms "patience is wearing thin". The BCC also warns that "directly affected companies" are "poised to activate contingency plans" if the confusion continues: indeed, "worryingly", some companies "have simply disengaged". The EU too, unsurprisingly, stated this week that there was "not a moment to lose" in finding a deal. Senior government sources, however, have played down the likelihood that any agreement will be reached this week.

Reports last week had suggested that Downing Street was willing to remain in a customs union with the EU for goods, but not services - though the chances of European leaders accepting such a proposition is near zero. Naturally, the Brexiteers sensed betrayal. Liam Fox, the semi-invisible international trade secretary, and the deeply weird Jacob Rees-Mogg, chair of the European Research Group of Tory backbenchers, both retorted that any move in such a direction would stymie effort by the UK to make new trade deals with other countries.

In what was presumably an attempt to show resolve and stave off leadership challenges, an official Downing Street source issued a statement late on February 4: "To put this to rest, we are categorically leaving the customs union." It added: "It is not our policy to be in the customs union. It is not our policy to be in a customs union" (my emphasis). But this just begged more questions than it answered, with government ministers contradicting each other left, right and centre.

Only a few days earlier when questioned in China, Theresa May refused to rule out involvement in a customs union. Hardly bringing clarity to the situation, the same Downing Street source said a customs union was entirely different from a "customs arrangement" or partnership - which would supposedly allow the British government to strike trade deals with countries outside the EU. The source also claimed that there had been no change in government policy - merely a "reiteration" of policy outlined in a paper published in August.



1930s game: empire days are long gone

Everything clear now?

Unavoidable

Obviously not. Former attorney general Dominic Grieve said he found Downing Street's intervention "rather strange", since the UK would have to maintain some form of "customs union or alignment" with the EU if it was to honour the terms of its agreement to prevent any hard border on the island of Ireland. Nor can this writer comprehend how you can leave the single market and customs union and still have a "frictionless" Irish border. Amber Rudd, appearing on the BBC's *Andrew Marr show*, claimed the prime minister has an "open mind" about a customs arrangement or customs partnership with the EU - further remarking she has "a surprise for the Brexiteers," which is that the sub-committee is "more united than they think".

But moments later on *Sunday with Paterson* on Sky TV, Dominic Raab, the housing minister and Brexit true believer, said he did not think that "we will be in any form ... of customs union, because ... we would have our hands tied while negotiating trade deals with other parts of the world". Rudd and Raab appear to have a different understanding of what is meant by a customs union.

Showing the immense difficulties confronting the British government, at the beginning of the week the EU's chief negotiator, Michel Barnier reminded May that the UK will face "unavoidable" barriers to trade if it leaves the customs union and single market - therefore the "time had come" for the UK to choose what it wanted after its 2019 exit. He went on to say that there was "some divergence" between the two sides, when it came to issues relating to transition and how the exit deal would be enforced. Whilst, of course, he "respected" the UK's decision to rule out any form of long-term customs union and other so-called "red lines", he emphasised how it was a prerequisite for any possible future deal that "everyone plays by the same rules" during the transition period - when the UK would have to comply with existing EU laws and regulations.

Barnier sought greater clarity from the UK about what "ultimate partnership" it wanted with the EU after its departure, expressing his hope that an "official position" would be put forward soon. Replying, Davis said the UK's position was "perfectly clear" - that it wanted a "free trade deal" with the EU, but also the freedom to strike deals with other countries throughout the world, where "trade opportunities" were apparently growing. Needless to say, the Brexit secretary's response clarified nothing.

Meanwhile, the orchestrated leaking by various factions and leadership hopefuls within the Tory Party - as well as other forces - continues apace. According to a legal document splashed across the media on February 7 - revealed in a draft section of the UK-EU withdrawal agreement which has yet to be finalised - Europe wants to be able to restrict the UK's access to the single market if there is a dispute after Brexit. As mentioned in the final footnote of papers leaked to journalists in Brussels, if referring a dispute to the European Court of Justice would take too long, the withdrawal agreement "should provide for a mechanism allowing the Union to suspend certain benefits deriving for the United Kingdom from participation in the internal market" - though it does not go into detail about what disputes could trigger the powers being used or which parts of the single market could or might be suspended. The document also says the UK would be "consulted" about fishing quotas, and would have to pledge not to act against the EU in international organisations. Sanctions the EU could feasibly impose include tariffs on goods, the enforcement of customs checks or the suspension of the aviation agreement giving UK carriers the right to fly between Britain and the continent.

'Sling out'

Theresa May has so far avoided a full discussion of these issues on the Brexit subcommittee, it is claimed, because of the "sensitivities" involved. MPs from both sides of the Tories' Brexit divide have told the press that the prime minister is at least partly to blame for the internal crisis by failing to spell out what she wants from this week's crucial meetings, which means that everyone thinks there is still "all to play for".

The *Sunday Times* reported that Boris Johnson had said "the cavalry" was coming to block any customs union scheme when the sub-committee meets. It is understood that he plans to argue against a customs union in Downing Street this week but will still publicly back the prime minister for the time being. The paper also claimed that Johnson, Gove and Rees-Mogg have been urged to form a "dream team" of Brexiteers to take over from May's failing administration.

Tensions rising high, leading pro-Europe backbencher Anna Soubry urged Theresa May on BBC's *Newsnight* to "sling out" arch-Brexiteers from the party altogether, as they are "not proper Conservatives" (February 5). In her opinion, "something is going to have to give", because otherwise "not only will we get Jacob Rees-Mogg as our prime

minister: we will get a devastating hard Brexit, which will cause huge damage to our economy for generations to come".

But if someone like Jacob Rees-Mogg deposed Theresa May then she "couldn't stay in a party led by somebody like him" - with "his views on things like abortion ... somebody who says that even if you were to be raped by your father you wouldn't have a right to choose to have a termination". Finally, she slammed the "undue influence" exerted by Rees-Mogg's European Research Group - which in her view was "forcing" Theresa May to rule out staying in some form of customs union: effectively meaning that the prime minister is "in hock" to 35 hard Brexiteers who "don't represent my party" - or those "who voted 'leave'".

At the end of last week, Rees-Mogg upset the civil service, and general establishment opinion, by accusing treasury officials of "fiddling the figures" over Brexit in a document that was leaked to BuzzFeed on January 29. This analysis showed that over a 15-year period national income would be 8% lower under a 'no deal' scenario, around 5% lower with a free-trade agreement with the EU, and about 2% lower with a soft Brexit option of single-market membership. But for Rees-Mogg this evaluation was "politically influenced": treasury forecasts were "rigged", because the department was "determined" to keep the UK in the customs union.

He also repeated his assertion that he had heard Charles Grant, the head of a pro-EU think-tank, the Centre for European Reform, saying treasury officials had created an economic model to show that all options other than remaining in the customs union were bad. He claimed on BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme that Grant is getting "private briefings from the treasury against government policy".

In turn, Andrew Turnbull, who led the civil service under Tony Blair, said that Whitehall officials had become the victims of "pre-emptive scapegoating" by Brexiteers in a manner akin to pre-war Nazi Germany - when it was argued that "our great army was never defeated, but it was stabbed in the back by the civilians, liberals, communists, socialists and Jews". This, believes Turnbull, is what "these critics are trying to do" - they are "losing the argument, in the sense that they are unable to make their extravagant promises stack up" - so they need "someone to blame" for their own failures.

Fantasy

Rees-Mogg may complain about officials "fiddling" the statistics and running Britain down, but he is indulging in a

wilful fantasy of his own. It is surely a statement of fact that the UK will take some sort of negative economic hit from pulling out of the EU. Virtually all economists say there can be no substitute (such as a deal with China or India) that would make up for what Britain will lose by doing so.

Cars, for example, require multiple imports/exports as part of the production process - a near ceaseless toing-and-froing of parts and components. If you suddenly throw up trade barriers or tariffs, then it is only to be expected that car manufacturing companies will seriously consider moving production out of Britain. Nor would it be a surprise if financial institutions were to move staff out of the City to Paris or Frankfurt, with the intention of opening up parallel headquarters in order to continue trading freely in Europe. That is just sound business sense. And many companies are putting investments plans on hold until things become clearer - or maybe not investing in Britain at all. Why bother with the hassle? Just go elsewhere.

With regards to the BuzzFeed leaked document and forecasting, it is important to note that we are not talking about an actual 5% drop in gross domestic product, but 5% less than it would have been 15 years from now if Britain had stayed in the EU and single market. In other words, we are talking about *relative*, not absolute, decline, not the apocalypse - though you might well think so given some of the heated rhetoric used by establishment 'remainers'.

Liam Fox's comment last July about how a free trade deal with the EU "should be one of the easiest in human history" was obviously being stupid. As we are seeing, the EU will not give Britain an easy break - quite the opposite. It is not in the interests of European leaders, or the wider EU project, for Britain to come out economically better off from Brexit - even if that was possible, which is clearly not the case.

The idea that Britain can leave the EU and strike so many lucrative trade deals so as to put the 'Great' back into Great Britain is just post-imperial fantasy, though delusions of this nature partly explain the reason for the Brexit vote in the first place: it is hard to imagine any other country behaving so stupidly.

May's recent trip to China is instructive on this score. Her hosts were pressuring her over its Belt and Road Initiative to build infrastructural development across Asia and into Europe: the new Silk Road. If May were to sign up to the \$900 billion scheme against US wishes, then Washington would punish Britain in some way or another. Similarly, if Britain were to throw all its efforts into striking deals with the US, then it would lose out on a deal with China. After all Donald Trump and his administration have been talking the dollar downwards and are all but promising a trade war with China. Welcome to the global realities of the 21st century.

Britain - no matter how much Jacob Rees-Mogg might lament - is no longer a top dog: its current position as a permanent member of the UN security council is owed purely to its imperial past. When the UN was founded, in 1945, Britain still had a global empire and counted as one of the 'big four' (the US, the Soviet Union, Britain and China). Today, at least in terms of economics, it is the US, China, Japan and Germany, who are the 'big' four. The Soviet Union is history, so is the British empire ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

SOUTH AFRICA

Zuma on the brink

Cyril Ramaphosa now looks set to become president a year earlier than scheduled, writes **Peter Manson**

After a frantic few days for the African National Congress, it looks as though Jacob Zuma is about to succumb to the pressure and agree to resign as South African president.

Ever since the election of Cyril Ramaphosa as ANC leader in December it had been a matter of time before his supporters on the national executive committee made a move against the head of state. True, Zuma's second and final term as South African president was set to end immediately after the 2019 general election in any case. But the argument had been that, with Zuma still at the helm, the ANC would be severely handicapped and would perhaps lose its parliamentary majority.

There are still 783 corruption charges hanging over him and are supposedly due to be reinstated in a few weeks time. Then there is the commission of inquiry into 'state capture' - ie the corrupt influence said to be exerted over government appointments by Zuma's close business contacts. This commission is about to start its hearings and Zuma has been summoned to appear before it.

But even more pressing was the 'state of the nation' address (Sona), due to be delivered by Zuma on February 8. Clearly he would have used it to blow his own trumpet, while the left-populist opposition party, the Economic Freedom Fighters, would have played into his hands by trying to prevent him speaking, allowing him to pose as a patriotic democrat. But on February 6 the two parliamentary speakers, or presiding officers, announced that the Sona had been postponed.

Apparently, the two speakers had been "dismayed in the past four years at the disruption, anarchy and chaos that have been characteristic of this annual joint sitting"; and "Developments this year - particularly the calls for disruption ... have, therefore, caused us great concern." So they "decided to approach the president of the republic to propose that we postpone the joint sitting in order to create room for establishing a much more conducive political atmosphere". But - would you believe it? - "When we met the president, we then learnt that he was already writing to parliament to ask for the postponement."¹

Behind the scenes

What had happened was that some - or perhaps all - of the 'top six' ANC national officers had had a private meeting with Zuma on February 4, when they insisted that he must not address parliament (the idea held by at least some of them being that if the Sona was delayed then perhaps the speech could be delivered very soon by the acting president of the republic - ie, Ramaphosa). This postponement was ratified the following day by the ANC's national working committee, which meets between gatherings of the national executive. The NWC then authorised an NEC meeting for February 7.

Incredibly, although the 'top six' officers were supposed to be evenly split between the pro-Zuma and pro-Ramaphosa wings, both factions seemed to be united on the need for both the suspension of the Sona and for the position of Zuma to be urgently discussed. Jessie Duarte, the ANC deputy general secretary elected on a pro-Zuma ticket, told the press: "The NWC has discussed the issue surrounding the future of president Zuma and the matter that we had discussed will be taken to the NEC."²

There was also the question of the no-confidence motion against Zuma that was due to be moved in parliament on February 22 by the EFF. Duarte said: "A vote of no confidence is not



Jacob Zuma: end game

desirable, under any circumstances." The reason she gave was: "Our most important consideration is that we don't believe South Africa should wish for us to embarrass the president of the republic, in any way whatsoever."³ In reality the matter most likely to qualify as the leadership's "most important consideration" was the belief that the replacement of the president ought to be driven by the ANC itself.

Duarte also remarked: "The inability of the NEC to have a decision has already had an impact on members on the ground, creating confusion, indecision and is creating what we saw on the streets of Johannesburg yesterday." She was referring to the February 5 clashes between Zuma and Ramaphosa supporters, when members of the black-nationalist pro-Zuma faction, Black First Land First, were attacked outside the ANC headquarters by Ramaphosa partisans. Zuma's proposal - announced without warning at the December elective conference, in favour of legislation allowing for the expropriation of land without compensation - had obviously gone down well in some quarters, but the presence of the BFLF outside the head office was not to the liking of one pro-Ramaphosa thug, who viciously attacked a BFLF woman, while the police stood by.

When asked what would happen if Zuma refused to resign after being recalled, Duarte said such a thing had never previously occurred: "I have not met a employee that has refused an instruction by the organisation. That has not happened." In other words, the dismissal of Zuma was more or less a *fait accompli*. But, of course, it was not beyond the bounds of possibility that the president would go quietly, in exchange for a deal whereby Ramaphosa would agree to protect him from prosecution.

Then, suddenly, late in the evening of February 6, the ANC announced that the special NEC meeting, called just hours earlier, had been cancelled. According to *Business Live*, the ANC secretary-general's office sent an email to NEC members, which read: "By the directive of the ANC president we hereby inform you that after fruitful and constructive discussions between the ANC president and [Zuma] held this evening ... [Ramaphosa] has postponed the special NEC meeting ..."⁴

ANC spokesperson Khusela Diko confirmed that the meeting would be delayed until February 17. It turns out that Zuma and Ramaphosa had had a last-minute face-to-face meeting: According to Diko, "The postponement came on the advice of ANC president Cyril Ramaphosa after his engagement

with president Jacob Zuma."⁵

So what agreement did the two come to, which caused Ramaphosa to pull back from an open confrontation? It seems more than likely that Zuma has now agreed to step down - although "It is not yet known when Zuma will tender his resignation, as the terms of his exit are being finalised."⁶

Getting it wrong

Interestingly, on the very day that both the NWC decision to call a special NEC meeting and the postponement of the Sona were announced, the *Morning Star* carried a short report, which noted the "speculation in white-owned anti-ANC media that Mr Ramaphosa and other ANC officials elected in December had urged the president to step down at a private meeting on Sunday". It added: "No confirmation of that emerged yesterday, suggesting the rumour was false, as with many earlier reports."⁷

Well, I am afraid the rumour was not false on this occasion. The author of the report was a certain James Tweedie, who is not only the *Star's* foreign editor, but the son of the South African Communist Party's main internet hack, Dominic Tweedie. So perhaps he ought to have known better. For example, on the same day the South African website, *Eyewitness News*, described what a number of insiders had been telling the press:

Since Tuesday morning, several African National Congress leaders who attended the national working committee (NWC) meeting on Monday have been speaking to *Eyewitness News* about the likelihood of Sona being postponed. The reasons they gave included, if president Zuma was not to resign before Wednesday's national executive committee meeting, the party's highest decision-making body would move to recall him and there wouldn't be enough time for the party to finalise who would deliver the address.

Some sources are telling *EWN* that the president will be recalled on Wednesday night and that his removal will be put to a vote if his supporters don't give in. They say if he refuses to go even after a decision is made, MPs will be instructed to vote in support of a motion of no confidence in him.⁸

Despite such commentaries, the implication of Tweedie's report is that the "white-owned anti-ANC media" are exaggerating the divisions. After all, they are all opposed to the ANC-led "national democratic revolution", aren't they? It is true that the bourgeoisie (both black and white) would prefer the ANC to drop such language and dissolve its alliance with the SACP,

not to mention the SACP-led Congress of South African Trade Unions. On the other hand, it is well aware of the role of the SACP and its use of 'Marxist' terms in keeping the 'NDR' within safe limits.

In addition, the SACP is hardly making a fuss about, for example, the anti-working class legislative package that is currently before parliament. The proposed amendments to the Labour Relations Act would make it much more difficult to legally call a strike - employers would be able to win a binding anti-strike judgement much more easily from the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration. Meanwhile amendments to the Basic Conditions of Employment Act would reduce the already minimal protection enjoyed by low-paid workers in sectors where union organisation is weak. I have yet to see any statement condemning the package of amendments from either the SACP or Cosatu.

The truth is that, while sections of the bourgeois media would certainly prefer the solidly rightwing Democratic Alliance to the ANC, most know full well that a DA government is just not going to happen any time soon. What is more, they now have, in the shape of Cyril Ramaphosa, someone who says he is committed to eliminating the overt corruption seen under Zuma, thus clearing the way for profitable capital investment. After all, Ramaphosa, as South Africa's 12th richest man (and second richest black man), has substantial interests in several large companies. Until recently he owned the South African franchise for the chain of McDonald's restaurants, and he was a director and major shareholder of the UK-owned Lonmin, the company employing the 34 Marikana strikers massacred by police in 2012.

And now he has a new soulmate. Another announcement made on February 6 was the appointment of Pule Mabe as the ANC's new national spokesperson to replace Khusela Diko. Like Ramaphosa, Mabe is a prominent capitalist, one of whose companies allegedly was "improperly" awarded a contract worth R33 million (£2 million) from the state-owned national rail company without the correct tender processes being followed. What was that about eliminating corruption? It is clear that the ANC is already being shaped in Ramaphosa's image.

But, not content with dismissing the talk about Zuma's impending departure as just another "rumour", the story in the next day's *Morning Star* focused almost exclusively on the postponement of the Sona - which apparently had nothing whatsoever to do with the leadership crisis: "South Africa's parliament

postponed tomorrow's state of the nation address by president Jacob Zuma yesterday over opposition threats of disruption," wrote James Tweedie. Surely measures to minimise such "disruption" could have been put in place?

Similarly Tweedie junior played down the significance of the (subsequently abandoned) special NEC meeting. His only comment was:

The ANC national working committee said on Monday that it had called a meeting of the 80-member national executive committee for today to discuss the "transition" between Mr Zuma's presidency and Mr Ramaphosa's.⁹

SACP fury

But the SACP itself had no such reticence about the turmoil in the ANC. The party has long been calling for Zuma's resignation - a call opposed by Tweedie senior, by the way. (Like father, like son?)

The party issued a furious statement late on February 6 condemning Zuma on two counts: firstly his "tribalism" in allegedly mobilising fellow Zulus to demonstrate in his support, so that he could "continue overstaying his welcome in office";

The SACP reiterates its decision for president Zuma to resign and for the ANC to recall him if he remains intransigent by refusing to resign. The constitution of our country requires the president to unite, and not to divide, our nation. President Zuma's conduct is reckless and unacceptable. The SACP is calling on all South Africans to unite in defence of our country and not allow him to go down with our hard-won democracy.¹⁰

Secondly, the SACP claimed that Zuma had been planning to fire Ramaphosa as deputy president and "replace him with Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, who he wants to position to take over as acting president, should he find himself removed from office". Dlamini-Zuma is the president's ex-wife and was his preferred candidate to succeed him as ANC leader and eventually state president.

The SACP concludes:

To that extent it would be very clear that president Zuma is also determined to divide and destroy the ANC through unrepentant factional conduct. The SACP calls upon the whole of our movement, as well as South Africans in general, to reject regressive forms of mobilisation and abuse of state power to try and manipulate and further polarise internal ANC and alliance politics.

Unlike the Tweedies then, the SACP is open about the ANC crisis - a crisis that, for the moment at least, seems likely to be resolved in favour of the Ramaphosa faction ●

Notes

1. www.parliament.gov.za/press-releases/statement-presiding-officers-parliament-2018-state-nation-address.
2. www.news18.com/news/world/south-african-anc-to-decide-matter-of-serious-concern-in-zuma-showdown-on-tomorrow-1652699.html.
3. <https://mg.co.za/article/2018-02-06-decision-on-zumas-fate-is-urgent-duarte>.
4. www.businesslive.co.za/bd/national/2018-02-07-countdown-to-change-ancs-zuma-exit-talks-progress.
5. *The Mercury* February 7.
6. www.timeslive.co.za/ideas/2018-02-07-zuma-has-bowed-to-pressure-and-the-recent-sona-farce-is-over.
7. *Morning Star* February 6.
8. <http://ewn.co.za/2018/02/06/is-sona-postponement-the-end-of-the-road-for-zuma>.
9. *Morning Star* February 7.
10. www.sacp.org.za/main.php?ID=6530.

IRAN



Women protesting against the imposition of the hijab in 1979

Just and progressive struggle

No to neoliberal feminism, yes to women's rights. **Yassamine Mather** calls for the left to support the anti-hijab protests

The events of the last few weeks in Iran, where dozens of women of all ages haven't removed their headscarves in public places, reminded me of Orhan Pamuk's wonderful book, *Snow*.

The story, written in 2002 - long before Recep Tayyip Erdoğan came to power - deals with political and cultural tensions over the hijab in the eastern Turkish city of Kars: there was a spate of suicides amongst teenage girls determined to wear it despite the state ban. The narrator, Ka, an atheist, tries to understand the story from several points of view: a former communist, a secularist, a fascist nationalist, a possible Islamic extremist, Islamic moderates, a young Kurd, members of the military, the secret service and the police - and, in particular, an actor-revolutionary.

In Iran, the reverse is happening: women are prepared to be arrested for refusing to wear the headscarf and this makes for a rather more complicated story than the one put forward by Iranian royalists and their main backer - the misogynist, Donald Trump - as well as their not so intelligent supporters on the Iranian right and left.

The *New York Times* tells us:

These bold acts of defiance against the hijab are unprecedented in the nearly 40-year history of the Islamic Republic, but a movement that may have helped inspire them has been going on for years. It began on the social media account of a Brooklyn-based Iranian journalist named Masih Alinejad in 2014.¹

Not quite true. Even though Ms Alinejad was a paid supporter of US-driven 'regime change' and we should not be surprised at the credit given to her by the US media (whether pro-Democrat, mainstream Republican or even pro-Trump), she was a reformist who for the first few years in exile wore a hat covering her hair in all TV appearances. This was outside Iran, so she was not exactly a

champion of women's rights!

The truth is, the struggle for the right to dress or not dress in a particular way started from the moment in March 1979 when Khomeini imposed the veil on Iranian women and when tens of thousands of women, supported by the radical left, came out in militant opposition.

It is true that the hijab is not the principal issue concerning working class women in Iran and I do understand the reluctance of sections of the Iranian left to prioritise this struggle. However, there is another aspect to the whole story: the imposition of the hijab was part and parcel of a series of legal and semi-legal measures that deprived women of the right to work, that prevented them taking up specific jobs, such as in the judiciary, which were considered to be beyond women's capabilities. In that respect opposing the Islamic regime's forced veiling of Iranian women is a just and progressive struggle and it does not matter if some of those involved in this movement are unsavoury characters. However, in supporting their struggles, we must expose the hypocrisy of their imperialist supporters in the west.

The *New York Times* article correctly tells us:

The founder of the Pahlavi dynasty, Reza Shah, banned the hijab, in a gesture of modernisation, in 1936, which effectively put some women under house arrest for years, since they could not bear to be uncovered in public. The leader of the Islamic Republic, ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, made the hijab compulsory in 1979.

While Khomeini's rules were deplorable, the *NYT* fails to remind its readers that the very same shah supported Hitler and was deposed by the allies in 1941 (sent into exile for his Nazi sympathies!). Here lies the similarity with the Turkish nationalist, Kemal Atatürk, in Orhan Pamuk's story! He writes in *Snow*: "The real question is

how much suffering we've caused our womenfolk by turning headscarves into symbols - and using women as pawns in a political game."

Challenge

Both Atatürk and Reza Shah were aware that the Bolshevik revolution had fundamentally challenged conservative views on women's rights. Wary of the threat now posed, reactionaries felt it necessary to adopt some superficial aspects of women's rights. But the brutal imposition of unveiling in 1938 created huge resentment amongst Muslim women and men, just as any attempt to do the same now or in future would create enormous problems.

We should not forget that between 1938 and 1979 middle class and upper class women looked down on working class and peasant women who wore the headscarf or the chador (full-length veil) and used the term 'chadori' as a class-based insult. Here I speak from the experience of my own close relatives, whose reactionary, class-based view of veiled women made me very sympathetic to those who did not want to remove their headscarves. Unlike the bully, Reza Shah, whose police tore the hijab from women's heads, or his incompetent misogynist son, who openly mocked women's struggles for equality, we have to respect the wishes of Iranian, Turkish or Arab women who choose to wear the headscarf.

However, in the same way the very idea that in the 21st century a religious state could force generations of women to cover themselves is an outrage. As in everything else in the Shia republic, all this is mired in hypocrisy. The very clerics who insist on the flogging of young girls caught breaking their strict hijab rules in public turn a blind eye to the fact that their own wives or daughters quickly remove their scarves as soon as their plane takes off from Tehran airport. It is time to say no to this hypocrisy. It is time to say no to the current schizophrenic situation, where

women of all classes live and dress one way at home and a completely different way in public. That is why we stand four-square with those courageous women who have publicly removed their headscarves in the last few weeks and why we should make their struggle against Iran's Islamic republic our own. It is only by doing so that we can expose the false defenders of women's rights in the Middle East.

Unfortunately many young Iranian women are under the illusion that in the west women have achieved equality because they are not obliged to cover up. Recent news items such as the scandals of the film industry, the Harvey Weinstein affair, the way businessmen in London think it is appropriate to entertain corporate customers at a President's Club dinner at the Dorchester hotel, the fact that women are still fighting for equal pay for equal work - all this points to the continued inequality, not to say misogyny, still prevalent in the west. And, instead of just cheering on the anti-hijab protestors in Iran, it is also our responsibility to expose the neoliberal, corporate version of feminism for what it is.

Mainstream feminists have concentrated on the career prospects of professional women, while ignoring important issues, such as the capitalist commodification of women's bodies. Of course, there are exceptions - mainly US-based Marxist women who have examined how gender, identity and culture affect class politics. But the dominant feminist discourse is used by neoliberal capitalism to intensify the exploitation of the working class in a globalised economy. Writers such as Hester Eisenstein and Johanna Brenner argue that the hegemonic form propagated by neoliberal feminists has become an integral part of what is considered common sense.

It is true that overt discrimination is now frowned upon in most countries, but we must constantly remind women in Iran and elsewhere that, while these

and similar attitudes have allowed middle class and upper class women unprecedented access in political, economic and social spheres, their effect on the day-to-day life of working class women has been more problematic - indeed often negative.

You do not need to be an economist to know that it is women who pay the main price for neoliberal deregulation at work, and have borne the main brunt of the tough measures adopted, as recession took over. Neoliberal feminism also ignores a widespread form of violence against women: the suffering caused by the pressure on them to appear attractive to men. Naomi Wolf, in the introduction to her book, *The beauty myth*, writes:

The more legal and material hindrances women have broken through, the more strictly and heavily and cruelly images of female beauty have come to weigh upon us ... During the past decade, women breached the power structure; meanwhile, eating disorders rose exponentially and cosmetic surgery became the fastest-growing speciality.²

Plastic surgery has now become part of the lives of many young women. A total of 43,172 surgical procedures were carried out in 2012, according to the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons. Neoliberal feminism has nothing to say about this - in fact some such feminists tell us it is a woman's right to use such drastic measures to look better, but we Marxists should remind everyone of the fallacy of the "beauty myth" that claims so many victims amongst my gender every year.

Supporting Iranian women without mentioning all this does nothing except create illusions in western, 'neoliberal'/corporate feminism •

Notes

1. www.nytimes.com/2018/02/03/opinion/sunday/iran-hijab-women-scarves.html.
2. N Wolf *The beauty myth* London 1990.

ISRAEL

Two-faced hypocrisy

The Ahed Tamimi affair exposes the failure of western feminism to oppose Zionism and imperialism, writes Tony Greenstein

Over the past month a 16-year-old girl, Ahed Tamimi, has become a Palestinian heroine compared to Joan of Arc. Israeli Zionists - both 'doves' and 'hawks' - were in uproar when on December 15 Ahed was filmed slapping an Israeli soldier. He had invaded the grounds of Ahed's house in the village of Nabi Saleh, a militant village of around 600 people, about 12 miles from Ramallah. It is a village that has seen its lands and even its sole freshwater spring confiscated by the nearby settlement of Halamish.

Violence against Palestinians is taken for granted. But the slapping of an Israeli soldier? This was a shock to the Israeli psyche - a national humiliation and completely unacceptable. A teenage girl challenging a heavily armed soldier and forcing him out of the grounds of her house caused national apoplexy.

The fact that Ahed's 15-year-old cousin Mohammed had been shot in the face with a rubber bullet half an hour before and had to be put in an induced coma in order to survive was not, of course, made much of in Israel. Such things happen. Death or serious injury of Palestinian children is not a matter of any great interest. But slapping a soldier? This is completely unacceptable to the *Herrenvolk*.

The reaction of leading Israeli politicians was as if a stake had been driven through the heart of Zionism. 'Culture' minister Miri Regev - a virulent racist who has compared Israel's African refugees to 'cancer' and who subsequently apologised to cancer victims¹ - was livid. "When I watched that, I felt humiliated, I felt crushed," she said. The incident was "damaging to the honour of the military and the state of Israel".²

Naftali Bennett, the far-right racist who masquerades as education minister, was full of righteous anger. Ahed and her fellows should "finish their lives in prison" he said.³ A life sentence for a slap! Of course, no Israeli Jewish child should suffer such a penalty: it is the *Untermenschen* who must be taught to respect their masters.

Michael Oren MK, the former ambassador to the United Nations, had a different take on the matter. The problem was that Ahed Tamimi not only wears western clothes, as opposed to traditional Arab dress, but she is white with blonde hair. This poses a problem. She might be mistaken for a Nordic Aryan. Even worse, people in the west might identify with her. Oren claimed that Ahed had been dressed by her family in western clothes. The Tamimi family were suspected, with their "blond hair, freckles and western clothes", of not being 'real' Palestinians.

Bassem Tamimi, Ahed's father, who has been arrested many times and even tortured, asked:

How did such a fool get to be your ambassador to the United States? How does the state of Israel allow such a thing? If that's your elite, I'm not sure how you manage to beat us ... The fourth strongest army in the world is afraid of a family and a girl ... When your enemy is angry and nervous, it means you're on the right track.⁴

The Zionist reaction is, of course, understandable because Palestinians are sub-human in Israeli eyes and as such do not have western-style families or the kind of emotional attachment we are used to. According to deputy defence



Ahed Tamimi: her treatment highlights the true nature of Zionism

minister Eli Dahan, they are "animals".⁵

'Liberal' journalist Ben Caspit had a slightly more sophisticated approach. He wrote in *Maariv*: "In the case of the girls, we should exact a price at some other opportunity - in the dark, without witnesses and cameras."⁶ This has been widely interpreted as a call to sexually abuse Ahed - and we know that she has been verbally and physically abused by women prisoners in her many shuttles between different Israeli prisons.

One of the charges being presented at my hearing against expulsion from the Labour Party is calling MP Louise Ellman a supporter of Israeli child abuse. This execrable woman, vice-chair of the Jewish Labour Movement, defended Israel's treatment of Palestinian children in a debate in the House of Commons in January 2016.⁷ The treatment of Ahed and other Palestinian children has not even been mentioned by those intrepid fighters against 'anti-Semitism', the JLM. Always eager to conflate anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism, the British wing of the Israeli Labor Party has gone silent over the treatment of Palestinian children - including, of course, the proposed expulsion of African refugees from Israel.

Harsh treatment

Shortly after the slapping incident Ahed was arrested. Heavily armed soldiers arrived in the early hours of the morning at her house, dragged her out of bed, handcuffed and blindfolded her and took her to a military detention centre. There was a determination by the military and political echelons that this slight 16-year-old would be made to pay for having humiliated the Zionist military machine.

By all accounts her treatment in custody has been harsh. She has been kept in cold cells, without access to her parents (her mother too was arrested when trying to visit her) or a lawyer, deprived of sleep and sanitary products. To understand the racism involved, compare this to an Israeli Jewish child living in a settlement on the West Bank, who would have immediate access to a lawyer, their parents and social workers. There would be no question of being shackled. And slapping a policeman or soldier? This would not even be considered a crime. But then Ahed's real crime is being a Palestinian and resisting the occupation.

On the evening of December 28, family members and friends of

Ahed gathered in the courtroom at Ofer military camp. Gaby Lasky, the Tamimis' lawyer, reminded the court of "the right to resist the invasion of one's home" and "right to object to occupation." While those like the Tamimis are being prosecuted for assault, incitement and violence, there was no mention of the soldiers' violence during the trial, nor the fact that they were on land that is deemed to be occupied in international law. This is a military court where there is a conviction rate of 99.74%. In the West Bank there are two legal systems and two different court systems.

But, despite her ordeal, Ahed has not lost her sense of humour. At one remand hearing the judge asked her how she hit the soldier, to which she replied that if they took her handcuffs off she would be happy to demonstrate!

Ahed is one of over 300 Palestinian children who are currently detained by Israel. The images of Ahed's "calm, precocious face, framed by the obdurate shoulders of uniformed guards, go round the world, radiating strength and resistance".⁸

Ben Ehrenreich wrote in *The Nation* that the slapping has revealed Israel to the world as a bully and exposed "a hideous nerve" in Israeli society. Israelis are in "sheer denial" that their country has any responsibility for the "humiliation, violence, and terror of the occupation".⁹

The Tamimi case has also exposed the utter paralysis of liberal Zionists, their inability to face what Israel has become.¹⁰ Phillip Weiss has noted that "the main response of liberal Zionists has been silence". The three leading liberal Zionist organisations - Americans for Peace Now, the New Israel Fund and J Street - have had almost nothing to say about the case.

But, when they do have something to say about it, they praise the Israeli soldiers for not responding violently to Ahed Tamimi. Peace Now called the soldiers "heroes". The reason for this closing of ranks by liberal Zionists is because they too are signed up to a Jewish state. They too accept the logic that such a state implies.

J Street is the leading liberal Zionist group. When it finally got around to mentioning the case, its leader, Jeremy Ben-Ami, wrote an anguished piece saying that the case exposes the "tragedy" of the conflict.¹¹ As Weiss notes, the most prominent emotion in Ben-Ami's article is

"pride" in the Israeli soldier, whose "restraint prevented the situation from deteriorating further". Ben-Ami did not mention the shooting of Tamimi's cousin, nor the calls for violence against Tamimi. He did not demand that Israel should free Ahed Tamimi.

Contrast this with Gideon Levy's fiercely argued support for Ahed in *Ha'aretz*. He asked "How is it that Israelis are totally indifferent to the plight of the blonde girl behind bars who could easily be their child?" As Levy notes,

Yet even Ahed Tamimi's non-Arab appearance hasn't managed to touch any hearts here. The wall of dehumanisation and demonisation that has been built through vile campaigns of incitement, propaganda and brain-washing against the Palestinians has trumped even the blonde from Nabi Saleh.

She could be your daughter, or your neighbour's daughter, yet the abuse she suffers rouses no feelings of solidarity, compassion or basic humanity. After the outburst of anger over what she dared to do came the imperviousness. She's a terrorist. She couldn't have been our daughter; she's a Palestinian.¹²

Feminism

A few weeks ago I wrote an article entitled 'Feminist silence over Ahed Tamimi exposes the racist consensus at the heart of western feminism'.¹³ In over a decade of blogging it has been my most popular article, attracting some 105,000 hits. Why? Possibly the guilty conscience of western feminists, who are all too aware of their own oppression as women, but fail to see the interconnections with the oppression of other women for whom their gender is not the totality of what it means to be oppressed.

Western feminism operates on the basis that there is a system called patriarchy, an all-encompassing oppression of women by men, whilst failing to account for the fact that women are divided by class, race, ethnicity and colour. Women living under the heel of imperialism or colonialism are thus not only oppressed as women, but as colonised people.

For women such as Ahed Tamimi or her mother, Nariman, the primary oppression they experience is not at the hands of the males in their family,

but from Israeli soldiers, regardless of sex. Who, for example, could doubt that for a Rohingya woman the experience of being driven out of Burma (often with the help of Israeli arms) is more immediate and dangerous than the oppression they experience in their relationship with men? Or that the primary experience of Jewish women in the camps of Nazi Germany was not that of Jewish men, but the Nazi state? There is no evidence I have seen that Nazi guards who were female shared any sisterhood with Jewish women.

The relationship between feminism, racism and imperialism has been a vexed one for over 30 years. When the issue of Zionism first manifested itself in the pages of *Spare Rib*, the magazine of women's liberation, in 1982, at the time of the invasion of Lebanon, it split the editorial collective in two. An article, 'Women speak out against Zionism', caused an explosion of fury amongst Zionist feminists, who asserted that support for the Palestinians and Lebanese was a form of anti-Semitism (shades of the Labour Party today!).

The debate has not gone away for the simple reason that, not only do different women experience different forms of oppression, but women can themselves be both the oppressors of other women and oppressed themselves by virtue of their gender. Although gender oppression will be felt most acutely by women who are least oppressed by virtue of class or race, it is of lesser importance to women for whom their status as an ethnic or racial minority is primary.

Can anyone doubt that in Israel Jewish women - like white women in apartheid South Africa before it - identify first and foremost with the system of racial supremacy they were born into? Racial oppression cuts across gender and thus we see, for example, in the United States that a majority of white women voted for Donald Trump despite his overt misogyny. They identified with his attacks on Mexicans and Latinos, amongst others.

In response to my own article, many women have argued that anti-colonial resistance had nothing to do with feminism ●

Notes

- [1. https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/israeli-lawmaker-miri-regev-heaven-forbid-we-compare-africans-human-beings](https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/israeli-lawmaker-miri-regev-heaven-forbid-we-compare-africans-human-beings).
- [2. www.nbcnews.com/news/world/palestinian-girl-ahed-tamimi-praised-hero-after-confronting-soldiers-n831571](http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/palestinian-girl-ahed-tamimi-praised-hero-after-confronting-soldiers-n831571).
- [3. www.haaretz.com/israel-news/idf-arrests-palestinian-teen-girl-who-slapped-soldiers-1.5629071](http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/idf-arrests-palestinian-teen-girl-who-slapped-soldiers-1.5629071).
- [4. www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/.premium-ahed-tamimi-s-family-ridicules-israel-s-secret-probe-of-their-identity-1.5765380](http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/.premium-ahed-tamimi-s-family-ridicules-israel-s-secret-probe-of-their-identity-1.5765380).
- [5. www.timesofisrael.com/new-deputy-defense-minister-called-palestinians-animals](http://www.timesofisrael.com/new-deputy-defense-minister-called-palestinians-animals).
- [6. www.maariv.co.il/journalists/Article-614459; http://mondoweiss.net/2017/12/should-israeli-journalist](http://www.maariv.co.il/journalists/Article-614459;http://mondoweiss.net/2017/12/should-israeli-journalist).
- [7. http://azvsas.blogspot.co.uk/2017/11/louise-ellman-mp-for-liverpool.html](http://azvsas.blogspot.co.uk/2017/11/louise-ellman-mp-for-liverpool.html).
- [8. http://mondoweiss.net/2017/12/liberal-zionists-nothing?utm_source=Mondoweiss+List&utm_campaign=9436b2b8d8-RSS_EMAIL_CAMPAIGN&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_b86bace129-9436b2b8d8-398519413&mc_cid=9436b2b8d8&mc_eid=ce892c63fb](http://mondoweiss.net/2017/12/liberal-zionists-nothing?utm_source=Mondoweiss+List&utm_campaign=9436b2b8d8-RSS_EMAIL_CAMPAIGN&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_b86bace129-9436b2b8d8-398519413&mc_cid=9436b2b8d8&mc_eid=ce892c63fb).
- [9. www.thenation.com/article/ahed-tamimi-has-become-the-symbol-of-a-new-generation-of-palestinian-resistance](http://www.thenation.com/article/ahed-tamimi-has-become-the-symbol-of-a-new-generation-of-palestinian-resistance).
- [10. http://mondoweiss.net/2017/12/ending-crisis-zionism](http://mondoweiss.net/2017/12/ending-crisis-zionism).
- [11. http://jstreet.org/thoughts-tamimi-case-answer-isnt-arresting-16-year-old-girl-ending-50-year-occupation/#.Wno1CXzLiHt](http://jstreet.org/thoughts-tamimi-case-answer-isnt-arresting-16-year-old-girl-ending-50-year-occupation/#.Wno1CXzLiHt).
- [12. www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-and-if-she-were-your-daughter-1.5630005](http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-and-if-she-were-your-daughter-1.5630005).
- [13. http://azvsas.blogspot.co.uk/2018/01/feminist-silence-over-ahed-tamimi.html](http://azvsas.blogspot.co.uk/2018/01/feminist-silence-over-ahed-tamimi.html).

ITALY

PD left up in arms

Matteo Renzi's purge is unlikely to halt his party's decline, argues **Toby Abse**



The Movimento Cinque Stelle (Five Star Movement - M5S) is still the strongest single party in the opinion polls, while the centre-right coalition of Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia, the Lega, the Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) and the centrist Noi Con L'Italia is still the dominant bloc. The PD and its allies in the centre-left coalition are still some distance behind the other two major groupings. Whilst the minor changes shown in the most recent Ipsos poll reported by *Corriere della Sera* on January 27 are within the usual margin of error, they do show a further decline in the PD's share of the vote to 22.7% (down by 0.4% compared to the January 13 poll), as well as in its allies' combined share of 4% (down by 0.4% as well).¹ Sadly, the social democratic Liberi e Uguali (Free and Equal People - LeU) has not, so far anyway, benefited from the centre-left's decline, and is down 0.3% to 6.1%.

Perhaps of greater interest than the minor fluctuations over the last month is the analysis of vote shares in terms of gender, age and occupation. Both the PD and Forza Italia are more popular amongst women than men (23.7%, compared with 21.9%, for the PD; and, more significantly, 19.9%, compared with 14.2%, for Forza Italia), whilst M5S is markedly more popular amongst men than women (32.4%, compared with 25.6%).²

In marked contrast to the UK electorate, with its concentration of elderly Tory Brexiters, Italian voters over the age of 65 are more inclined to support parties that are at least nominally on the left (36.1% for the PD, 7.2% for LeU, 2.7% for the minor

centre-left parties) than any other age group. This is probably because their world-view was formed in the days when the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) and the trade unions were strong - in the 1970s - not because of any great enthusiasm for an arrogant young(ish) neoliberal like Matteo Renzi.

Contrary to much superficial journalism, particularly in the Anglophone sphere, M5S is not strongest amongst 18-24-year-olds. Indeed, its rating amongst this age group is, at 28.1%, lower than amongst any age cohort other than the over-65s, amongst whom, more predictably, the internet-obsessed populists only command 18.8% support. The greatest enthusiasm for M5S comes from 35-44-year-olds (36.5%).

Turning to occupational groups, it is revealing that the two most popular parties amongst what the pollsters call *operai e affini* (roughly 'factory workers and other manual labourers') are the right-populist ones - M5S has 40.6%, and the Lega 19.6%.³ Forza Italia comes third, on 14.1%. The PD only has 13.6% support - less than it has amongst any other occupational group, even including the unemployed, amongst whom it scores 18.3%.⁴ If one adds the other centre-left parties (3.8%) and LeU (3%) to the PD total, only 20.4% of the core of the traditional working class is now prepared to vote for even nominally left parties.

Although undoubtedly casualisation, the shrinkage in the number of large factories and the considerable decline in trade union membership have all played a role

Italian parliamentary elections looks set to deliver another blow to 'centre-left'

Matteo Renzi continues to promote his zombie Blairism



in this rightward shift, the gradual capitulation to neoliberalism by the post-communist successor parties of the PCI over nearly 30 years, aggravated by Renzi's virulently anti-working-class zombie Blairism (eg, the Jobs Act), has made a massive contribution to this disastrous decline in class-consciousness.⁵

As I have already indicated, LeU has, so far, not made a great deal of headway amongst the traditional core of the working class. It has gained far more support among students (10%) and is doing reasonably well amongst teachers and other white-collar employees (7.4%) - perhaps reflecting higher degrees of unionisation amongst public sector workers. It has also done better amongst pensioners (7.5%), for the reasons I explained in my general analysis of age cohorts. Somewhat surprisingly, LeU is also doing relatively well amongst 'entrepreneurs, professionals and leaders' (presumably a category resembling the ABs in comparable British opinion poll surveys) at 8.2%.

Although Forza Italia's lowest scores are amongst students (10%) and 'white collar employees and teachers', it would be wrong to be too smug about the positive effects of higher education as a preventative against rightwing demagogues, since the Lega is doing rather better amongst students (13.2%) and amongst the group that includes teachers (14.6%). Contrary to what is sometimes assumed, students are slightly below average in their degree of support for M5S (28.3%), but the group including teachers shows slightly above-average support, at 33%. Conversely, amongst those with

the lowest level of education (only the primary school certificate), who account for about one in four voters, the PD is the first party on 30% - but it should be stressed that many of these are older voters, who are more inclined to vote for the PD anyway, especially if they are retired manual workers who received little or no secondary education in the immediate post-war decade. It is worth pointing out that amongst practising Catholics (ie, those who go to mass every Sunday) the PD is the leading party, whilst the Lega has below-average support.

Racism

Although the PD is a fusion of former communists and former left Christian Democrats, I would be wary of ascribing the current situation to a merger that took place back in 2007-08. It seems more plausible that recent statements by pope Francis and the leadership of the Italian Bishops' Conference, particularly cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti - attacking racism and xenophobia in general, and the Lega in particular - have had some effect. Their statements came in response to shocking remarks by Attilio Fontana, the Lega and centre-right coalition candidate for the Lombard regional presidency - about "defending the white race".

Fontana is pretty unrepentant, and has - quite possibly correctly - suggested such a stance increased his support. The neo-fascist FdI leader, Giorgia Meloni, hypocritically criticised him, since in public utterances she, like shrewder far-rightists everywhere, talks in terms of cultural and religious identity - not 'race', with its Nazi associations. Fontana - an elderly lawyer and former

What we fight for

mayor of the small town of Varese, with no national reputation - was misleadingly presented as a relative moderate by Lega standards, when his patron, Matteo Salvini, was faced with an attempt by Berlusconi and Forza Italia to claim the centre-right Lombard candidacy for their party in the wake of Roberto Maroni's unexpected decision not to stand for a second term as Lombard regional president. Fontana is regarded by the PD as a weaker candidate than Maroni would have been, but, as current projections (*La Repubblica* February 1) for the Lombard single-member first-past-the-post constituencies give the centre-right a massive majority of seats, it seems very unlikely that they will lose a regional contest to be held on the same day as the general election (March 4).⁶

It is unlikely to be coincidental that the recent anti-racist comments from Catholic church leaders have occurred more or less at the same time as president Sergio Mattarella's decision to fill the first vacancy for a life senator that has arisen during his term of office with Liliana Segre, an Auschwitz survivor. Segre's recollection of being excluded from school at the age of eight by Benito Mussolini's racial laws had obvious parallels with the experience of migrant children in present-day Italy, as did her descriptions of her traumatic journey back to Italy at the end of the war.⁷

The inflammatory rhetoric of Attilio Fontana about "the defence of the white race" may well have helped to push Luca Traini - a 28-year-old unsuccessful Lega candidate in the June 2017 municipal elections - towards his murderous shooting spree in the city of Macerata on February 3, in which six Africans, of a variety of nationalities, were wounded. Traini claimed to be avenging the death of 18-year-old Pamela Mastropietro, whose dismembered body was found at Pollenza, near Macerata, on January 31 (a Nigerian has been arrested and charged with her murder). Although Traini's family own a house in Pollenza, Traini does not seem to have ever met Pamela, so any claim that his actions were a personally motivated vendetta, is absurd.⁸ Three of the victims were not even Nigerian, but from Gambia, Ghana or Mali, and none of them had any link with the Nigerian drug-dealing murder suspect.

It is quite clear that Traini was going around Macerata shooting at anybody with a black skin; in short, he was a politically motivated neo-fascist terrorist - a skinhead who wore a Celtic cross, had the Wolf emblem of the 'Third Position' tattooed on his face, and seems to have had links with both Casa Pound and Forza Nuova.⁹ Lega leader Matteo Salvini responded to the shootings by claiming that "the moral responsibility of any violent episode that occurs in Italy" should be shouldered by "those who have filled it with illegal immigrants".¹⁰ M5S leaders Luigi Di Maio and Alessandro Di Battista appealed to all politicians to "stay silent" - in effect once again refusing to condemn racism and fascism. Whilst the now marginalised long-standing M5S activist, Roberto Fico, disagreed with his leaders, the duo represent the official position of M5S.

PD rebellion

Whatever assistance the pope and president might have been attempting to give the centre-left, Renzi seems bent on political suicide. The PD secretary has shown absolutely no mercy in his choice of PD candidates, making a complete mockery of any claims to be committed to a broad, pluralist centre-left.¹¹

The final decisions on the PD lists were taken during a marathon meeting in the party's headquarters on the night of January 26-27. This ended in extreme acrimony at 4am, when the representatives of the more social democratic minority factions,

led by Andrea Orlando and Michele Emiliano, refused to participate in the vote to ratify the definitive lists. Even the report by Filippo Ceccarelli in *La Repubblica* (January 28) - a paper broadly sympathetic to the PD - referred to Renzi's "crocodile tears" when the PD secretary claimed that what many journalists have described as his 'Night of the Long Knives' was "a devastating experience from the personal point of view".

Andrea Orlando is alleged to have told "his friends" that "Renzi is carrying his ultra-loyalists into parliament and then transforming the PD into a 'bad company'".¹² Ugo Spisetti, the former treasurer of the Democratici di Sinistra (DS) - the ex-communist component of the PD - was even more brusque in his reaction: "Renzi is a serial delinquent. Right now we are mounting an election campaign for the PD. After March 4, however, we will concern ourselves with the delinquency."

According to *La Repubblica*, Renzi has sought to insure himself against any serious rebellion amongst the PD parliamentarians in the event of the PD's electoral defeat, and has done his utmost to pick a team that would have no hesitation in following him into a coalition with Forza Italia if the parliamentary numbers for such a two-party majority stack up after March 4. Renzi has calculated, on the basis of current opinion polls, that around 200 PD parliamentarians will be elected, of whom 155 will be his ultra-loyalists, 15 will be supporters of currents led by figures like Dario Franceschini (who have generally voted with him against the PD's residual left minorities, but sometimes have serious reservations about his rash decisions) and 20 will be supporters of the broadly social democratic minorities associated with Orlando and Emiliano. Press reports estimate that amongst the full lists of candidates - some with little or no hope of being elected - 18 are Orlando supporters, four back Gianni Cuperlo, who stood against Renzi in the 2013 PD leadership election,¹³ and just three are followers of Michele Emiliano.¹⁴

Renzi's purge was not confined to the obvious rebels linked to the left minority faction. Ermete Realacci, a long-standing friend of prime minister Paolo Gentiloni and a leading environmentalist, has been judged unsuitable.¹⁵ The internationally respected sociologist, Luigi Manconi, has also been dropped, presumably because his last-ditch, principled defence of the *Ius Soli* ('right to the soil' - a law giving Italian-born children of immigrants citizenship on certain conditions) was regarded as a liability when there were racist votes to be courted. Senator Sergio Lo Giudice, who played a prominent role in the parliamentary struggle for civil partnerships, of which Renzi claimed to be so proud, has been deselected, perhaps to appease homophobic allies like Pierluigi Casini.¹⁶ Giusi Nicolini, former mayor of Lampedusa and winner of the Unesco Peace Prize for her tireless work with refugees, was also regarded as unworthy of a parliamentary candidacy, presumably because Renzi suspected she could not be trusted to keep quiet about the appalling fate of black refugees in the Libyan camps, which the PD leadership regard as such a convenient way of keeping Africans out of Italy.

Whilst some of Renzi's exclusions may pass unnoticed amongst the wider electorate, even if they may demoralise some PD activists - not a good idea in closely fought single-member constituencies - one of his positive choices is bound to further erode the PD's vote share. This is the arrogant and reckless decision to place Maria Elena Boschi at the top of no less than five lists (the legal maximum) in multi-member constituencies in the proportional section,¹⁷ even though she had already been given a 'safe' single-member

constituency in Bolzano.

Although Boschi's leading public role as minister for reforms meant that her political reputation suffered as a result of Renzi's humiliating defeat in the December 2016 referendum on constitutional reform, the main reason for popular hostility to her is far more personal - her connection with the Banca Etruria scandal in her home town of Arezzo. Her father was vice-president of the bank at the time of its collapse, in which thousands of local small investors lost their entire life savings. He has already been subjected to massive fines by the regulatory authorities and is apparently still under criminal investigation.

Faced with an M5S motion of no confidence, Maria Elena claimed in a famous and tearful parliamentary speech to have had no involvement with the bank during her period as a leading minister in Renzi's government, alleging she was being persecuted as her father's daughter. However, the parliamentary commission of enquiry into Italian banks - set up in the last months of the outgoing legislature, largely because of Renzi's obsessive and ill-advised desire to pursue his vendetta against the Bank of Italy - demonstrated that she had been, to put it politely, somewhat economical with the truth. Various leading officials from other banks, as well as the outgoing head of the Consob (roughly equivalent to the Financial Conduct Authority in the UK) all claim to have had conversations with her during her period in office about matters directly or indirectly related to her father's failing bank. Unsurprisingly, her threats of a defamation action against a former *Corriere della Sera* journalist, who had already made some reference to one of these meetings in a book published some months before the commission hearings, have not been followed through.

Her attempts to defend herself have sometimes been both ruthless and ludicrous. She unearthed an old email from the Head of Consob sent around midnight, asking to see her at his house at 8am on the following day, implicitly trying to get journalists to depict him as some kind of Harvey Weinstein character. In reality, it seems far more likely that this strange episode was some kind of clandestine attempt to pass on private financial information before the stock market opened for the day - insider trading, not sexual harassment.

In any event, the PD's falling opinion poll ratings in December were directly correlated with the claims about Boschi at the commission hearings. It became apparent that if she ran as PD candidate in her family's home town of Arezzo, where the Banca Etruria was based, the enraged savers and their families would vote for whichever opposition candidate was most likely to boot her out of parliament. Subsequently, Renzi imagined it might be possible to put her up as a candidate elsewhere in her native Tuscany, but local PD activists refused to touch her with a bargepole. PD members in various other regions showed an equal lack of enthusiasm for running her as a candidate in a single-member constituency in their local areas.

Ultimately, she was found a seat in Bolzano as a result of a deal between the PD and the regional party, based on the German-speaking population in Sud Tirolo/Alto Adige. It will be extremely interesting to see if she makes good on her very recent promise to learn German. Since Forza Italia's Micaela Biancofiore is regarded as a strong candidate, who might, despite the odds, win in Bolzano, Renzi clearly felt he had to ensure his favoured minister had five other parachutes elsewhere in Italy ●

Notes

1. It seems reasonable to assume that '+ Europa' is the strongest of the three minor allies, given the much greater media visibility and popularity of its leader, former foreign minister and European commissioner Emma Bonino. According to a poll reported in *La Repubblica* (January 27), Bonino is the second most popular Italian politician

after prime minister Paolo Gentiloni, with a 42% approval rating, compared with Renzi's 31% (joint fourth with Berlusconi).

2. For what it is worth, LeU has 6.3% male support and 5.9% female. Its presentation to the foreign press in Rome on January 30, which had three male platform speakers, provoked a female Canadian television journalist to walk out. That was somewhat unfortunate, as was the attempt by Chiara Geloni, an LeU candidate in the Massa constituency who was present at the event, to laugh it off by saying, "What should D'Alema have done? Go to Casablanca to become a woman? We have many women at the head of our lists". That was the sort of remark guaranteed to offend the canons of North American political correctness. Laura Boldrini has indeed been placed at the top of four Lombard lists, while Rossella Muroli, LeU's main election organiser, also heads four lists.

3. The FdI, coming from a more classically neo-fascist tradition, only scores 3.2% amongst this group.

4. Whilst some of the Italian unemployed may be graduates, this reversal of the traditional correlation between a class-conscious employed proletariat and an atomised and demoralised lumpenproletariat is worth pondering.

5. I acknowledge that similar trends can be found elsewhere in continental western Europe - with racist, xenophobic and Islamophobic right-populist forces making headway amongst the traditional proletariat (and not just in their more traditional petty bourgeois constituency). But in other countries stronger remnants of 'official communism' (the PCP in Portugal, PCF in France and KKE in Greece) or new left-populist forces (Podemos, Syriza, Mélenchon) have put more of a brake on this phenomenon. Obviously, workers in the UK - or more specifically in England and Wales - can be seen as showing some signs of moving in the same direction, but this article does not seem the most appropriate place to discuss either the very negative developments seen in the June 2016 referendum or the slightly more positive outcome of the June 2017 general election, with Labour's greatly increased share of the vote, even if by no means all of this increase came from traditional working class supporters.

6. The Lazio regional election is also taking place on March 4, but I have seen no explanation as to why similar elections in a few smaller regions due this year have not been incorporated in the so-called 'election day', given the widespread preoccupation with turnout in recent contests, such as that in Sicily last November.

7. The centre-right remains as shameless as ever: Forza Italia is running Alessandra Mussolini as parliamentary candidate, while Giorgia Meloni's FdI - not to be outdone in the use of the Mussolini surname - are running another of *Il Duce's* granddaughters in a different Lazio constituency.

8. This claim was implied by Berlusconi's reference to "the action of a madman" without "a lucid political connotation".

9. Forza Nuova's leader, Roberto Fiore, announced in the aftermath of Traini's arrest: "We shall side with him and pay his legal expenses, so he does not feel alone."

10. Maroni clearly distanced himself from the Lega's new leader by saying of Traini: "This man is a fascist criminal, and does not have anything to do with the glorious history of the great Lega."

11. Renzi's use of minor allies is purely instrumental. Provided they each get more than 1%, but less than the 3% threshold for parliamentary representation, all their votes get added to the PD's total - just one of the undemocratic features of the *Rosatellum* (new electoral law).

12. This is a fairly obvious reference to Renzi's dream of emulating Emmanuel Macron and creating a new centrist formation devoid of any ex-communist from the DS.

13. Cuperlo himself discovered at 3am on the Saturday morning that he had been assigned a "safe seat" at Sassuolo, an area with which he had no previous links, without any discussion with local party activists. He chose to reject Renzi's offer and abandon his parliamentary career out of respect for the rank-and-file members. One suspects that Cuperlo now wishes he had been more loyal to his old patron, Massimo D'Alema, and followed him on the path to LeU, instead of attempting a partial reconciliation with Renzi.

14. Naturally all three have been assigned constituencies in Puglia, the area where Emiliano is regional president, to avoid any danger of nationwide oppositional coordination.

15. Renzi has always been irritated by environmentalists complaining about oil drilling in the Adriatic, or poor safety standards at the Taranto steel works.

16. This Christian Democrat was always eager to rant against homosexuality and abortion at so-called Family Day gatherings of Catholic fundamentalists promoted by popes John Paul II and Benedict XV. On March 4 he will be standing in the 'safe' constituency of Bologna for Civica Popolare with PD support. (One of his opponents will be the former regional president of Emilia Romagna with a PCI/PDS/DS/PD history, Vasco Errani, who is standing for LeU. It will be interesting to see if any vestigial trace of 'Red Bologna' will be found in the polling booths on March 4.)

17. Whilst two other PD women are also on five such lists, they have been given second or even third place on some of them. Given Boschi's lack of any previous connection with Sicily, where she is top of three lists and where allegations have already been made about other PD candidates in this election, the PD's enemies - particularly in the Lega and M5S - will doubtless make further insinuations along the lines of the 'fake news' that was widely circulated on the internet, falsely claiming she had been present at the funeral of Mafia chief Totò Riina, who in reality was secretly buried.

■ 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.

weekly Worker

**Is China
capitalist or
state capitalist?
Or still Maoist?**

Alternative to Marxism

Is 'trading economics' China's new 'ideologically acceptable' theory of capitalism? **Michael Roberts** looks at the thoughts of a major figure in the People's Bank of China

In my view, the Chinese economy remains at a structural crossroads.¹ The state and state enterprises continue to dominate the economy in investment, employment and production. That means that foreign capital, domestic private capital and market forces do not hold sway, even though they have been increasing in weight and power over the last 30 years.

My view is controversial in Marxist circles. The vast majority of Marxist economists and 'experts' on Marx's 'theory of the state' reckon that China is capitalist or 'state capitalist'. But for me the class nature of the Chinese state remains open.

All I would add at this point is to remind readers of the data that I have previously published on the sheer weight of the public sector and public assets in the Chinese economy.² The International Monetary Fund has published a full data series on the size of public sector investment and its growth going back 50 years for every country in the world.⁴ It shows that China has a stock of public-sector assets worth 150% of annual gross domestic product. Only Japan has anything like that amount, at 130%. Every other major capitalist economy has less than 50% of GDP in public assets. Every year, China's public investment to GDP is around 16%, compared to 3%-4% in the US and UK.

There is nearly three times as much stock of public productive assets to private capitalist sector assets in China. In the US and UK, public assets are less than 50% of private assets. Even in 'mixed economy' India or Japan, the ratio of public to private assets is no more than 75%. This shows that in China public ownership in the means of production is dominant - unlike any other major economy. But the IMF data also show that, while public-sector assets in China are still nearly twice the size of capitalist-sector assets, the gap is closing. Private (capitalist) investment stock is growing faster than state-sector assets.

Balance

In this article, I want to show that, because the Chinese economy is balanced between the power of the state and the market, this is increasingly reflected in the ideology and economic thinking of Chinese officials and academics. There are still many academics in Chinese universities that hold to what they think is Marxist economic theory and categories. But there are many more - particularly officials in government and state enterprises, who have been educated in 'western' universities - who have long abandoned a Marxist view and opted for mainstream neoclassical or Keynesian theory.

A recent striking example is Wang Zhenying, director-general of the research and statistics department at the People's Bank of China's Shanghai head office and vice-chairman of the Shanghai Financial Studies Association. This leading Chinese state banker recently summarised his economic views from his Chinese language textbook on economics (for Chinese students) in the *Financial Times* of all places.

Wang tells us that "Crises destroy, but

also create." He means that

... the outbreak of each crisis gives rise to new economic theories. Marx's theory of surplus value was created amidst frequent economic crises in the late 19th century and Keynes's revolutionary theory was put forward during the great depression in the 1930s. Today, with a worldwide financial tsunami only now receding, people are expecting a new economic theory in response to the failure of the pre-crisis mainstream.⁵

So for Wang Marx has had his day in the theoretical limelight (ie, 19th century) and, for that matter, so has Keynes (20th century). The recent global financial crisis needs a new theory for the 21st century. Marx and Keynes apparently have nothing more to offer.

And what is this new exciting theory that Wang is proposing to his students to explain the world economic crisis? He calls it "trading economics":

'Trading economics' is one new theory emerging against this backdrop. Mainstream economics deduces the macro whole by extrapolating from the behaviour of individual 'representative agents'. Trading economics replaces this with a systematic and comprehensive analysis approach. It stresses that, in an interconnected world, the interaction between trading subjects is the fundamental driving force behind the operation, development and evolution of economic systems.

Well, I am still no wiser. Wang explains that mainstream neoclassical theory is stuck with "representative agents" who have "rational expectations" for maximising utility and profits, while market prices move up and down to achieve equilibrium. As Wang says, this bears no relation to the reality of modern economies and never did. In contrast:

Trading economics chooses a different path. Everyone participating in economic activities is put in a specific organisational structure. As a result, their behaviour becomes affected by culture, morality, property and system. There is no 'economic person' like Robinson Crusoe in trading economics. Trading economics only has organisations with specific internal structures: households and enterprises. This is the first step to bring economic theory back to the reality.

This all sounds promising. Wang is going to 'rethink' economics⁶ and return it to reality. And what does he come up with? Behavioural economics. And "Behavioural economics experiments have demonstrated that choices are characterised by variety - there is no single answer to all situations."

Now this is not so promising. Economics is reduced to considering each situation or problem as having a different answer. That would suggest we cannot find any generalised laws about the world economy and its crises.

According to Wang,

Trading economics differs by recognising that different people have different information, in part because they have different experiences. So, while each trading subject seeks maximum profits, the 'maximum' differs from one subject to another, even when trading and constraints are the same. Therefore, if the behaviour model in neoclassical economics is the absolute maximum, then it is the relative maximum in trading economics. This is where the difference lies.

Hmm. I am still none the wiser.

What Wang really seems to be arguing for is free trade and international integration:

From the study of the development rules of economic system, it is found that global economic integration is neither the innovation of a single politician, nor a strategy implemented by a certain country to pursue its own interests. Instead, it is the only option following the development rules of social economic system. Today's world has shifted from an isolated island, through small-world development, to a network without marks. To achieve comprehensive progress and development, the world economy must promote the integration of trading network among countries. We need to listen to the warning of trading economics in a world awash with anti-globalisation thoughts.

This is shades of the very line presented by president Xi Jinping at Davos 2017, where he claimed that China is the leading globaliser. Now the economic theorist of the People's Bank of China is offering "trading economics" to support Xi.

A key feature of Wang's "trading economics" is that it rejects the idea of looking for causal relationships between economic variables. He refers

to the "masterpiece" work of rightwing monetarist Milton Friedman's analysis of the cause of the great depression of the 1930s. Friedman argued that the failure of the Federal Reserve Bank to properly control the money supply was the cause. The banks collapsed because of an unnecessary monetary squeeze. But others argued that the economy collapsed because of a change in 'expectations'.

Wang concludes: "It is impossible to find a single factor among various events to explain the great contraction." You see, it is just too complex for ordinary mainstream theory. So Wang says we must "give up on simple causal relationships". Instead, using "trading economics", we can get "a concrete structure through the trading network." Then, apparently, "various possibilities of economic operation can be predicted, including the fluctuation of economic cycles, the probability of crisis, assessment of policy effects, etc".

Wang provides no evidence in his *FT* article for his claim of the power of prediction enabled by trading economics. And here is the nub of his theory: namely its close "connection between macroeconomics and behavioural economics". According to Wang,

The behaviour of each trading subject and the ways in which they react to external disturbances can be informed by the research of behavioural economists and psychologists. The economic operation simulated in this way is better targeted and the analysis has more solid experimental foundation.

'Great leap'

There we have it. Far from carrying out empirical research for cause and effect, all we need is to go back into the laboratory of behaviour and do 'experimental research'. Wang claims that this "is a great leap in methods of economic theory research, because it represents the unity of economic research and natural science in methodology".

Actually, a behaviourist approach is an economics *cul de sac*. Before the global financial collapse, this micro-motivation approach to economics was popular with young economists, who had turned away from questions like poverty, inequality or unemployment to study behaviour on television game shows. Looking at the 'irrational' behaviour of people's brains and thinking was substituted for the aggregate trends and changes in modern economics.

The irony of Wang's view is that, since the global financial crash, empirical studies have come back into favour in looking for the causes of the great recession, because mainstream and behavioural theory had failed. Despite that, Wang wants us to ditch Marxist macro theory for Keynes's psychological 'animal spirits' or the micro 'nudge' theories of behaviourists like Richard Thaler.⁷

Is the way forward really through behaviourists developing computer models, where the idea is to populate virtual markets with artificially intelligent agents who trade and interact and compete with each other, much like real people? Sure, every situation is different, but anyone who makes a living out of data analysis knows that 'heterogeneity' is limited enough, so that the well understood past can be informative about the future.

In my view, if economists want to understand the causes of financial and economic crises, they need to look away from individual behaviour models and instead look to the aggregate: from the particular to the general. And they need to turn back from deductive *a priori* reasoning alone towards history: the evidence of the past. History may not be a guide to the future, but speculation without history is even less based in reality. Economists need theories that can be tested by evidence - but the evidence of the aggregate and history, not the laboratory.

Yes, Wang recognises that mainstream economics is no good at explaining developments in modern capitalism, but does "trading economics" take us any further? It seems more like an ideologically acceptable theory as an alternative to Marxism in the country of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'.

Michael Roberts blogs at <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com>.

Notes

1. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2015/09/17/china-a-weird-beast>.
2. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2017/3/10/25/xi-takes-full-control-of-chinas-future>.
3. www.imf.org/external/np/fad/publicinvestment/pdf/csupdate_jan17.pdf.
4. November 6 2017: <https://ftalphaville.ft.com/2017/11/06/2195583/guest-post-trading-economics-a-new-theoretical-system>.
5. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2014/06/30/rethinking-economics>.
6. See <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/nudges-manipulate-except-when-they-dont>.
7. See <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/nudges-manipulate-except-when-they-dont>.

Subscribe			Name: _____		Standing order	
	6m	1yr	Inst.	To _____ Bank plc _____		
UK	£30/€35	£60/€70	£200/€220	Branch address _____		
Europe	£43/€50	£86/€100	£240/€264	Post code _____ Account name _____		
Rest of world	£65/€75	£130/€150	£480/€528	Sort code _____ Account No _____		
New UK subscribers offer: 3 months for £10				Please pay to Weekly Worker, Lloyds A/C No 00744310 sort code 30-99-64, the sum of _____ every month*/3 months*		
UK subscribers: Pay by standing order and save £12 a year. Minimum £12 every 3 months... but please pay more if you can.				until further notice, commencing on _____ This replaces any previous order from this account. (*delete)		
Send a cheque or postal order payable to 'Weekly Worker' at: Weekly Worker, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX				Date _____		
				Signed _____ Name (PRINT) _____		
				Address _____		
				Tel: _____		
				Email: _____		
				Sub: £/€ _____		
				Donation: £/€ _____		