



weekly **worker**



**The tradition of Marxists
opposing referendums goes
back to the time of Napoleon III**

- Letters and debate
- Iran's unstable banks
- Brexit realities
- Noam Chomsky's past

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Mercy, mercy, me What's going on?



LETTERS



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

Stop boring

As a relatively new reader of the *Weekly Worker*, I can't help noticing the long, and seemingly interminable, letters about Jews in the bourgeoisie. It seems that Socialist Fight (whoever they are) feel that there is a preponderance of Jews in the bourgeoisie, especially in the United States.

One reaction might be, if true, so what? After all, we need to fight the bourgeoisie whoever they are. Another reaction might be, how do they know? Has Socialist Fight done a scientific, statistical analysis of the weight of different ethnic groups in our ruling classes?

What about the Chinese? They're everywhere - Indonesia, Thailand (San Francisco?). And then there are the Hindus - Gupta brothers, anyone? Tata Steel? If Jews are to be given a special place in the world's elites, then there must surely be a bit of research on similar groupings.

It seems to me, after several years of reading, that there is a preponderance of Jews in the field of opposition to Zionism. They may be outnumbered in Arabic - I've no idea - but readers of the *Weekly Worker* are obviously aware of Moshé Machover and Tony Greenstein and, as well as them, we have Shlomo Sand, Norman Finkelstein, Max Blumenthal and many more. Further statistical research might discover that Jewish socialists and anti-Zionists provide an exact counterweight to Jewish bourgeois.

Yes, Israel has a powerful lobby in the US: the American Israel Public Affairs Committee has been diligent in weeding out anti-Zionists and supporters of the Palestinians in US politics. Another powerful lobby is the National Rifle Association and I would suggest that there are probably even more rifle-owners in the world than there are Jews (though I haven't done the necessary research). Both of these lobbies fight hard for their particular interests, but they are both, I believe, dwarfed by the energy industry, the American Chamber of Commerce and the banking and arms industries.

If one were looking for conspiracies, then the Koch brothers alone would provide plenty of grist to the mill, but I assume, given their father's and their own early interest in the John Birch Society, that neither of them is Jewish.

Ian Donovan raises the attempt to 'take down' Alan Duncan. Again, so what? Why wouldn't they? I wonder which ethnic group was responsible for accusing Ed Miliband's father of being "the man who hated Britain"? And who worked up a smear campaign to reveal Jeremy Corbyn as a Russian spy?

The Zionist lobby is strong in the US and that is not surprising. Israel was founded as an imperialist outpost of European capital and the USA has taken over as main backer and mentor. Israel holds a strategic position in the Middle East and especially in the oil-bearing areas. It has further been very useful as a test bed, and creator, of weapons for use on civilian populations - something that the USA too is very keen on.

Israel has had almost unquestioning support from Jews all over the world since 1948 - what a surprise. But now, even some Israeli newspapers are starting to worry about a loss of support in diaspora Jews. They don't like the rightwing religious nutters who have such a grip there; they don't like the way that African refugees are treated;

and they don't like the way that Palestinians have been treated either, especially since the last 'mowing of the lawn' in Gaza.

This long-running nonsense is at best a diversion from a real 'socialist fight' and no amount of quotes from Marx are going to change that. Let's get on with the real battles - and stop boring *Weekly Worker* readers.

Jim Cook
Reading

Figure it out

I thought I had said enough to debunk Ian Donovan's flimsy theory, according to which all Jewish capitalists in the US and other western countries are part of the Israeli ruling class - simply by virtue of the Law of Return, that grants them the option of immigrating to Israel and acquiring its citizenship. But, no, he seems to imagine he has won the argument and indulges in triumphal *ad hominem* unpleasantness (Letters, March 1).

So let me spell it out in very elementary terms. Consider Jacob Goldman, a Jewish capitalist of Miami, who has a vast portfolio of investments in the US and other places around the globe, including Qatar, the UAE, Malaysia and Indonesia ... but zilch in Israel. Apparently his financial advisor reminded him of the Jewish joke that in order to make a small fortune in Israel one should go there with a large fortune. He is quite happy to stay in Miami and has no intention of going to live in Israel. But, according to Ian, Mr Goldman is still a member of the Israeli ruling class, since the Law of Return gives him part ownership of Israel.

Now consider Rebecca Kuperstein, a Jewish schoolteacher in Brooklyn. She has no investments to speak of except her modest pension fund. The Law of Return applies to her too. Actually, to her it makes potentially more difference than to Mr Goldman, because unlike him she cannot afford to buy citizenship of any other foreign country (including the UK). But just like him she too has no intention of going to live in Israel - especially because, like about half of US Jews of her age-group (including Mr Goldman's son), she is married to a non-Jew. But still, according to Ian's logic, Ms Kuperstein belongs to the Israeli ruling class because the said law gives her part ownership of Israel.

If being a beneficiary of this law is sufficient to make Mr Goldman a member of Israel's ruling class, even though he has no capital invested there, then surely the same must apply to Ms Kuperstein. Both of them stand in exactly the same relationship to Israel. In fact, according to this bizarre logic, all Jews outside Israel belong to its ruling class, although obviously only the capitalists among them belong to the ruling classes of their own countries.

Go figure it out.

Moshé Machover
email

Keep it up, Ian

In my letter of February 22 I reminded readers of Ian Donovan's claim that bourgeois Jews, by virtue of their 'overrepresentation' in the ruling class, "have the power not only to force American governments to adopt the most slavish support for very brutal actions of Israel, but also to destroy the careers of politicians who speak out against such actions".

I asked him to provide us with a list of occasions when bourgeois Jews did indeed "force" the US government to support Israeli actions or "destroy the careers" of politicians who opposed them - I requested "the names of the

Jewish individuals or organisations who made the demands, quoting what they actually said, and the concrete effect it had on named US politicians". Not surprisingly, he was unable to provide such details, merely recalling examples of opposition by the Jewish lobby to politicians who were seen as anti-Israel (or insufficiently pro-Israel).

A couple of those examples concerned people targeted for trying to engage with the Palestine Liberation Organisation, which is an interesting case. The bourgeoisie as a whole was at first largely opposed to this proposition, while later both Jews and non-Jews argued for and against such an engagement - although, according to comrade Donovan's narrative, bourgeois Jews in general should have been hard at work 'forcing' the US government not to entertain it, at pain of having their careers 'destroyed'. And yet not only was the PLO engaged with: it was successfully brought under the influence of US hegemony in the Middle East. Strange that, isn't it?

Just about everyone outside Socialist Fight now agrees that comrade Donovan's 'theory' is plain nonsense. But don't expect Ian to give it up as a lost cause - after all, someone has to keep us on our toes by reminding us what those dastardly Jews are getting up to, don't they?

Peter Manson
London

Sixes and sevens

In the February 15 of the *Weekly Worker* editor Peter Manson headlined 'Break with multimillionaires' to analyse Jacob Zuma's resignation as president of South Africa.

It was a very third-campist article at first glance - Zuma was an exceedingly corrupt individual who had to go. Peter had indicated strong disagreement with *Socialist Fight's* article, 'No to the ouster of Zuma,' produced during the CPGB's Communist University in August 2017. But the target of his contempt in this article is not *Socialist Fight*, but Dominic and James Tweedie:

"Despite the fact that the entire NEC had eventually fallen into line with the Ramaphosa leadership (and no doubt with the sentiments of a large majority of ANC members across the country too), incredibly a section of the South African Communist Party was still opposing the SACP's own call for Zuma to resign. Foremost among them was Dominic Tweedie, who runs several SACP-influenced email lists. On February 13 he circulated the ANC statement quoted above to WhatsApp and various discussion and information lists, but just below that he included a touching photograph of Jacob Zuma, under the words, 'Thank you, Nxamalala' - the great man's affectionate nickname, derived from his Zulu clan and home village. Last week I reported how Tweedie's son, who happens to be the *Morning Star's* foreign editor, had been claiming it was all a matter of the hostile media. Since then James Tweedie has continued in that same inane manner."

A truly shocking, "inane" and opportunist stance by the Tweedies, who were quickly slapped down by *Morning Star* political editor John Haylett, Peter was pleased to report:

"But all this was clearly becoming too much for former editor John Haylett ... and on February 8 he wrote a feature headed: 'With Zuma still holding on, the ANC is in trouble'. The online version of his article was even more explicit: 'As long as Zuma remains, the only way for the ANC is down,' read its headline."

But Peter feared that John may not have gone far enough: "The policy

of black economic empowerment (BEE) transformed comrades of modest means almost overnight into multimillionaires,' writes Haylett. 'Comrades previously committed to serving the people now saw their priority, acknowledged or not, as serving themselves.' And he added pointedly: 'Both Zuma and Ramaphosa are implicated in this.' But what comrade Haylett stops short of admitting is that the SACP alliance with the pro-capitalist ANC is totally and utterly unprincipled. What is needed is the independence of the working class."

Well, now it seems as if Ramaphosa might be as bad as Zuma. But, no, the great majority of those who were for the ouster of Zuma were for the victory of Ramaphosa, apart from those third-campists who advocated the traditional cover of being for "the independence of the working class" - or indeed 'One solution - revolution', which has the benefit of tying you do doing nothing either and sounds far more radical. All very correct, but pious phrase-mongering if you do not propose any solution to the problems in terms of what concrete steps to take next; and do not bear in mind that those who are not able to defend old gains will never make new ones.

But comrade Manson was strangely silent on the issue in the February 22 edition, because John Haylett had clarified his position in the *Morning Star* ('Hope revived in South Africa', February 22):

"South Africa's people have experienced such a collective upswing of confidence over the past fortnight that former public protector Thuli Madonsela says Cyril Ramaphosa's election as state president has 'put the country as a whole on the pedestal of hope' ... Ramaphosa's insistence on negotiating has seen Zuma go quietly, his supporters have understood the need for change and rowed in behind the president and the opposition appears willing to wait and see what the new administration has to offer. A pedestal of hope indeed."

So, no third-campism there for comrade Manson. Ramaphosa is certainly *not* as bad as Zuma in John's view: on the contrary, he is a "pedestal of hope" - for the careers of the SACPer, that is, if not for Dominic Tweedie. In fact, the phenomenon of populist "hope" he has engendered is referred to as 'Ramaphoria' and it has caused deep divisions within the opposition Democratic Alliance, because he has stolen their thunder.

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

Liberal left

Sandy McBurney, like many of the gushing European Union supporters on the liberal left, seems to think it is some philanthropic organisation aimed at the betterment of the European working class, rather than seeing the whole rotten structure as part of the globalisation scheme which seeks to grind down workers to their lowest common denominator - driving down wages and conditions, and wrecking union cultures and traditions (Letters, March 1).

The aim is to break regional and national working class identities and traditions, union and socialist cultures and heritage in a drive to render us one hapless, rootless mass with scant interest in fighting for lasting improvements and union organisation. Why any self-declared communist would defend such a backward and reactionary structure I don't get - unless it is in the belief that, once we are all busted to the cobbles, with no other identities than that of one of a faceless mass we will have no option but to recognise each

other as one class and thereby bring about some internationalist class identity without historic national skill or regional distractions. I have to say, such an outlook, if true, is deeply cynical and anti-social.

All that aside, my main point is to challenge comrade McBurney's designation of the anti-EU MPs within Labour as "rightwing"! Actually anyone with a passing knowledge of the Labour anti-EU forces will know them to be the traditional Bennite wing of the party, composed originally of those round Tony Benn, George Galloway, Dennis Skinner, Ronnie Campbell and, for most of his political life, Jeremy Corbyn.

Sorry, mate, but Blair, Brown, Kinnock and two-thirds of the Parliamentary Labour Party have not in fact joined the left because they are rabidly pro-EU. Neither are the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, whose scheme this is, part of a revolutionary socialist endeavour.

David Douglass
South Shields

Disgraceful rise

It beggars belief that at a time of austerity, with apparently no money available to protect public services or the wages of public-sector workers, MPs will get a 1.8% pay rise.

MPs are already very well paid. The £77,379pa salary they will now receive is just the basic rate of pay - they get paid more for some jobs, such as chairing select committees. MPs will now be paid £1,488 per week: the average worker earns £512 per week before tax, according to the Office for National Statistics, nurses £421. MPs' pay has risen every single year for the past seven years - a total increase of £11,641. That is a 17.6% pay rise since 2010 - whilst other public-sector workers have suffered seven years of austerity.

Public-sector pay was actually frozen from 2010 to 2013, since when there has been a 1% pay cap. This year's 1.8% pay rise for MPs is nearly double that. Prime minister Theresa May announced the end of this 1% pay cap last year, but public-sector workers are still waiting to hear how much their pay will rise - and there is no guarantee it will be by as much as the 1.8% MPs will get.

Direct comparisons of MPs' pay with specific jobs in the public sector are illuminating. Since 2010, an MP's pay has gone up from £65,738 to £77,379 - an increase of 17.7%, or £11,641. In contrast, a nurse's pay over the same period has gone up just 3.5% - a pay cut, in real terms, of 12%. Teachers have seen their pay fall by 10%, as have firefighters and ambulance drivers, according to TUC research. Average weekly pay for public-sector workers fell by 7% between 2010 and 2016. How can any government justify increasing the pay of one group of workers (MPs) by 17.7%, whilst cutting the pay of every other public-sector worker?

Taking inflation into account, public-sector workers are thousands of pounds worse off today, compared to 2010 - for paramedics, NHS dieticians and prison officers the figure is £4,000pa, for firefighters £3,000, for teachers £2,400 and for lifeguards £2,200. This is an absolute disgrace, and will further alienate ordinary working people from their representatives in parliament. There is already a serious distrust of politicians, and the fact that austerity - unnecessary as it is - is not being distributed equally will fuel the contempt people have for their MPs.

Pete McLaren
Rugby Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

IRAN

The role of ideology

At the end of the day the religious state functions in a way not dissimilar to that of the liberal bourgeoisie in the west, argues **Yassamine Mather**

In late summer 2017, the *Financial Times* warned about the precarious nature of Iran's banking sector:

For decades isolated from the rest of the financial world, many Iranian banks struggle to comply with international banking norms. After years of populist policies, many are beset by high levels of bad loans ...

Sound familiar? The issue is clearly not unique to Iran and, of course, part of the problem lies outside the country's borders. Continued US and European sanctions, related to allegations of terrorism against Iranian entities linked to the Revolutionary Guards (even in the privatised sector), means that leading international banks still refuse to deal with Iran. Only Chinese, Russian, Indian and some second- and third-tier European banks are handling small transactions with Iranian companies.

The *Financial Times* also warned:

Iran's lenders - most of which are nominally private, but affiliated to state bodies - have long operated in a regulatory environment characterised by low capital adequacy requirements, weak supervision and a scarcity of well-trained auditors ...

As borrowers struggle to repay their loans, the amount of debt on bank books continues to rise. Total debt owed by state and private-sector entities to banks reached IR11,374trillion (\$346.5 billion) by the end of the last Iranian year (March 20), up 25% on the previous year, according to the central bank figures ...

Banks charge 28% on loans. "Which business makes 30% profits to be able to get or pay back banking loans? No business," said a senior businessman in the private sector. The central bank has no choice but to force banks to write down their assets and bail out troubled credit institutions.¹

In the last few years the 23%-25% interest rate paid on a savings account has encouraged sections of small capital to shut down businesses and concentrate investments in such banks.

However, by autumn of last year many such banks were collapsing, with savers losing all their money, and the financial repercussions of this has affected many pension funds, in what is described as a cascade of defaults.

According to the *New York Times*,

Bijan Khajepour, an Iranian economist based in Vienna, estimated that as many as hundreds of thousands of people lost money because of the collapsing financial institutions. Iranians have a term for the growing class of victims: "property losers," or *mal-baakhtegan* in Persian. Many of the failing institutions sank the money into speculative investments during a real estate bubble, lent to well-connected friends or charged usurious interest rates to desperate borrowers. Now, regulators have quietly steered many of the companies into mergers with larger banks to try to absorb their losses, but that has created a worsening problem of bad loans and overvalued assets throughout the banking system.

Economists say that as many as 40% of the loans carried on the books of Iranian banks may be delinquent.²

Again does this sound familiar? Of

course it does. In the UK we know about the British Home Stores pension fund, while members of the University and College Union have been striking in defence of their pension funds.

However, in Iran corruption, cronyism and greed have been working hand in hand, allowing financial institutions to gamble with ordinary people's deposits or run Ponzi schemes with impunity for years. Many got away with it because they had good connections with the country's multifaceted financial organisations, involving religious foundations, current or former leaders of the Revolutionary Guards, as well as semi-private funds. But, while corruption under Iran's Islamic republic has reached extraordinary levels, those bourgeois liberals who point the finger at the current regime tend to forget that under the rule of their hero, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the situation was not much better. Bank Ellie, the national industrial and financial loans section, would only lend to organisations which had the support of the shah's family. Of course we are now talking of much more diverse groups influencing financial funding, but this has little to do with the ideological nature of the religious state and everything to do with abuse of state power in pursuit of the interests of capital - a common feature of capitalism in the third world.

In other words, the current crisis in Iran is not that different from what is experienced in more liberal, non-religious, third world capitalist countries. But our bourgeois opposition has only one solution: once we get rid of the 'ideological' influence over the state everything will be fine.

One should remind these ignorant people that:

- capitalist states are ideological
- irrespective of the religious rhetoric, the dominant ideology in Iran remains that of capital.

The most ideological state I personally have ever encountered was that of Margaret Thatcher, who closed down coal mines and ruined whole communities, while importing more expensive coal. There was only one justification: defeat the working class and pave the way for finance capital.

I have always found Louis Althusser's writing on this subject to be very relevant. Relying on Marxist theory, he asserts that any social formation must ensure that labour-power is reproduced. Only if the productive forces exist can the conditions and relations of production be maintained. That is why in addition to infrastructure the state needs a superstructure, consisting of culture and ideology.

According to Althusser, culture includes the law, politics, art, etc, while ideology includes world views, values and beliefs - today the mass media play a significant role in propagating such ideology. In his opinion the repressive state apparatus functions as a unified entity (an institution), unlike the liberal state apparatus, which is diverse in nature and can play many roles. The apparatus of the state, repressive and ideological, is responsible for overseeing the double functions of violence and ideology. In liberal democracies the state only makes overt use of the repressive state apparatus if the position of the ruling class or the social order is threatened, but more subtle forms of repression are constantly employed.

The capitalist ideological state apparatus does not normally need to use physical violence, relying instead on educational institutions, the mass media, paid social media, advertising, religious beliefs, the family as well as market forces. Yet Iranian bourgeois liberals consider all of the above to be 'non-ideological' - indeed apolitical: part of their cherished 'civil society'. Nothing could be further from the truth. But in general there is no need to resort to overt repression: the ideological state apparatus oversees the dissemination of ideologies that reinforce the control of a dominant class. Dissenters are ridiculed and face isolation and rejection. In Althusser's view, a social class cannot hold state power unless and until it simultaneously exercises hegemony over and through the ideological state apparatus.

Althusser is also right to point out that, when it comes to indoctrination, educational institutions have replaced religious ones. Education's main role is to ensure that labour-power is reproduced in a suitable form for the functioning of capitalism. As far as Iran is concerned, one should add that the mass media from *outside* Iran plays a significant role in terms of culture and ideology, often painting a glorious picture of the west. Thirty-nine years after the creation of the Shia state almost everyone - including within the religious establishment - agrees that Islamic indoctrination has failed. To the chagrin of supreme leader Ali Khamenei, the overwhelming majority of young Iranians are not Islamists. As in the rest of the globalised world, the dominant culture - ideology - is that of international capital.

Of course, no-one should deny the discrimination that exists in higher education and in employment, imposed by the Iranian state on individuals who fail certain religious tests when applying for higher degrees or jobs. However, everyone knows that such tests are charades: the examiner is often as cynical about 'Islamic behaviour' as the applicant and very often the 'religious' test is an excuse for giving a job or position to those with connections. No doubt such tests are an insult to the intelligence of ordinary Iranians and obviously should be abolished. However, our bourgeois liberals conveniently forget that their favourite dictator, the shah, also imposed 'tests' - applicants had to demonstrate their knowledge of his book, *The white revolution*, based entirely on his idiotic conspiracy theories - compulsory reading at secondary school.

To summarise, the Iranian people are facing a disastrous economic situation: wages go unpaid, banks are defaulting, the elderly face poverty, as pension funds disappear into thin air. Added to which, there is the constant threat of new sanctions creating additional uncertainty in the economy. However, many of Iran's economic problems are not that different from those of other third-world countries. In such circumstances it is criminal to create illusions about 'regime change from above', with the west as saviour, or to ferment illusions about the corrupt, inept *ancien régime* ●

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Notes

1. www.ft.com/content/ee47505a-7cd7-11e7-9108-eda0bcb928.
2. www.nytimes.com/2018/01/20/world/middleeast/iran-protests-corruption-banks.html.

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday March 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.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday March 13, 6.30pm: Series of talks on human origins, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1. This meeting: 'The next major transition in the evolution of our species'. Speaker: Christopher Opie. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: <http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

What next for South Africa?

Friday March 9, 7pm: Talk, Bookmarks, 1 Bloomsbury Street, London WC1. Veteran ANC and SACP activist Ronnie Kasrils discusses his new book, *A simple man*. Admission £2 www.facebook.com/events/421964564920013/

Stand Up To Racism

Rally to mobilise support for March 17 UN anti-racism day protests: **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.

March for pensions and pay

Wednesday March 14, 12 noon: Demonstration. Assemble Malet Street, London, WC1. Support the UCU in their fight to defend their pensions.

Organised by University and College Union London region: www.facebook.com/UCULondon.

US out of Latin America

Thursday March 15, 6.30pm: Emergency rally, Discuss, 128 Theobalds Road, London WC1. No to Trump's interventionist agenda against Venezuela and Nicaragua.

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

For an anti-war government

Thursday March 15, 7pm: Public meeting, Kiln Farm, Milton Keynes MK11. Speakers:

Lindsey German (Stop the War Coalition), Andrew Murray (Unite). Organised by Milton Keynes Stop the War: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Defend Palestinian women

Monday March 19, 6pm: Book launch, School of Oriental and African Studies, room B202, Brunei building, second floor, London WC1. The launch of the new book by Iraqi author, activist and former political prisoner Haifa Zangana.

<https://www.facebook.com/haifa.zangana>

End the witch-hunt

Tuesday March 20, 11am: Lobby of Labour's national executive committee meeting, Southside, 105 Victoria Street, London SW1.

Wednesday April 25: Lobby of Marc Wadsworth's NCC disciplinary hearing in London. Details to be confirmed.

Organised by Labour Against the Witchhunt: www.labouragainstthewitchhunt.org.

The lynching

Thursday March 22 to Saturday March 24, 7.30pm: One-woman play, Teatro Technis, 26 Crowndale Road, London NW1. Starring Jackie Walker, chair of Labour Against the Witchhunt, who was falsely accused of anti-Semitism and suspended from the Labour Party.

Tickets (£7 to £10) from:

www.eventbrite.com/e/the-lynching-tickets-43750469833.

Drop bass, not bombs

Friday March 23, 8pm to 4am: Anti-war music night, Total Refreshment Centre, 1 Foulden Road, London N16.

All money raised for Stop the War Coalition:

www.stopwar.org.uk/index.php/events/national-events/2904-23-march-london-drop-bass-not-bombs-002.

Labour Against the Witchhunt

Saturday March 24, 1pm: General organising meeting, the Cock Tavern, 23 Phoenix Road, London NW1.

Organised by Labour Against the Witchhunt: www.labouragainstthewitchhunt.org.

A new foreign policy

Saturday March 24, 2.30pm: Public meeting, Augustine United Church, 41-43 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh EH1. No more wars.

Organised by Edinburgh Stop the War: www.facebook.com/EdinburghStopTheWarCoalition.

Socialism and the USA

Saturday March 24, 1pm: Public meeting, Wakefield Labour Club (Red Shed), Vicarage Street, Wakefield WF1. Admission free, including light buffet.

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

Marxism and capitalist economies

Tuesday March 27, 7pm: Political economy lectures, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. The first in a series of lectures from professor Simon Mohun.

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

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.

TURKEY

Conflicts on many fronts

Despite the popularity of Turkish actions in Syria, Cyprus and the Aegean, the ruling AKP is forced to seek allies at home, writes **Esen Uslu**

Turkey's offensive in the Afrin province of Syria has been going on for six weeks without losing its ferocity. According to official communiqués, its army - along with a hodgepodge of various militia groups, trained, equipped and financed by Ankara - has cleared the high ground along its borders, and is now ready for an offensive on the flat lands leading to Afrin town.

Of course, official communiqués do not always represent the reality on the ground. The speeches of president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his ministers, as well as those of the army top brass, are full of words such as 'duty', 'flag', 'heroism' and 'sacrifice'. The daily body count of Kurdish fighters, as well as every nook and cranny of the mountain defences conquered, have been blared out by the media. Loyalist mobs have been mobilised on demonstrations in support of the army and government, and the funerals of fallen soldiers have been used to further stoke up the war hysteria.

Of course, despite a UN security council resolution for a truce in Syria, the shooting war never stopped. Turkey simply ignored it and continued its operations. According to the foreign ministry, the resolution did not specify Afrin, and so it cannot be applicable to Turkey. Ankara was advised by French president Emmanuel Macron and the US state department to read the resolution again, but Turkish officials insisted that it was their allies in the western world who had got things wrong. They also called on the US to seize back the arms it had distributed to the Kurdish YPG (People's Protection Units), since the war against Islamic State in eastern Syria was now over.

Meanwhile Czech police arrested the former leader of Syria's Democratic Union Party, Salih Muslim, on an international warrant issued by Turkey. If one remembers, Muslim visited Turkey when he was in office in the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (Rojava) and was given the red-carpet treatment by the Turkish regime, but he has been charged with offences such as causing explosions in Turkey. He was soon released, but his arrest served to reinforce the government's claims that they were pursuing terrorists all around the world.

Then Muslim appeared as a speaker at a public meeting in Germany, giving Ankara the opportunity to channel its opprobrium towards Berlin once more. So it seems that the only remaining ally of Turkey that has not been condemned as a supporter of terrorism is the UK.

Turkish intentions within the occupied Syrian territories are beginning to be clarified. The predominantly Kurdish region also has a large Turkomen and Arab population, yet despite the major population upheavals Afrin remained quite stable for almost five years, and IS could not get a foothold there.

But now the whole Kurdish population is leaving the areas occupied by the Turkish army, and Turkey is preparing to transfer back

some of the refugees who have been in camps in Turkey. Of course, they would be very carefully selected in line with Ankara's intention to maintain its long-term domination of the region.

A similar campaign to relocate the population in the previously occupied zone near al-Bab and Azaz has already been in full swing, but the prospect of using that territory as a springboard to unleash another military campaign in order to push the YPG to the east of Euphrates River is delaying the resettlement programme.

It is now an open secret that Turkey will not get out of Syria in the near future. Its aim is to change the population balance and maintain a puppet regime there to keep control. That was what happened in Cyprus, and before that in Hatay province in southern Turkey.

Get rich quick

The occasional flaring up of a crisis over the unoccupied Turkish islets of Kardak in the Aegean is a quite important indicator of Turkey's ambition to extend its influence in the Mediterranean. In 1982 when the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was agreed, Turkey's military junta was busy dealing with other problems and it was quite late in the day when it was realised that UNCLOS would create an Aegean Sea dominated by Greece.

Turkey remains among the few countries that still refuse to sign the UNCLOS agreement, which limits a state's national rights to 5.6 kilometres of its coastline, and has stated that any unilateral action of Greece to implement UNCLOS in the Aegean would be regarded as an act of war. Since then the two Nato 'allies' have played cat and mouse in the Aegean Sea. They have engaged in mock confrontations, with the naval vessels of one power sometimes pursuing those of the other. These are often a question of brinkmanship, but have occasionally turned deadly.

During the cold war the US paid particular attention to maintaining the balance of forces in the region through military aid and trade. However, European arms-exporting countries, such as Germany and France, did their best to challenge US hegemony. Turkey's increasing

capacity to build ships and equip them with locally produced armaments, not to mention the financial restrictions imposed on Greece, seems to have shifted the military balance.

Despite all the problems, it seemed there was a genuine possibility of a rapprochement at the beginning of the 21st century - until in 2008 new natural gas fields were discovered under the Mediterranean between Cyprus, Egypt and Israel. Suddenly the expectations of getting rich quick spread like a fever in all the countries of the region.

Greece and Egypt agreed on delimiting their exclusive economic zones (EEZ), while the European Union reminded Turkey that EU membership requires compliance with UNCLOS. Meanwhile Turkey declared its own EEZ on behalf of Turkish Cypriots - which served to bolster its own claims over Cyprus. Ankara declared that it would regard gas exploration by the Republic of Cyprus as an act of aggression and in 2008 sent a naval force to harass Cyprus-contracted exploration vessels.

However, after 2011 it became apparent that 'get rich quick' was a dream - even the Leviathan gas field off the Israeli coast barely warrants the massive investment that would be required. So tensions reduced. Then in 2015 the Zohr gas field north of Egypt was discovered. Despite the political turmoil, there was massive investment and in December last year the field started to pump gas into Egypt.

That provoked a re-escalation of the crisis. Now it seemed that Israel's Leviathan gas field and even the puny Aphrodite field in the Cypriot zone made for a viable investment opportunity - provided that they could be linked together through a pipeline system. The Cypriot government, and behind it the Greeks, thought this was an opportune moment to reinvigorate their exploration and pile international pressure on Turkey. As expected, Turkey reacted sharply

and declared an exclusion zone. It decided to hold a naval exercise in the disputed area, maintaining a five-ship presence throughout.

Turkey seemed to have come out best from the brinkmanship, but the next scheduled Cypriot exploration is next week in the sector to the south-east of the island - furthermore it would be an American operation. And the US naval presence in the region is not insignificant.

Pseudo anti-imperialism

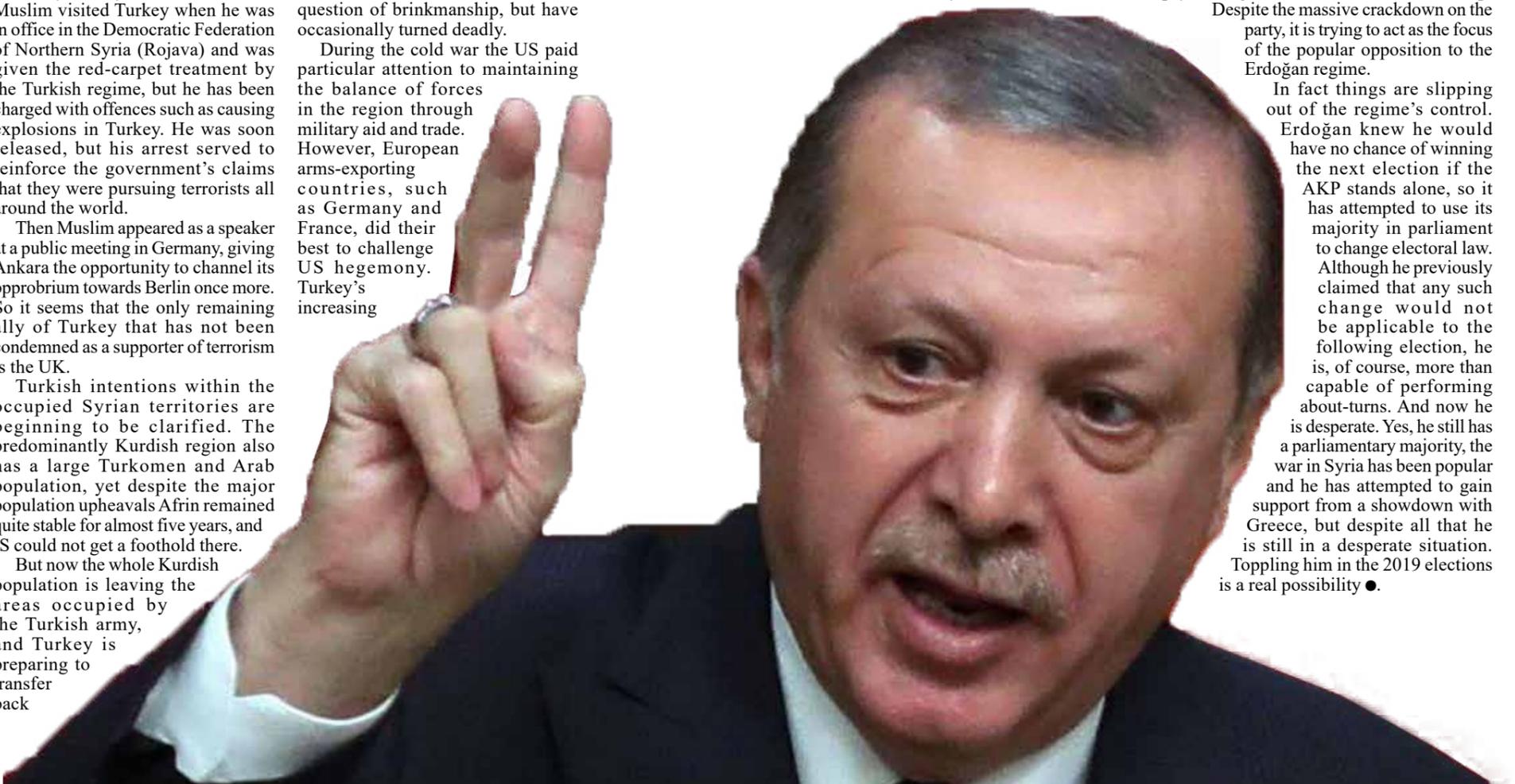
So suddenly the Turkish government has recalled the actions of revolutionaries against the visit of US Sixth Fleet to Turkey in 1968. Miraculously revolutionary songs were converted into Islamist and nationalist hymns, and were played in the state-controlled media. Ironically the current speaker of the parliament was in 1968 a leader of a rightwing student organisation, and one of the organisers of the Islamist-nationalist mob that attacked the revolutionary students. That event gained infamy as 'Bloody Sunday' - three demonstrators were killed in the Taksim area of Istanbul and hundreds were wounded. It was a case of going full circle - without even a hint of shame, of course.

The nationalist-Islamist rhetoric suddenly gained a pseudo-anti-imperialist tinge. These developments startled the so-called nationalist socialists of Turkey. Most of them thought the best thing to do under present conditions was to hide under the skirts of the so-called social democratic CHP (Republican People's Party). Some even went the last mile and pledged their support to the 'Public Coalition' - the new formal alliance of the ruling AKP and the far-right MHP - the inheritor party of infamous Grey Wolves.

Meanwhile, the leftwing HDP (People's Democracy Party) held its congress and elected a new leadership. Despite the massive crackdown on the party, it is trying to act as the focus of the popular opposition to the Erdoğan regime.

In fact things are slipping out of the regime's control. Erdoğan knew he would have no chance of winning the next election if the AKP stands alone, so it has attempted to use its majority in parliament to change electoral law. Although he previously claimed that any such change would not be applicable to the following election, he is, of course, more than capable of performing about-turns. And now he is desperate. Yes, he still has a parliamentary majority, the war in Syria has been popular and he has attempted to gain support from a showdown with Greece, but despite all that he is still in a desperate situation. Toppling him in the 2019 elections is a real possibility ●.

Recip Tayyip Erdogan: enemies to the south, enemies to the west... and enemies within too



EUROPE

Softest form of hard Brexit

Theresa May's 'hard facts' will only bring a temporary cessation of war between the rival Tory factions, writes **Eddie Ford**

For some time now we have had to put up with total nonsense from the likes of Liam Fox that a post-Brexit deal with the European Union would be "one of the easiest in history" - with one glorious bound Britain would be free to become a super-Singapore in the rain, doing free trade deals everywhere in the sort of buccaneering spirit that once painted the map pink.

But Theresa May has finally introduced a note of reality. In her heavily publicised Mansion House speech on March 2 to a mainly diplomatic audience, she said that the British people will need to "face up to some hard facts" - primarily that "life is going to be different", because "our access to each other's markets will be less than it is now".¹ After all, she continued, "how could the EU's structure of rights and obligations be sustained if the UK or any country were allowed to enjoy all the benefits without all of the obligations?"

Possibly worse - at least if you are a hard-core Brexiteer raised on a diet of tabloid xenophobic propaganda - even after Brexit the "jurisdiction" of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) will "continue to affect" the UK. And in practice UK and EU regulatory standards concerning goods will be "substantially similar" in the future, especially when you consider that many of them are themselves "underpinned" by "international standards set by non-EU bodies". This also means, she said, that the UK may choose to remain "in step" with various other EU regulations in areas like state aid and competition in order to get "good access" to markets.

Other "hard facts" sketched out by May included the acceptance, or recognition, that banks located in the City of London will lose their 'passporting' rights to trade across the EU without country-by-country approval - therefore a new system will be brought in to allow "the same regulatory outcomes over time". Then there was the need for associate membership of EU chemical, medicine and aviation agencies - accepting their rules and making "appropriate" financial contributions. There will also be continued participation in EU science, education and cultural programmes, a close relationship with the European Atomic Energy Community and continued participation in the EU's internal energy market, etc, etc.

On the increasingly contentious issue of Northern Ireland, the prime minister said very little except that Britain must take "responsibility" for avoiding a hard border. But she would not accept anything that would "damage the integrity of our precious union". No indication, in other words, of how the circle of a frictionless border can be squared with a hard Brexit - apart from a rather implausible reference to the use of "advanced IT solutions" (the exact nature of this miraculous technology is still a mystery) and "trusted trader" schemes to do away with the need for customs checks.

Naturally, May insisted that Britain's desire for a "deep and ambitious" partnership with the EU was not the same as cherry-picking - or if it is then every trade deal is an example of cherry-picking, she argued, as every free trade agreement allows for "varying market access, depending on the respective interests of the countries involved". We are all cherry-pickers. She went on to say that Britain would



Forced to face facts at last

"not accept the rights of Canada and the obligations of Norway". That is, Britain wants a deal going further than the deal signed between Canada and the EU (which took over six years to clinch²) but stopping short of Norway, which is a member of the European Economic Area - something else ruled out by the Brexiteers. More squares and circles.

Perhaps one of the most striking features of the speech, in the opinion of professor Jonathan Portes of the UK in a Changing Europe research group,³ was that it failed to make any economic case for divergence - "managed" or otherwise: "It was the complete triumph of the convergers from an economic and analytical point of view," he writes in the *Financial Times*. "There wasn't a single argument for why the UK would benefit from diverging from the EU in any sector" and there was "nothing to suggest that new free trade deals would outweigh the costs of reduced market access to the EU" (March 2).

Trade-offs

Of course, textual analysis aside, Theresa May's 45-minute speech - which apparently took months to prepare - was far more about the Tory Party and its internal divisions than about the EU and Brexit: a "delicate attempt to unify both wings of her governing Conservative party" (*Financial Times* March 2). This in no way means, it almost goes without saying, that what the prime minister put forward in her speech is what we are going to get or even what she is actually going to be prepared to stand on. Forget it. The pitch is what matters, not the reality. The press, essentially correctly, greeted the speech as the 'softest form of hard Brexit' possible - her previous red lines have become very blurred indeed.

From that perspective, May's attempt to bridge the chasm between the rival factions inside the cabinet and the Conservative Party itself seems to have had its effect - at least for the time being. For the most part, both the hard Brexiteers and their opponents seemed to be happy to one degree or another with the vision - insofar as you can call it that - outlined by the prime minister at Mansion House. 'Remainer' Nicky

Morgan, Tory chair of the treasury select committee, said it was a "recognition at last of the complexity involved in Brexit" and the need for compromise. Anna Soubry too, who at one stage suggested that hard Brexiteers should be kicked out of the party, welcomed the conciliatory and sensible tone of the speech - though she did wonder what was in it for 'leave' voters, given that "the Brexit we are heading towards is very, very different to the one we were promised". She might have a point.

On the other side of the fence, Iain Duncan-Smith praised the speech as "upbeat and clear", and called on the European Commission to "stop playing games" and treat Britain as an "equal partner". Boris Johnson, the absurd foreign secretary, tweeted that Britain will remain "extremely close" to the EU, but the Brexit mapped out by the prime minister is one where the country is "able to innovate, to set our own agenda, to make our own laws and to do ambitious free trade deals around the world". More importantly for Theresa May and her hopes of an outbreak of peace and love in the Tory Party, was the reaction of Jacob Rees-Mogg - who described it as a "good speech" that was "pragmatic and generous". He wrote in the *Daily Telegraph* that "now is not the time to nit-pick" (March 2) - though the implication was that such a time will eventually come.

Of course, a staunchly pro-European grandee like Sir Michael Heseltine was not pleased by the speech one bit - it consisted of nothing but "phrases, generalisations and platitudes", which had done nothing to make a deal more likely. For him, the only way forward was to put the issue back to parliament and then to an election or another referendum. But, at the end of the day, Theresa May's speech was not designed for Michael Heseltine, John Major or Kenneth Clarke - let alone Tony Blair or *The Guardian* - so such grumblings are neither here nor there.

However, like Heseltine, the response from the EU has been very frosty - there is no sign that its leaders will go with Theresa May's various special or "bespoke" deals for the City, British

car industry, free movement of people, etc. Guy Verhofstadt, the European parliament's Brexit coordinator, cuttingly remarked that "we can only hope that serious proposals have been put in the post" - whilst Michel Barnier, the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, damned the speech with faint speech by saying it provided "clarity" about the UK's intention to leave the single market and customs union, ominously adding that the "recognition of trade-offs" would "inform" the EU's future approach to Brexit and the British government.

Even less impressed, it seems, was Stefaan de Rynck - the main advisor to Barnier - who stressed that the rules of the single market require far more than the mutual recognition of standards. He pointed out that in the wake of the financial crisis the EU has moved to a "centralised approach with a single EU rulebook, common enforcement structures and single supervisory structures" (*The Guardian* March 6). Furthermore, EU rules were clear that the ECJ could intervene "at any point" to declare that mutual recognition of standards was "undermining" the single market's integrity.

He also claimed that EU businesses, faced with a choice, "are more concerned with maintaining the integrity of the EU single market than any loss of access to British markets" and warned Britain that there was "no appetite" to extend the talks on UK's exit beyond the current timetable of March 2019. Therefore, if the UK wanted to rescind its proposals to withdraw from the EU, set out in its article 50 letter, this would not just be a matter for the UK unilaterally, but would require a "collective response" by the EU member-states. Another hard fact, so to speak, was that the length and terms of the transition period could only be agreed once the withdrawal agreement was settled.

Just as illuminating were the contents of a leaked EU report, released on the eve of the European Council's planned publication of guidelines for a post-Brexit trade deal. Pointing out the obvious, the study commented that, just like with her other speeches on the issue, May was mainly addressing her

domestic audience - "trying to bridge the gaps between the two poles of the debate on Brexit in the UK". Her latest intervention may have featured a "change in tone", the report says, "but not in substance" - it was totally "short on workable solutions that would respect the EU27 principles". The document accused Theresa May of "double cherry-picking" by "taking in selective elements of EU membership and of third-country trade agreements" and making "zero progress" when it came to ideas for customs cooperation. As for Northern Ireland, the British prime minister has "no solution" - the aims of no single market or customs union, no hard border in Ireland and no border down the Irish Sea were "mutually contradictory UK objectives". Something has to give.

Theresa May herself blindly proved this point with her Commons statement on March 5. She declared that there are "many examples of different arrangements for customs around the rest of the world" - such as, "for example, the border between the United States and Canada", which "we are looking at". This seems a curious model indeed for a "frictionless" or "invisible" border, given that it features a whole series of custom posts, barriers, fences, vehicle blockades, hidden sensors and cameras, armed officials and snarling dogs - residents of both states who own property adjacent to the border are forbidden to build within six metres of the border without permission from the International Boundary Commission.⁴ Unsurprisingly, the Irish prime minister, Leo Varadkar, said that a US-Canada type border is "definitely not a solution that we could possibly entertain".

Back to the drawing board, Theresa ●

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Notes

1. www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-on-our-future-economic-partnership-with-the-european-union.
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comprehensive_Economic_and_Trade_Agreement.
3. <http://ukandeu.ac.uk>.
4. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada%E2%80%99s_United_States_border.

LABOUR

What's going on?

Unexpected fault lines have opened up on the soft Labour left over who will be the next general secretary, reports **Carla Roberts** of Labour Party Marxists

With less than a week to go before nominations close on March 13, there are two candidates standing for the position of Labour's general secretary. Their politics appear so similar that the contest between them seems, at best, ludicrous and, at worst, irresponsible. Should a 'moderate' candidate choose to exploit the current division, and should both pro-Corbyn candidates continue to insist on standing, that moderate might indeed 'slip in' through the middle when it comes to the crucial vote on Labour's national executive committee on March 20. We presume that will not happen and that either Momentum owner Jon Lansman or Unite's Jennie Formby will withdraw. But then, we never presumed that there would be two pro-Corbyn candidates standing in the first place!

The issue might already be decided by the next meeting of the NEC officers group on March 14. It is tasked with putting together a short list for the full NEC and has a pro-Corbyn majority. Of the current eight members, at least five are pro-Corbyn and two are members of Unite (though Jennie Formby, the current NEC vice-chair, will probably have to excuse herself).

One thing is for sure. The election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader is continuing to have a disruptive effect, not just on the establishment, but on the Labour left too. In a sense, this is very much to be welcomed. The left seemed to have been dying a slow, painful death - it needed a 'cultural revolution'. For a start, wouldn't it be nice if we had actual transparency and democracy in our movement? Why on earth are there no proper reports, for example, from all NEC members? They should be obliged to report back to those they represent as to what was discussed and how they voted. Pete Willsman and Ann Black have been the only ones to routinely write such reports (for general circulation) - with their own omissions and partisan views, of course.

But in recent days NEC members Christine Shawcroft and Darren Williams have come out with short Facebook posts and brief hints, which indicate not just deep divisions between the representatives of the left-led unions and the nine elected by Constituency Labour Party members, but also the tensions between the nine, though they were elected on same the 'centre-left slate'. We will come to that below.

Here is what we know.

For days, Jennie Formby seemed a virtual shoo-in. She has the support not just of her union, Unite. But pretty much every single group on the Labour left has come out for her, including quite a few Momentum branches. Shadow chancellor John McDonnell has tweeted his support. Jeremy Corbyn is keeping schtum in public: he wants to appear above the fray and, of course, he values the support of *both* Momentum and Unite's Len McCluskey.

So why then are there two left candidates? There are various theories and possible scenarios, some of which are, of course, interlinked. Clearly, we are in the middle of a very messy process.

Theory 1: Lansman has gone mad

This is perhaps the most common theory one comes across when discussing the issue on the left. According to this - and



Splits: but not how we expected

I must admit to having some sympathy for it - Jon Lansman's ego has simply got the better of him. So successful has he been running Momentum as his own private fiefdom that he now thinks he has earned the right to aim for bigger things. After all, wasn't it his tens of thousands of foot soldiers who nearly managed to get Jeremy Corbyn into No10?

Being directly responsible for over 200 staff; the party's campaign and media strategies; all its organisational, constitutional and policy committees; the organisation of party conference; the preparation of party literature, etc - it sounds right up Jon Lansman's street, doesn't it? And who cares if that puts Corbyn in a very awkward position when it comes to Unite leader Len McCluskey? The time has come for Lansmanism to blossom!

We can certainly believe that Lansman's ego is bigger than your average politician's. But just like theories that try to pin the outbreak of World War II on Adolf Hitler's psychological problems, that is clearly too easy an explanation.

Theory 2: Lansman is moving to the centre

We do not believe for a moment that he is standing in some semi-sacrificial way to "open up the contest and ensure we have a wide range of candidates". We presume that Lansman thinks that he has an actual chance of winning a majority of votes on the NEC.

Of the 38 executive members, 21 could be described as pro-Corbyn, and 17 as rightwing. According to *The*

Skwawkbox:

all the left NEC members have committed to support Jennie Formby, with the exception of a couple who have said they'll only vote for a leftwing woman - and one who is behind Jon Lansman. Those committed to Formby include both party and union representatives - including party representatives elected as part of slates backed by Momentum, the organisation founded by Jon Lansman.²

We know, of course, that outputs by 'alternative media' like *The Skwawkbox* should be taken with a pinch of salt. They are increasingly being used by political factions and sometimes even by journalists to leak unverified rumours to the wider public, so that it can then be picked up by the mainstream press. But we reckon that the website has done its counting correctly this time: 17 votes for Formby. The single leftwing NEC member who openly supports Lansman is Christine Shawcroft. But Lansman seems to think that he can win round those two left NEC members who have not yet openly backed Formby - a possibility, clearly.

But he must also count on the *entire right wing* on the NEC to back him in order to achieve a majority. He has clearly been working very hard to position himself in the political 'centre' of the Labour Party. I am sure Lansman is not entirely unhappy with the media narrative, according to which Jennie Formby is the representative of the hard left and the union bureaucracy, openly supporting - would you believe it? - the democratic rights of the Palestinian people. Clearly, she is too radical

and 'anti-Semitic' to head the Labour machine!

In reality there is, of course, very little actual political difference between Jennie Formby and Jon Lansman. We are seeing a split between the hard and soft left (which is probably still to come). Both candidates are *uncritical* supporters of Jeremy Corbyn and his policies, presumably prepared to back various political climbdowns should he become prime minister.

Which makes the only visible difference all the more crucial: the question of Israel and Palestine. With the Israeli army inching closer to getting involved in Syria (to distract perhaps from the legal problems of a certain Binyamin Netanyahu³) the Labour Party's position is becoming increasingly important. Can it really become an anti-war party - perhaps even in government? Will the pacifist Corbyn stick to his guns (excuse the pun) as prime minister and forthrightly condemn Israel aggression?

That would put the pro-imperialist right in the Parliamentary Labour Party under immense pressure from the Zionist lobby. This is, after all, why the whole 'anti-Semitism' scandal was created in the first place. Discredit Corbyn's anti-war and pro-Palestine stance. Force him to 'man up' and come out in support of US interests. And that includes unconditional support for Israel to do whatever it has to do to 'defend itself'. (We note Prince William is the first member of his family to make an official visit to Israel, as well as Lebanon and "the occupied Palestinian territories".⁴)

In this context, Jon Lansman's participation in the 'anti-Zionism

equals anti-Semitism' witch-hunt in the Labour Party is very, very important. He has said of Ken Livingstone, "It's time he left politics altogether"; thinks that "there should be no place for George Galloway in the Labour Party" (and called on his employers to sack him);⁵ and when Jackie Walker was suspended from Labour on trumped-up charges of anti-Semitism, he quickly removed her as vice-chair of Momentum. He wants to be seen as a safe pair of hands, when it comes to Israel.

The question is, can Lansman get away with positioning himself in the political centre? After all, he is Mr Momentum, which has since its inception been portrayed as a dangerous hotbed for an assortment of hyperactive hippies and Trotskyist troublemakers. He has been on the 'far left' of the Labour Party for decades, we are told. However, over the last 14 months, Lansman certainly has been very busy moulding Momentum into a thoroughly respectable election machine.

His coup of January 2017, which abolished all democratic structures in the organisation and imposed his constitution on the membership, has certainly gone a long way to assure the establishment of his 'credentials'. He also subordinated Momentum to the compliance unit by barring membership to all those who have been expelled from the Labour Party for "supporting another organisation" (rule 2.1.4.B).

No doubt Momentum's deployment of an army of foot soldiers during the general election campaign made a real difference to Labour's votes. Momentum nationally has been very careful to support *all* Labour Party candidates, not just pro-Corbyn ones (even if locally its members often choose to campaign mainly for leftwing candidates).

Politically, the organisation is even more harmless. For example, despite the fact that Jon Lansman has campaigned for mandatory reselection of parliamentary candidates for decades, he has now dropped the demand and campaigns merely for a reform of the trigger ballot. At present an MP needs to win a simple majority of nominations from local party branches and affiliated trade unions and socialist societies in order to become the candidate once more. Lansman wants to raise this threshold to 66%, but this would still disproportionately favour the sitting MP: rather than allowing for a full and democratic automatic reselection process before every election, a sitting MP would still have to be *challenged*.

So successful is Momentum's transformation that now even Theresa May openly wants to emulate it. This week she has written to "young activists" to help build Momentum-style grassroots campaigners. According to *The Sun*, the letter states:

We are recruiting a new army of foot soldiers to take the fight to Labour. It is clear from the results of the general election that we are more likely to win seats in which our organisation is strong. And it is an unfortunate fact that Labour's organisation was better in many seats than ours.⁶

It is absolutely possible that the right in the Labour Party might swing behind Lansman. *The Guardian* writes:

Lansman's entry into the race is thought to have the tacit backing of some other unions, which are

irritated by what they regard as Unite's increasing dominance of Labour decision-making. Key to the decision will be two other major unions, the GMB and Unison, who have so far declined to give Formby their backing.⁷

It is not impossible that other rightwingers on the NEC - for example, those from the PLP or those representing councillors - might support him, too. Especially if that was the only way to stop Formby.

Politically, of course, Lansman's method of chasing the political centre is very much old school and in line with the method advocated by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and its founder-leader, Vladimir Derer, since 1973 (he died in 2014). The organisation was founded on the premise that any reform in the Labour Party has to be achieved not by pressure from the membership (which, for example, Militant pursued), but by winning over - or at least neutralising - the 'centre', in the party and the unions. The fascinating BBC docudrama *The campaign* shows how the CLPD won a conference majority to vote for a version of mandatory reselection in the early 1980s: through a number of backroom deals with union leaders.⁸

It still pursues this method though the so-called Centre Left Grassroots Alliance, which 'recommends' various candidates for Labour Party elections. It is based on rather mysterious, private and entirely undemocratic get-togethers of various Labour left organisations, to which only a few lucky ones are invited (this year, for example, Jewish Voice for Labour was among the invitees), while others never make the gathering. The Labour Representation Committee regularly complains when it is left out in the cold.

According to Wikipedia, the CLGA was founded in 1995 by the CLPD and Labour Reform, "a centrist democratic group", which had supported Ann Black as member of the NEC. When "private talks with trade union representatives" failed, Liz Davies of *Labour Left Briefing* and Mark Seddon, editor of *Tribune*, were also brought in. But, convinced of the left's unelectability, the CLGA continued to support centrist candidates and rejected any moves to present a leftwing platform or support openly left candidates.⁹

This explains how Ann Black could remain on the 'left ticket' for so long, despite clearly being very much on the centre of the party. She supported the move to stop tens of thousands of pro-Corbyn members from voting in the second leadership election and, as chair of the NEC disciplinary panel, gave her backing to much of the witch-hunt against the left - for instance, by voting for the suspension of Brighton and Hove CLP. Many have questioned, quite rightly, why the CLGA continues to back her.

Theory 3: It is all about Ann Black

As we have reported, Jon Lansman and CLPD secretary Pete Willsman, who have worked together in the CLPD for decades, have fallen out over Black. Just how badly became very obvious at the CLPD's March 3 annual general meeting. Clearly having thoroughly internalised the centre-left strategy, Pete Willsman continues to insist that Black should be included on the CLGA slate. When his own CLPD executive committee voted (by a majority of one) against her inclusion a few months back, he decided to ignore the decision and campaign for her.

On the morning of the AGM, a rumour was doing the rounds that Lansman would turn up in order to graciously announce his withdrawal from the general secretary race. If true, he clearly changed his mind. He did not

even show up. But his supporters were a visible presence. After a long list of worthy but boring speakers (which pushed all normal motions submitted off the agenda), Lansman's NEC ally, Christine Shawcroft, presented an emergency motion, which sought to remove Pete Willsman as CLPD secretary and force immediate new elections to the position (which she was apparently intending to contest).

The motion criticised as "unacceptable" the delay in putting together a slate for the NEC elections in the summer:

A draft slate was not opposed by CLPD, yet during February attempts were made to overturn it with biased and incomplete emails around the executive, and threats to take it to the AGM. All in the name of keeping someone on the slate [ie, Ann Black] who has consistently voted against us in the last two years, often in ways very damaging to the leader. Now the two-month delay means that those on the final slate are already on the back foot, struggling to make up time. This has happened because of a lack of basic democratic accountability in CLPD's organisation.

The motion was ruled out of order (on the basis that it was "not an emergency"), but it took a vote that needed two recounts before that decision was accepted. And, of course, it served another purpose: to justify the fact that Jon Lansman single-handedly leaked a list of the nine NEC candidates supported by Momentum to the national press. Ann Black was not on it, of course.

In our view, Ann Black should certainly not be on any leftwing list. But then she should have never been on it in the first place! She had been supported by Lansman and Willsman for many years - and, no, she did not turn into a centrist overnight. She had always been one.

By kicking her off the left slate, Lansman seems to have been acting in line with the party leadership. After all, the NEC officers group (which has a clear a pro-Corbyn majority) risked media ridicule when they shut down a meeting to elect a new chair of the national policy forum, because Ann Black was sure to win it.¹⁰

Pete Willsman, however, did not seem to get the message. We wonder how long the deeply divided CLPD can keep going.

Theory 4: Lansman 'wants to break the union link'

This is where the contradictions start to mount up. It is one thing to stand against a leftwing union representative. If you present yourself as the serious, credible alternative candidate of the political centre, you might have a chance of getting the rightwing unions on the NEC behind you.

But Lansman has gone one further with his proposal to have the general secretary elected by the party membership as a whole. We very much oppose it. It sounds democratic, but really it is not. It would actually create two rival centres of power. We have seen under McNicol's tenure how destructive the general secretary can be. Having direct elections to the post would *not* prevent this situation occurring again - it would though guarantee endemic conflict between Labour Party HQ, the NEC and the leaders' office. No, the general secretary should remain directly accountable to the NEC. Once the numbers on the NEC had changed in favour of the pro-Corbyn left, McNicol's time was up. And that is how it should be.

Lansman's proposal is also very risky from his point of view, as it surely is bound to alienate *all* unions affiliated to the Labour Party. They see it as their historic right to fill a proportion

of leadership positions, so why would they vote for him to become the next general secretary if he is proposing to change that? Especially as his NEC ally and fellow Momentum director, Christine Shawcroft, used an angry Facebook post to declare: "It is time to support disaffiliation of the unions from the Labour Party."

This came as a complete surprise to us. To our knowledge, she had never put forward such a line before. And it also came as a shock to Jeremy Corbyn, whose spokesperson described that statement as "a heat-of-the-moment remark":

There is almost no-one in the entire Labour Party who supports any kind of breaking of the link with the trade unions. Even to say it's a minority view would be exaggerating it: it's a completely marginal view that has no support whatever. I don't think it even represents her view.¹¹

Shawcroft has indeed deleted the comment. But some have claimed that she was not totally out of tune with Jon Lansman here, even if Momentum was quick to distance itself from her statement.¹² In his candidacy statement Lansman talks about wanting to "listen to our trade union affiliates" and "work hard to strengthen Labour's trade union link".¹³ But he has also gone to the media to express "dissatisfaction that the role [of general secretary] should be chosen behind closed doors by Labour's NEC, which in practice would mean a deal struck between major trade unions for their preferred candidate".¹⁴ However, to interpret this as a desire on Lansman's part to see the unions disaffiliate is a bad case of clutching at straws.

True, the union link seems to have been a point of discussion among his allies and there is certainly room for democratic reform when it comes to the unions' role in the Labour Party. For a start, instead of union general secretaries casting their union's bloc vote at the Labour conference, we call for the vote to be divided on a proportional basis according to the political balance in the delegation.

But calling for the link to be broken is entirely wrong-headed. If Labour is to become the party of the *whole class*, then clearly it must become the umbrella organisation for *all* trade unions, socialist groups and pro-working class partisans. All unions should affiliate and all union members should pay the political levy.

Theory 5: Jon Lansman is the good guy

This is almost as hard to swallow as scenario 4. But bear with us.

Shawcroft's outburst on Facebook actually came about after the March 17 meeting of the NEC's disciplinary panel, of which she is now chair. The disciplinary panel is made up of the entire NEC - or, more precisely, of those NEC members who can be bothered to show up. It is the committee that decides if disciplinary charges have any merit - and should therefore be sent to the National Constitutional Committee for further investigation.

The NCC consists of 11 members, chosen by party conference for a two-year term. Four are elected by CLP delegates, six by the unions and one by affiliated socialist societies. Last year, the CLGA candidates, Emina Ibrahim and Anna Dyer, won overwhelmingly in the CLP section. The other two CLP positions are up for election at this year's conference, but for now the NCC clearly remains in the hands of the right. And it is questionable how 'left' the CLGA candidates are. Emina Ibrahim, for example, was supposed to be the alibi leftie on the three-person NCC panel at Tony Greenstein's expulsion hearing - and despite the obvious democratic shortcomings, lack

of natural justice and due process in the accusations against him, she voted in favour of him being expelled. For being rude.

As far as we can tell, Christine Shawcroft has used her new position as chair of the disciplinary panel to argue for the dismissal of *all* cases brought before it - and against their referral to the NCC. Exactly right. Once your case is in front of the NCC with its current composition - if you are a leftwinger - you can kiss your membership card goodbye. Next to their access to the national press, this is probably the most potent weapon the right in the party machine still has. We support the demand that all 18 cases currently in front of the NCC should be referred back to the NEC's disciplinary panel.

But at the March 17 meeting it seems that despite her best efforts to dismiss all the cases in front of the committee (there were a few dozen, we understand) the majority voted for three cases to be referred to the NCC, despite the evidence being "far from compelling", as NEC member Darren Williams complains (see below).

Interestingly, Shawcroft wrote on Facebook that a certain Jon Lansman supported her; whereas Jennie Formby did the opposite. According to Shawcroft,

I was supporting Jon Lansman for general secretary before today's NEC sub-committee meetings, but after today I'm even more determined. Only someone from his tradition will support the rights of rank-and-file members in the CLPs. The major trade unions are actively opposed to us - a very cursory examination of trigger ballots in mayoral 'selections' will tell you that. Look at their track records before you rush to support someone.

I must admit to a certain scepticism when I first read this. Shawcroft did, after all, support Jon Lansman in the middle of his undemocratic coup by becoming Momentum's director and did not speak up when he continued to ride roughshod over the members by imposing his own constitution. She also previously voted to refer Jackie Walker's case to the NCC. She irresponsibly split from *Labour Briefing* journal to set up her own *Original Labour Briefing* - without explaining the politics behind it.

But then she was backed up by fellow NEC member Darren Williams on Facebook. We cannot stress enough how unusual this is for both of them:

The disputes panel meeting left me feeling very disheartened - and not for the first time. I can't go into details, because all cases are confidential, but it's deeply disappointing to see party members put on a path to likely expulsion when the evidence of their supposed wrongdoing is far from compelling. Labour needs to do far more to embed the natural justice principles espoused by Chakrabarti in our internal processes and organisational culture. A small consolation was agreement by the organisation committee, which followed disputes, to review our disciplinary procedures. This is a task that the NEC began early last year and its completion is long overdue.¹⁵

In the discussion thread underneath, Christine Shawcroft then wrote:

Unfortunately, reviewing the disciplinary process is going to come too late for some of our comrades. This is why I am supporting Jon Lansman, or a woman in that tradition, for general secretary. Nothing would induce me to support a candidate from a major trade union - they stick it to the rank-and-file members time after time after time.

After being questioned if this was a *systematic* voting pattern of the

representatives of the major unions and if Jennie Formby has indeed been part of that pattern, comrade Williams clarified: "I think there has been undue caution sometimes about speaking up for members facing questionable charges, probably due to a fear of being seen to be contributing to Labour's supposed 'anti-Semitism problem'."

Ever since she threw her hat in the ring, Jennie Formby has been at the forefront of the right wing's radar. She has been accused of "acting with anti-Semitic intent" by Labour Against Anti-Semitism - an attack which Unite has quite rightly termed a "malicious smear".¹⁶ A smear which has, of course, been picked up and repeated by the entire press. She clearly feels the need to bend the stick in the other direction to have a chance of being elected. On March 3, she tweeted: "Just seen anti-Semitic attacks on @jonlansman. They are disgraceful and must stop. This sort of abuse has no place in the Labour Party. Not in my name."

But if it is true that she *systematically* votes to refer disciplinary cases to the NCC, that is a different matter altogether. We are told that Formby, in this instance, did not vote at all, but basically left the room repeatedly, so that she would not have to cast a vote. Apparently, all trade union representatives at that meeting (except the Transport Salaried Staff Association) voted to refer the three cases to the NCC. And, apparently, Jon Lansman voted *against* that.

Many members expected that, with the NEC finally having a pro-Corbyn majority, the witch-hunt would come to a swift end. But it was never going to be that easy. The civil war continues. And the fault lines are continuing to shift.

Right now Labour Party members deserve to know if Unite representatives (including Jennie Formby) *do* systematically vote with the right when it comes to the witch-hunt against pro-Corbyn members. If that is indeed true, it would certainly shine an entirely new light on Jennie Formby and how deserving she is of the left's support.

Of course, in the absence of openness on such important issues, we should be careful about who is spreading news and to what purpose. After all, Len McCluskey has been very outspoken in his opposition to the 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' witch-hunt, so this reported behaviour by one of Unite reps is, to put it mildly, surprising ●

Notes

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SCIENCE

Contradiction and denial

Noam Chomsky worked on weapons systems for the Pentagon, yet he consistently campaigned against militarism. **Chris Knight** looks at the controversy provoked by his own critique

When it was first published in 2016, my book, *Decoding Chomsky: science and revolutionary politics*, provoked immediate controversy.

Despite praise in publications ranging from *The Times Literary Supplement* and the *New Scientist* to a number of more academic journals, Noam Chomsky himself told the *New York Times* that, contrary to my claims, no military research was conducted at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology during his time there. Elaborating on this theme in a subsequent public comment, Chomsky denounced my entire narrative as a “wreck ... complete nonsense throughout”. The controversy continued in the *London Review of Books*, when the feminist sociologist of science, Hilary Rose, cited my book approvingly on the letters page, provoking Chomsky to denounce “Knight’s astonishing performance” in two subsequent letters.¹

Perhaps the most negative review was by Chomsky’s loyal biographer, Robert Barsky. Here is an extract:

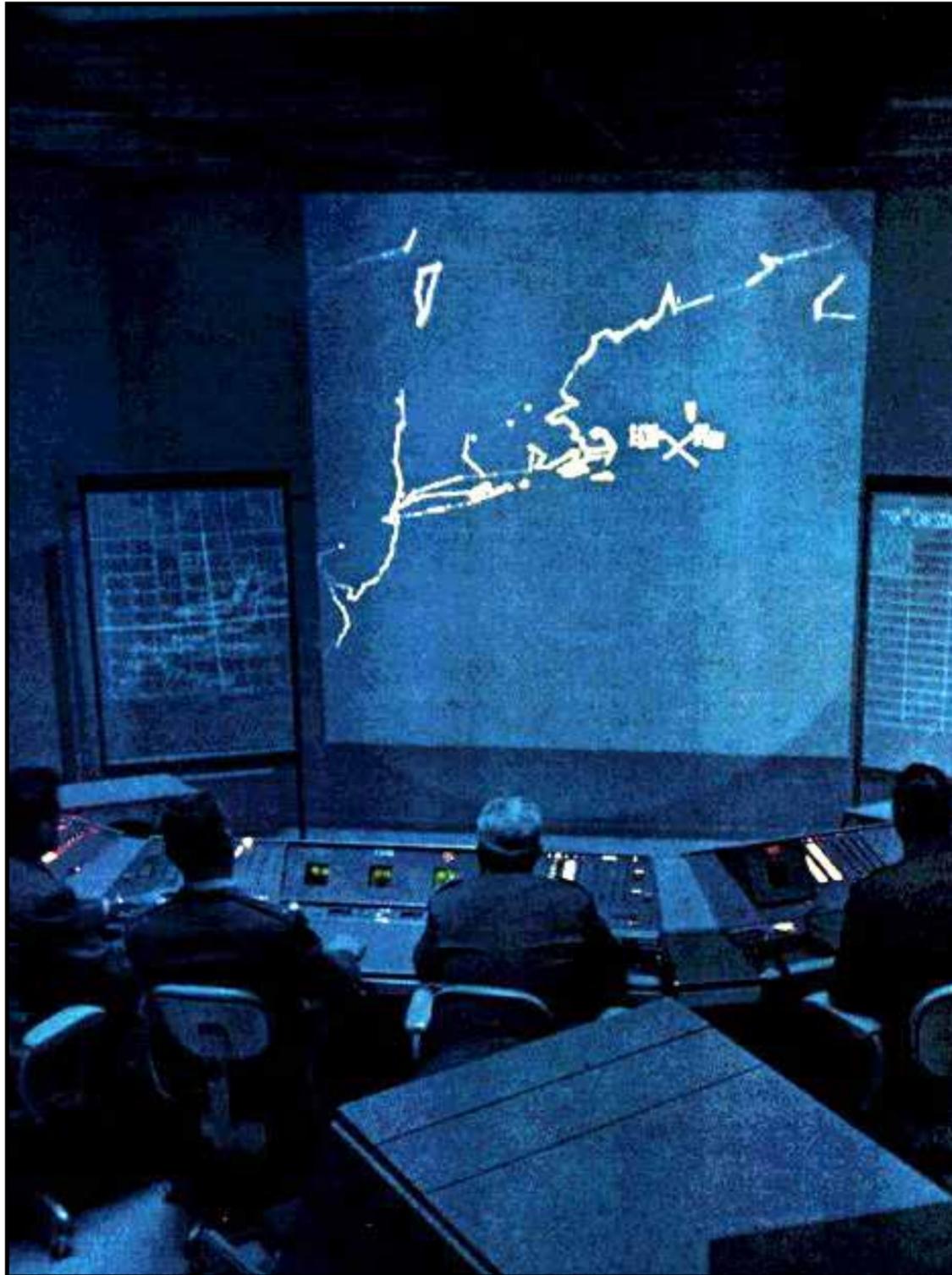
The problem is, the book contains no serious debate, just a whole lot of uninformed and half-baked assertions and some really strange conclusions derived from flimsy evidence. The ‘idealist’ Chomsky worked with Victor Yngve in a research laboratory studying translation at MIT, so he was a dupe to those who were “overtly developing command and control systems for nuclear and other military purposes”. What? Machine translation research is turned into a project dedicated to “command and control systems”? Really? And how did Chomsky contribute to that MIT project? No word from Knight, and no mention of the linguistics work Chomsky was doing at that time in MIT’s research laboratory for electronics.²

Despite his tone, Barsky makes a valid point. In my book, I did not go into detail on these topics because my underlying thesis was that it was Chomsky’s determination to *avoid* military work which decisively shaped both his politics and his linguistics. But, since Barsky has queried whether the projects on which Chomsky worked had anything to do with military ‘command and control’, let me say a little more.

Earlier this year, a number of Chomsky’s former students got in contact with me. They have confirmed to me that between 1963 and 1965 Chomsky worked as a consultant on a US air force project to establish English as an “operational language for command and control”.³ According to one of these students, who also worked on this project, the military justification for funding this work was that “in the event of a nuclear war, the generals would be underground with some computers trying to manage things, and that it would probably be easier to teach computers to understand English than to teach the generals to program”.⁴

Although he has always been reluctant to discuss why the military were so interested in his particular type of linguistics, Chomsky has never hidden the fact that MIT was “about 90% Pentagon-funded”. As he says of his university in the 1960s, “I was in a military lab. If you take a look at my early publications, they all say something about air force, navy and so on, because I was in a military lab - the Research Lab for Electronics [RLE].”⁵

It is also no secret that the Pentagon



Mitre’s first command and control project: the SAGE air defence system for nuclear war

sponsored Chomskyan linguistics in order to enhance their command and control systems. As a former air force colonel, Anthony Debons said in 1971:

Much of the research conducted at MIT by Chomsky and his colleagues [has] direct application to the efforts undertaken by military scientists to develop ... languages for computer operations in military command and control systems.⁶

That same year, another air force colonel, Edmund Gaines, explained in more detail why they needed linguistics of this kind to enhance their systems of computerised command and control:

Defense of the continental United States against air and missile attack is possible in part because of the use of such computer systems. And, of course, such systems support our forces in Vietnam ... Command and control systems would be easier to use [if artificial computer languages] were not necessary. We sponsored linguistic research in order to learn how to build command and control

systems that could understand English queries directly.⁷

Colonel Gaines’ explanation is confirmed by a 1965 article written by Jay Keyser, a linguist who had been recruited to MIT by Chomsky before going on to serve in the air force.⁸ In the article, Keyser suggested that the control languages then being used in the military’s command and control systems should be replaced with an English control language based on Chomsky’s insights into language structure. Keyser illustrated his article with words such as ‘aircraft’ and ‘missile’, as well as with sample sentences such as: “The bomber the fighter attacked landed safely.”⁹

Much of this military linguistics work was done at an offshoot of MIT called the Mitre Corporation. As a 1968 article outlined,

The most ambitious effort to construct an operating grammar is being made by a group at Mitre, concerned with English-like communication in command and control computer systems. It is no accident that Noam Chomsky, the major theorist in all

of American linguistics, is located at MIT.¹⁰

As many as 10 MIT linguists worked on this Mitre project and two of them have confirmed to me that Chomsky did indeed visit Mitre in his consultancy role, at least in 1965.¹¹

To understand all this, it helps to know more about the Mitre Corporation and MIT. Mitre was set up jointly by MIT and the US air force in 1958 in order to develop air defence and ‘command and control’ technology - both for use in a nuclear war and in more limited conflicts like that in Vietnam. In its section on the Vietnam war, the corporation’s official history states that, by 1967, “Mitre was devoting almost one-quarter of its total resources to the command, control and communications systems necessary to the conduct of that conflict”.¹²

This official history also refers to Mitre’s key role in creating the so-called McNamara line - a huge barrier of sensors, mines and cluster bombs along the border between North and South Vietnam. It was Jerome Wiesner who helped initiate

this infamous project.¹³ Wiesner is important because he was the lab director who first recruited Chomsky to the RLE in 1955, who co-founded MIT’s linguistics programme in 1961 and who, as MIT’s provost and then president, was in effect Chomsky’s boss for over 20 years.¹⁴

In the early 1960s, Wiesner was the country’s most powerful military scientist. He was proud of the fact that the RLE had made “major scientific and technical contributions to the continuing and growing military technology of the United States”.¹⁵ He was also proud that he had “helped get the United States ballistic missile program established in the face of strong opposition from the civilian and military leaders of the air force and Department of Defense”.¹⁶

Having brought nuclear missile research to MIT, Wiesner then became president Kennedy’s chief science advisor in 1961, from which position he insisted that nuclear missile development and procurement “must all be accelerated”.¹⁷ Wiesner later became more critical of the unrestricted stockpiling of nuclear weapons, particularly those equipped with multiple warheads. But this change of heart did not stop him from administering MIT laboratories dedicated to research on just such developments.¹⁸ As MIT’s provost and president, he also oversaw research into helicopter design, radar, smart bombs and counter-insurgency techniques for the ongoing war in Vietnam.¹⁹

Anarchy of science

Much of MIT’s military research was done by people who were quite happy to manufacture weaponry. But most academics prefer to think of themselves as free agents, unrestrained by military discipline or other pressures. Wiesner clearly understood this when he talked about the “anarchy of science”, which had to be protected in order for novel insights to emerge. This approach was consistent with general Eisenhower’s 1946 directive that military scientists “must be given the greatest possible freedom to carry out their research”.²⁰

This illusion of freedom was strengthened by the fact that, in order to secure generous funding from the Pentagon, MIT’s scientists would themselves come up with reasons why their research had military applications. Some scientists, no doubt, then convinced themselves that they were tricking the Pentagon into investing in research of real value to humanity. Yet precisely who was tricking who remains an open question. As long as a reasonable percentage of the research sponsored by the Pentagon turned out to be militarily useful, why should the Pentagon care what these scientists *thought* they were doing?

Professor Jonathan King revealed the level of self-delusion of many MIT researchers in the 1980s, when he said:

There were hundreds and hundreds of physics and engineering graduate students working on these weapons. [They’d say things like] they’re working on the hydrodynamics of an elongated object passing through a deloop fluid at high speed.

“Well, isn’t that a missile?” - “No, I’m just working on the basic principle; nobody works on weapons.”²¹

The linguistics students who worked at Mitre in the 1960s seem to have had similar attitudes. One of them, Haj Ross,

told me earlier this year:

We were as free as birds ... I never had any whiff of military work at Mitre ... What we talked about had nothing at all to do with command and control or air force or anything similar.

Another student, Barbara Partee, also emphasised how free they were, although she was clearer about the air force's requirements:

We had total freedom. Everybody could choose their own topic, as long as it could be related to the goal of eventually getting machines to process English sentences and do some question-answering on topics of potential interest to the air force.

It was Partee who told me that the supposed military justification for the research she and others were doing was that it would be "easier to teach computers to understand English than to teach the generals to program".²² When I asked her again how she and her fellow linguists felt about working on what was evidently a military project, she said that the "story of the generals being underground during the war and the computers therefore needing to understand English, really I'm not sure that anybody believed it". She then told me: "I never sensed any discomfort with taking air force money, of which Chomsky had a great deal for supporting students at MIT." Partee also recalled that "we all tried to convince ourselves that taking air force money for such purposes was consistent with our consciences". She explained to me that "our standard rationalization was that it was better for defense spending to be diverted to linguistic research than to be used for really military purposes".²³

Clearly, Partee has some doubts about this rationalization, perhaps rightly. In 1971, the Pentagon's representatives insisted that the defense department had to date made "a very thorough effort" to ensure that it funds "only research projects directly relevant to the military's technological needs". And, when exhaustively checked at the time by a group of anti-militarist academics from Stanford University, this claim was found to be accurate.²⁴

On the other hand, maybe Partee is right. After all, none of Chomsky's linguistic theories from this period ever really worked, so all the money the Pentagon spent must have seemed wasted from its point of view. But what if his theories had worked? The authors of the Mitre papers that name Chomsky as a "consultant" are quite clear that their project was about the "development of a program to establish natural language as an operational language for command and control".²⁵ So what if this Mitre project had been successful? Would that not have led to a situation in which, whenever a US commander targeted a village in a counter-insurgency operation - or targeted an entire city during a nuclear war - that commander would be unleashing death and destruction, thanks to linguistic theories inspired, initially, by Chomsky himself?

It is hard to know what Chomsky thought about this particular project, because, to my knowledge, he has never publicly talked about it. Whenever he has been asked about the military's role at MIT, he has usually claimed that the military never had any influence on the university's academic work and that they did not "involve themselves in any way in what was going on".²⁶ At MIT, according to his testimony, "you could do what you wanted ... within a broad range. It must've been one of the most free universities in the world."²⁷

Based on such comments, it is hard to know what Chomsky was really thinking during his time at Mitre. But we can make inferences from what he did after his time there, after 1965, when he appears to have resolved

never again to work directly on a military project, instead committing himself publicly to anti-militarist activism. Up until the mid-1960s, Chomsky was relatively quiet about his political views. Partee recalls: "I never heard him say a political word in any linguistics class", while Ross told me: "At Mitre I had never had the slightest hint about Noam's radicalism." But, as is well known, from 1965 Chomsky threw himself into passionate and effective resistance against the war in Vietnam.²⁸

Chomsky's politics

As part of this activism, Chomsky advocated the "avoidance of work that can be used by the agencies of militarism". He also gave considerable thought to "resigning from MIT, which is, more than any other university, associated with activities of the department of 'defense'".²⁹ But MIT's managers had treated him particularly well, appointing him associate professor at the age of 29 and a named professor at 37. And, as Chomsky says, this named professorship, which he received in 1966, "isolated me from the alumni and government pressures".³⁰ Consequently, he was now in the rare situation of being free to be an outspoken anti-militarist, while still working in one of the US's most prestigious military labs.

Such a situation had many advantages, including the fact that such proximity to the US's military and scientific elite gave his criticisms of that elite a unique authority. But to be the Pentagon's No1 critic, while remaining loyal to the Pentagon's No1 university, was never going to be straightforward. It led Chomsky to take a variety of contradictory positions on events both at MIT and in the wider world.

For example, despite his sympathies with their anti-militarism, when student radicals protested against MIT's military research in 1969, Chomsky apparently stood in the MIT president's office to assist loyal staff in protecting it from being occupied by these same radicals.³¹ Then, when Walt Rostow tried to return to his former job at MIT, Chomsky threatened to "protest publicly" in favour of Rostow being allowed back to the university. According to Chomsky, Rostow's leading role in the Vietnam war made him a "war criminal". But Chomsky was quite open about the fact that he "supported the rights of American war criminals not only to speak and teach, but also to conduct their research, on grounds of academic freedom, at a time when their work was being used to murder and destroy".³²

Commentators have usually seen Chomsky's attitude to war research as just an example of his uncompromising commitment to academic freedom. But we can now see such comments in a different light, as an attempt by Chomsky to come to terms with his own early career decisions at MIT. The same might be said of Chomsky's defence of Robert Faurisson, the French academic who was deprived of his teaching job after he wrote a book denying the holocaust. Clearly Chomsky has never had any sympathy with holocaust denial.³³

Naturally, having argued that people like Rostow and Faurisson should be able to work in academia, Chomsky was in no position to be too hostile to any of his colleagues at MIT, no matter what they were up to. In the 1980s, for example, MIT's most notorious academic was its provost, John Deutch, who was particularly controversial due to his role in bringing biological warfare research to the university.³⁴ Deutch was also heavily involved in the Pentagon's chemical weapons strategy, its deployment of MX nuclear missiles and its Nuclear Posture Review of

1994.³⁵ By this point, student and faculty opposition meant that Deutch had failed in one of his ambitions - to become president at MIT - but he had succeeded in becoming deputy defence secretary. Then, in 1995, president Clinton made him director of the CIA.

It was around this time that Chomsky was asked about his relationship with Deutch. He replied:

We were actually friends and got along fine, although we disagreed on about as many things as two human beings can disagree about. I liked him ... I had no problem with him. I was one of the very few people on the faculty, I'm told, who was supporting his candidacy for the president of MIT.³⁶

In another interview, Chomsky was even more positive about his friend, remarking that Deutch "has more honesty and integrity than anyone I've ever met in academic life, or any other life ... If somebody's got to be running the CIA, I'm glad it's him."³⁷

One of Chomsky's most controversial political positions concerned Pol Pot's regime in Cambodia. Although he never denied that the regime committed atrocities, it is hard to read his early writings on this subject without getting the impression that he is understating what was going on in Cambodia under Pol Pot.³⁸ Chomsky's rightwing detractors have implied that this was because he had some ideological sympathy with the Pol Pot regime. This was clearly not the case. A better explanation is that it pained Chomsky's conscience to be too critical of any country that had been so brutally targeted by the Pentagon: ie, by the same people who had so generously funded his own academic career.

I am not saying that Chomsky's conflicted relationship with his military employers was the only factor in these various political positions. After all, the left has always been divided on its attitudes to student protests, academic freedom and third world nationalism, along with many other issues. But, in my opinion, you cannot understand Chomsky's more controversial standpoints without taking account of his institutional situation at MIT. This applies in particular to his ideas about the nature of human language.

Chomsky's linguistics

Anyone who has investigated Chomsky's linguistics will know that he is not really interested in the way English or Russian are used by native speakers. Instead, he has always been concerned with something called 'universal grammar' - a concept which has become increasingly vague and abstract with the passing of time. My own explanation for this is that after his early experiences at MIT and Mitre he only felt comfortable when developing models so utterly abstract and ideal - so effectively immunised against social or engineering applications - that no-one could possibly make use of them for anything practical at all, let alone for killing people.

This last suggestion is controversial. But I have come across no better way of explaining the peculiar features of Chomsky's linguistics. In Chomsky's writings, individualism and genetic determinism are both taken to astonishing extremes. Again and again, Chomsky insists that human language is individual, not social, having no significant function in terms of the communication of thoughts and ideas. "Language," he claims, "is not properly regarded as a system of communication ... [although] it can, of course, be used for communication, as can anything people do - manner of walking or style of clothes or hair, for example."³⁹

So, according to Chomsky, language is no more designed to facilitate communication than your legs, clothes or hair! Chomsky's ideal is to make

linguistics rigorously formal, on the model of pure mathematics or philosophical logic. Such a view of language has many disadvantages, but one big advantage. You cannot kill people with philosophical logic.

Most readers of the *Weekly Worker* probably take it for granted that the genetic capacities underlying language must have evolved under natural selection in response to material pressures and demands. Most would assume that language must have something to do with history, politics and culture, and that children acquire their first language by learning from those around them. So it may come as a shock to discover that Chomsky completely rejects every one of these ideas.

He suggests, for example, that the biological capacity for language did not evolve through natural selection but, rather, that language suddenly emerged when the brain of a single early human was "rewired, perhaps by some slight mutation".⁴⁰ He then makes the even stranger claim that the concepts we put together in sentences - for example 'book' or 'carburettor' - are genetically determined items which existed in the human brain from the very beginning, millennia before real books or carburettors had even been invented.⁴¹

These ideas simply make no sense. But there has to be a reason why Chomsky so passionately espouses them. I am not claiming any privileged access to Chomsky's psychology, but what I can say is that such strange ideas categorically remove linguistics from all contact with the real world, situating the entire field in a realm of eternal abstractions. While this successfully removes linguistic theory from any dubious military use, it also means, unfortunately, that none of it really works.

Let me say here that, although Chomsky remains a hugely influential figure, the military were not alone in concluding that no part of his theoretical system could ever be made to work. The celebrated concept of 'deep structure' had to be abandoned long ago, along with virtually every other concept of the early years. Many linguistics would agree that almost none of Chomsky's detailed claims about the nature of language has survived the test of time - a point candidly conceded by Chomsky himself.⁴²

For anyone in my position as a lifelong activist, it feels risky to say things that can so easily be misunderstood. No part of my account can detract from Chomsky's record as a tireless anti-militarist campaigner. Neither can it detract from his persistence in withstanding the institutional pressures that he must have endured at MIT. Had he resigned in disgust in 1967, when he was thinking of doing so, he might never have gained the platform he needed to signal his dissidence across the world. There are times when all of us have to make compromises, some more costly than others. My argument, as I explain in more detail in my book, is that it was Chomsky's linguistics rather than his activism that bore the brunt of those damaging pressures and costs ●

Chris Knight is the author of *Decoding Chomsky: science and revolutionary politics Yale 2016*

Notes

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POLEMIC

A device of dictators and demagogues

Against a second referendum

Some on the 'left' insist on tailing John Major and Tony Blair and their call for a second referendum. However, argues **Jack Conrad**, Marxists are right to distrust referendums as a method of political decision-making. We champion working class political independence and representative democracy

The lead article in last week's *Solidarity*, 'Open borders for people', boasts of supporting those who "defend the existing free movement within Europe" and the "campaign to stop Brexit and support a referendum" on the Tory terms for leaving the European Union.¹ *Solidarity* is, of course, the paper of the social-imperialist Alliance for Workers' Liberty - an organisation notorious on the left for providing 'socialist' excuses for US-UK wars of intervention, the 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' witch-hunt in the Labour Party and big business opposition to Brexit. The article comes unsigned and is, one presumes, authoritative (in other words, either the exclusive work of editor Cathy Nugent or that of the entire editorial board as a collective: ie, Cathy Nugent, plus Michael Elms, Simon Nelson, Gemma Short and Martin Thomas).

The reasoning employed in 'Open borders for people' is thoroughly bourgeois. Apparently, population growth "coming from migration" is "essential" for making much needed investments in schools, housing and the national health service. The NHS "in particular" depends "heavily on migrant workers and would shrink without them". Moreover, funding for pensions and benefits likewise "depends on migrants": they are of "young, working, heavy tax-paying, low benefit-claiming age". In other

words the migrants coming to Britain are a vital source of exploitable labour-power and tax-revenue.

Logically, that should mean that migrants leaving Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, etc represent a net loss for those countries. After all, for every Polish nurse who makes the wrenching move to Britain, there is one less available for Poland's health system. The narrow focus on British interests certainly belies the AWL's claim to stand for "global solidarity". It also overlooks the salient fact that an influx of people coming from other countries - many of them desperate for any kind of employment and hence willing to work for longer hours and less pay - increases competition amongst workers and tends therefore to drive down the price of labour-power. Note, over the last decade *real* wages in Britain have stagnated or fallen.

In the short term, a growth of anti-migrant sentiments is almost inevitable. And branding such sentiments as a manifestation of ingrained racism or being the result of poor educational attainments is smug, easy ... and politically useless. In fact, in the absence of a viable left alternative to capitalist rule, what we see is a deflected form of the class struggle.

No, Marxists consider open borders - and not only within Europe - as *objectively* progressive, not because we wish to boost investment in Britain or increase the government's tax

take. Open borders allow workers from different countries to mix, overcome national parochialisms, organise together and eventually come to recognise the common interest in the fight for global communism.

The AWL's campaign to "stop Brexit and support a referendum" is no less bourgeois. Echoing big business, the AWL warns that Brexit will be bad for investment, bad for public services and bad for Britain. Hence, along with the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors and the *Financial Times*, the AWL gives a cautious welcome to Jeremy's Corbyn's recent announcement that Labour wants "a customs union" with the EU. Another cautious welcome is given to Keir Starmer's commitment that Labour will demand a parliamentary vote on the final Brexit deal.

However, it is the AWL's pledge to campaign in "support" of a second referendum "over whatever deal the Tories come up with" that surely exposes the sheer depths of pro-capitalist opportunism being plumbed.

The call for a second referendum unites a whole swathe of the great and good: Tony Blair, John Major, Peter Mandelson, Vince Cable, etc. A campaign aided by a generous £400,000 courtesy of George Soros.

The AWL offers its rather more modest services. Like a modern snake-oil salesman, *Solidarity* peddles the carefully manufactured story that a

68%-19% majority of Labour voters want a referendum on whatever Brexit deal the Tories produce. We are told in the same dumb spirit, that there is a 50%-34% majority of the "whole electorate" who would support a referendum before any deal can go ahead. By asking the 'right' question, those who pay for opinion polls can always get the 'right' result.

Despite the AWL's implied claim that public opinion is swinging against Brexit, there are good reasons for scepticism. David Cameron's 2016 referendum campaign began the year with a 53%-47% 'remain' opinion poll lead. However, he ended up with a 51.9%-48.1% 'leave' vote where it counts - in the ballot box. And, frankly, in terms of where we are today, there is no compelling reason to believe that a second referendum would go the way of the 'remainers'. Polls show that the gap between those who think the UK took the 'wrong' decision and those who think it was 'right' to be incredibly narrow. On February 27 YouGov reported 44% opting for 'right' and 45% for 'wrong' (there were 11% 'don't knows').² And, when it comes to 'How would you vote in a second referendum?', it seems that we would still get Brexit. A March 2 ComRes poll puts 'remain' on 43% and 'leave' on 46% (there were 12% 'don't knows').³ That despite the cabinet divisions, the Irish border, EU intransigence, numerous UK

climbedowns and Theresa May's adoption of the softest version of a 'hard' Brexit.

Epitome

Of course, our objection to a second EU referendum is exactly the same as our objection to the first one - and it has nothing to do with opinion polls. Referendums are by their very nature undemocratic. They bypass representative institutions and serve, in general, to fool enough of the people, enough of the time. And yet referendums have the great virtue of appearing to be the epitome of democracy. That is exactly why Harold Wilson, Tony Blair and David Cameron used them when it came to controversial constitutional issues. Complex questions are simplified, drained of nuance, reduced to a binary choice that cuts across previous party and class solidarities and therefore produces radically false alignments. Hence, one half of the working class finds itself aligned with Jacob Rees-Mogg; the other half behind John Major and Tony Blair.

Actually, the true nature of referendums can be usefully illustrated by the mini-me example of Jon Lansman. Not only was his Momentum coup carried out through a referendum (disgracefully backed by Jeremy Corbyn, Diane Abbott, Clive Lewis, Christine Shawcroft, Paul Mason, etc). Now Lansman says he wants to see the Labour Party general secretary

What we fight for

elected through a referendum too. With the method comes the message. The Momentum coup was justified by a nasty 'red scare' campaign, amplified through generous publicity provided by the capitalist media. Now, it is Jennie Formby who stands accused of being a dangerous red, an anti-Semite, a pawn in Len McCluskey's sinister bid to take over the Labour Party ...

It is surely in the nature of things that human beings will have disagreements. Assuming that there is a straightforwardly 'right thing to do', it is rarely obvious what that right thing is. Very frequently, there is not only a choice to be made between option 1 or 2, but between options 1 to 7 and within these, 1 (a) (i), 1 (a) (ii), 1 (b), ... and so on. To reach a decision, then, it is necessary to reduce the range of options. That is, of course, why British governments have a vast civil service producing green papers, white papers and bills, and why there are three parliamentary readings, a committee stage, numerous amendments and hours of debate before a final vote. The ruling class knows that such a drawn-out process is vital: 'act in haste, repent at leisure'. Before the Blair ascendancy, Labour Party rules (1) recognised the right of Constituency Labour Parties to introduce amendments to proposed conference motions, (2) had composing procedures, and (3) allowed space for debate at conference before the final vote was taken. Unless such basic democratic rights are restored (and radically extended), we should not be surprised if we get a Corbynite version of manipulation, demagoguery and backroom fixes.

History

We did not conclude that referendums were undemocratic, fraudulent, a means of mass deception, etc because of sour grapes over the *result* of the June 2016 Brexit vote. On the contrary, we called for an active boycott of Cameron's referendum. His objective was not to give power to the mass of the people, but to outflank Ukip, wrong-foot Labour, satisfy his Europhobes ... and hang on as prime minister. There was no reason for the authentic left to give him any support whatsoever.

Our objections to referendums are principled and long-standing. We opposed the Bonapartist operation in relation to the 'Vote for the crook, not for the fascist' presidential election in France in 2002. Before that we urged an active boycott of Blair's 1997 referendum in Scotland.⁴ Then the 1998 Good Friday referendum in Ireland, and the Scottish independence referendum of 2014. All offered, from an elementary working class viewpoint, a bogus choice.

Nor is this position a CPGB novelty. The background to the labour movement's historic rejection of referendums lies with the resistible rise of Louis Bonaparte (directly elected as French president for 1848-52 and then elevated to emperor over the years 1852-1870). His 1851 anti-parliamentary coup was endorsed by a rapidly called referendum, followed by a second referendum in 1852 which made him emperor.

Needless to say, Marxists condemned this 'democratic despotism'. And Marx and his co-thinkers - Jules Guesde, Paul Lafargue and Friedrich Engels - presented their alternative in the 'minimum' section of the *Programme of the Parti Ouvrier*. Here it was argued that the building of a mass workers' party "must be pursued by all the means the proletariat has at its disposal, including universal suffrage, which will thus be transformed from the instrument of deception that it has been until now into an instrument of emancipation".⁵ The emperor's constitution had to be abolished and in its place there had to be universal suffrage and representative democracy.

Similarly, socialists in the United States took it for granted in the 1890s

that they had to "abolish the presidency" (and the Senate). The only question was how. Engels countenanced comrades in America standing presidential and senatorial candidates ... provided they were committed to the abolition of the post of president and the Senate.⁶

Karl Kautsky's *Parliamentarism, direct legislation by the people and social democracy* (1893) is worth commenting upon too.⁷ Kautsky's arguments against legislation by referendum are still persuasive. In an age of class-based parties, from the standpoint of revolutionary change it is, he said, far preferable for the population to think about, organise around and vote for competing party outlooks. Referendums serve to blur and override the fundamental dividing lines between classes and their respective parties: precisely the *opposite* of what any Marxist wants to see.

Usefully, Kautsky makes a more general point about 'direct democracy' in the form of referendum. Marxism strives, particularly through its emphasis on the necessity of a mass workers' party, to bring about a situation in which the state is as weak - and the people are as strong and organised - as possible. He draws a vital distinction between, on the one hand, 'the people' as an isolated, unorganised mass, who are not thinking about national or global politics and not organised into, or by, social democratic parties with a national focus, and, on the other, 'the people' as a politically educated, coherent and militant force led by social democracy.

To press home the point, Kautsky refers to contemporary studies about the *conservative* effects of referendums in Switzerland. Louis Blanc had already made a similar point back in 1851 (ie, in the midst of Louis Bonaparte's power grab). Blanc highlighted the Girondist roots of proposals for political decision-making by referendum. When in 1792 Louis XVI was condemned to death by the French convention, the Girondists demanded a referendum (in vain, true). They were convinced that this was the only way to stop the revolution falling into the hands of Robespierre and the Montagnard extremists.

Notwithstanding that, Kautsky claims that referendum might be useful in the weaker, less autocratic states ("Maybe in the US, England and the English colonies, even under circumstances in France"). However, far more importantly, he stresses the expansion and deepening of existing *representative* democracy. In terms of Britain, for example, this would involve the election of judges, the abolition of the House of Lords, short parliamentary terms and the abolition of extortionate electoral deposits, which effectively debarred working class representatives (the experience of Chartism was in the forefront of his mind).

The rise of social democracy - which Kautsky is convinced will also spread to Britain with time - not only counters the capitalist monopoly over the press and its systematic corruption of public opinion, but through the establishment of a workers' press, leaders, speakers and parliamentarians would be trained to take the social democratic message to ever wider sections of the masses. Indeed, through party organisation the working class learns how to impose its agenda on society ... and thereby prepares itself to rule.

Despite its undoubted shortcomings, *Parliamentarism, direct legislation by the people and social democracy* retains its worth - not least because we have seen the *entirely negative* effects of referendum campaigns over recent years. In Northern Ireland the left fell in behind the 1998 Good Friday agreement, even though it constitutionally institutionalised the sectarian divide of the working class; in Scotland the working class split into two hostile camps over independence and the non-Labour left collapsed into

petty nationalism; and throughout the UK the question of Europe effectively cleaves the working class into bitterly opposed 'leavers' and 'remainers'.

Memory loss

The reason why the left has largely forgotten the history of opposing referendums in the name of *extending representative democracy* stems from two sets of ideas.

The first is the tradition of the early Communist International, which in 1919-22 declared in one thesis and one resolution after another that revolution in the west was an immediate prospect. Communists had to prepare the working class for a frontal assault on the citadels of bourgeois power. Under such circumstances the constitutional demands of the minimum programme seemed to be of secondary importance - even a barrier for some. Such an assessment doubtless appeared well founded amidst the storms and turmoil that immediately followed World War I. However, that had already become a nonsense by 1923. The entirely artificial attempt to make revolution in Germany ended in a predictable fiasco.

The second set of ideas is commonly called 'transitional method', a strategy developed by post-1945 Trotskyites. Its antecedents are claimed to go back to Comintern's 1922 Fourth Congress and the resolution to include "transitional demands" in the envisaged programme for world revolution.⁸ Examples of such demands were the call for a workers' government and workers' control over production. Then, of course, there is the *Transitional programme* written by Trotsky and presented to the founding congress of the Fourth International in 1938. It too was based on the conviction of capitalism undergoing its "final death agony" and that therefore the world socialist revolution would triumph within the next few years.

While some of the key transitional demands of 1922 have an appropriate place in the modern communist programme, the post-1945 'transitional method' turns out to be merely an attempt to trick the working class into taking power by defending existing constitutional arrangements and narrowly focusing on everyday economic demands. Difficult constitutional questions are shunned: eg, in Britain abolishing the monarchy and the House of Lords, replacing the standing army with a popular militia, and achieving a federal republic (all compatible with the continuation of capitalism).

In other words, the post-1945 'transitional method' is a mere

variation of the line advocated by the Russian economists of the early 1900s. Publications such as *Credo* and *Rabochaya Mysl* argued that Russian workers were far from ready for the sophisticated social democratic politics that had become so popular in Germany. No, before that, social democrats would have to help organise Russian workers around their immediate economic interests: eg, building trade unions and taking strike action against the capitalist employer. *Iskra's* insistence on placing the demand for the overthrow of tsarism and a democratic republic at the centre of its message would find no mass hearing. Furthermore, *Iskra* stood accused of ignoring "the enormous educational significance" of economic struggles (vehemently denied by Lenin, its leading editor). *Rabochaya Mysl* could, however, adopt a sneering leftist pose, when it suited. The end of tsarism and achieving a democratic republic was long off ... and was anyway a "bourgeois task" that ought to be left to the bourgeoisie.

Modern leftwingers too often denounce immediate constitutional demands as not being revolutionary enough. Meanwhile they give a revolutionary gloss to routine pay disputes, pacifistic protest marches, liberal anti-racism campaigns and the nationalist project of breaking up Britain. Hence the *immediate* demand for a federal republic is counterposed to the *maximum* demand for a socialist republic. The result, in programmatic terms, is a combination of tailism and a refusal to even countenance an *independent* working class challenge to the existing constitutional order.

Hence we have groups such as Socialist Resistance, Left Unity and the AWL howling over Donald Trump and Brexit and to all intents and purposes aping the enraged wing of the liberal bourgeoisie ●

Notes

1. *Solidarity* February 28 2018.
2. See whatukthinks.org/eu/questions/in-highlights-do-you-think-britain-was-right-or-wrong-to-vote-to-leave-the-eu.
3. whatukthinks.org/eu/questions/if-a-second-eu-referendum-were-held-today-how-would-you-vote.
4. See J Conrad *Blair's rigged referendum and Scotland's right to self-determination* London 1997.
5. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/05/parti-ouvrier.htm.
6. F Engels to F Wiesen (in Texas) in K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 50, New York NY 2004, p119.
7. See B Lewis, 'Referenda and direct democracy' *Weekly Worker* September 18 2014; K Kautsky, 'Direct legislation by the people and the class struggle' *Weekly Worker* March 31 2016.
8. J Riddell (editor and translator) *Toward the united front: proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922* Chicago IL 2012, p632.

Fighting fund

Keep it up

Our March fighting fund has got off to an excellent start, thanks not only to the usual flurry of standing orders at the beginning of the month, but three brilliant cheques totalling £175 - thank you, RB (£100), KN (£50) and RT (£25 - added to his annual subscription).

As for those standing orders, there were 19 of them, ranging from £5 to £40. It is true that the largest SOs come in towards the end of the month, but in terms of numbers you can't beat the first week! There were two for £40 (MS and EW), four for £30 (ST, SW, AC and CG), one for £25 (GD) and two for £20 (DL and TG).

As for those cheque-writers, RB says: "After reaching your target in February, I want to make sure you do the same in March!" Well, that £100 tells me you mean it, comrade! In addition there were

two PayPal donations - the usual £15 from US comrade PM, plus £7 from KH, who is in Germany. That was his way of thanking us for sending him a back copy of the *Weekly Worker*, after he was particularly impressed by an article he read last year on the web. That definitely more than covered the postage, comrade!

Anyway, after exactly one week our running total stands at £559 - well above the average needed if we're to reach our £1,750 target. However, as I've pointed out, the first week of every month is always the best. So let's keep it up and make sure the remaining three and a half weeks are just as good! ●

Robbie Rix

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly WORKER

Mid-term
elections
are due in
November

Negotiating with guns

Donald Trump's tariffs are about politics, not economic renaissance, argues Paul Demarty

A cynical observer, up to March 1, could be forgiven for thinking that Donald Trump's protectionist tough talk was mere campaign-trail bluster. Such an observer may end up being proved right in the end: the tariffs are yet to be enforced, and there are some indications that Trump might settle for less.

Nevertheless, things have clearly moved on. Trump's plan to impose a 25% tariff on steel imports and 10% on aluminium hardly represents the first protectionist measures in American history, nor even in the period of America's global supremacy since 1945. It has been a while, however, since tariffs have been presented *in openly protectionist terms*, rather than merely America doing on the quiet the sins it loudly denounces in others through its agencies such as the World Trade Organisation. Trump is giving full throat to his tendency to talk about global economic intercourse in the terms of the market-stall huckster haggling over counterfeit Calvin Klein boxers. The list of 'bad deals' has been excavated from the box-file left on Steve Bannon's desk.

Until recently, we were wondering what had become of Bannon, but he has now resurfaced in Italy, wanting a front-row seat for the next victory for the insurgent far-right. A man who served the American establishment well as a devil figure, a demagogue and an intellectual, Bannon could quote Lenin, compared his film style to Leni Riefenstahl and openly exulted in winding up his political opponents. He came to appear as a sort of cross between Goebbels, Kissinger and the Norse god, Loki - in his own mind as much as anyone else's. He began the year with the suicide strike that was Michael Wolff's *Fire and fury*, for which he was the most unguarded source, and promptly found himself outside the Breitbart news organisation he had rejoined; but he will be pleased as punch with all this.

Leader of the free world

It is worth keeping Bannon in mind, as we examine the great unease that has gripped the bourgeois world in response to Trump's statement - and still more in response to his refusal to back down from it. There are two strands to this (though they are hardly separable with any great rigour): the diplomatic and the economic.

The most acute problems are probably diplomatic, in that Trump - however great an opinion he has of himself - is only the latest in a long line of right-nationalist world leaders to have arisen in the past decade or two. The marquee name of this tendency, before Trump came along anyway, was Vladimir Putin - thus Adam Shatz, a couple of years ago, could write a piece on "Israel's Putinisation",¹ but might also have remarked on the "Putinisation" of Shinzo Abe's Japan, or China under Xi Jinping (the Chinese regime's recent hypocritical hymnals to globalisation notwithstanding), and



What happens in the next episode?

now Italy ... The "Putinisation" of America has the added twist that the intellectually barren creatures in the US punditocracy seem to believe that it was literally Putin's work, but apart from that is an iteration in a known pattern.

However, it is an especially important iteration, thanks to the US's hegemonic position. Were Russia to blare on about making itself great again through industrial protection, the US would have the WTO inflict some sort of penalty and make the Russians suffer - never mind some smaller irritant, like Venezuela or Zimbabwe. But now? Who will guard the guards? The WTO has warned that the consequences of a trade war will be grave; but can America's closest rivals really expect that the big beast of the capitalist world will submit to sanctions or arbitration?

The answer can be read in their actual behaviour. Spokespeople for the European Union have talked fairly tough, although the much-trumpeted targets of retaliatory sanctions - bourbon, Levi jeans, Harley-Davidson motorcycles, and so on - will hardly have US industrialists quaking in their boots. There is some suggestion that the brands named are very targeted - Harley-Davidson is based in Republican house leader Paul Ryan's state of Wisconsin; bourbon comes from Kentucky, represented by Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell; and, for the sake of insurance, Levis is a blow against California, which returns Nancy Pelosi as leader of the house Democrats. Who knows if such 'clever tactics' have any purchase, however. It is more the principle of the thing: can we imagine the EU threatening even to put a tariff on anything American-made

10 years ago - or even five?

Closer to home, Trump is on safer ground. He has made it clear to the governments of Mexico and Canada that they might be treated more favourably, depending on how the 'renegotiations' of the North American Free Trade Agreement (Nafta) go; it is not beyond imagination that the whole thing basically comes down to Trump pulling a gun in the middle of a drug deal, in order to gain more favourable terms.

Goldman grumbles

Pulling a gun in a real drug deal is, of course, risky, for the simple reason that the other lot might also have guns. The United States can have no such fears with regard to its North American neighbours (Europe and China are another matter). The *immediate* problems for Trump come instead from the horrified response from almost all those who claim to speak for America's business interests.

The immediate reaction from the markets can have surprised nobody. The Dow Jones industrial average took another dive, although it recovered some of the losses on March 6, when Trump started making special cases for Canada and the like. Treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin has little choice but to carry the can on this one, but the vast tentacular society of Goldman Sachs alumni to which he belongs will no doubt agree with the mother-squid itself, whose head of commodities research, Jeffrey Currie, tells us:

Not all metal is created equally ... US allies produce many of the value-added steels that current US capacity cannot fully replace without [a] substantial increase in investment

... As a result, the US will end up simply paying the tariffs on the higher-quality imported metal from US allies even if the amount was at or under the quota.²

We tend to think of the steel industry, in other words, as basically low-tech, on account of the appearance of its products as so many tons of *stuff*. But, of course, that is not true - many subtly different combinations of the same basic ingredients are possible, but a given plant can only ever produce some subset of the same. The analysis from Goldman, much like the views of most of its peers, is that America will simply be unable to replace the high-tech metals it needs domestically in time to avoid its firms simply having to pay the higher prices, leading to a sharp division between those higher-margin industries that can absorb the higher input costs, and the lower-margin industries that cannot. Currie's graphs have automobile and auto parts firms - so totemically important in the American mind in spite of everything - very much in the latter category.

From the Goldman-alumnus White House caucus, it seemed to have fallen to National Economic Council director Gary Cohn to try to sort this mess out - until he resigned. Currie pointedly states that a tariff targeted only at countries who are not US allies would have only a "modest" effect on prices, and such a 'clarification' would allow Trump to retreat without being seen to cave in.

Eyes on the prize

To listen to the anxious rhubarbing of the bourgeois establishment, as so often when it comes to Trump, you might be left with the impression that he has simply miscalculated badly: the juice ('better' terms in Nafta, whatever that means) isn't worth the squeeze. But, while the Goldmanites are surely correct, in economic terms, that the immediate effect on the basic economic indicators of these tariffs is very likely to be negative, we must pay attention to what they gloss over.

For this is an election year and Trump knows that he must deliver the goods, or he is at great risk of impeachment; he needs a solid bloc of Republican congressmen who owe him their jobs to protect him from Department of Justice special counsel Robert Mueller's endless fishing expedition. Having divested himself of Bannon's services last summer,

and publicly feuded with him since - "Sloppy Steve", who "begged for his job", etc - here is Trump, lurching suddenly towards Bannonomism.

If the EU's retaliation threats are targeted, how much more so the original insult! For what is the home of the US steel industry if not Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania? That state was one of the handful that swung for Trump, giving him the most unlikely of victories; but perhaps the Democrats noticed that Trump not only took the Republican primary by a country mile, but *won in each individual county*. The harsh impact of deindustrialisation in the state gave Trump's message serious bite. The message that worked there is exactly the one he pursues with his tariffs - make American industry great again!

From that point of view, it is actually pretty clever politics - not least because it puts the Democrats in a trap. They must either line up with Trump on the basis of concern for the 'American working man', or (more likely) line up with Goldman, offering wonkish wisdom about why it is futile to object to being tossed on the dung heap of America's economic history. This autumn's midterms, on the historical trends for the parties of incumbent presidents, are the Democrats' to lose; but one would not put it past the enervated gang of idiots who still somehow run the party machinery to *increase* the Republican majority in both houses via their unshakable commitment to neoliberalism.

If that happens, of course, Steve Bannon will be happier still. For it will prove that 'economic nationalism' works. But it will be more significant than that: it will prove it likewise to many more movements comfortable with the message around the world. We have already said that the prevailing wind in global politics is towards such nationalism; the true danger of Trump's policy is that it could reach gale force, and send us tumbling towards war. While the 'sensible' neoliberalism opposed to Trump only accelerates this process, a serious socialist alternative remains, alas, a distant prospect in the United States ●

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Notes

1. www.irb.co.uk/v38/n04/adam-shatz/israels-putinisation.
2. www.cnbc.com/2018/03/06/goldman-trumps-tariffs-are-draconian-and-will-raise-prices.html.

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