

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



**Royal handshake: no wonder
Unionists claim they won with
the Good Friday agreement**

- Letters and debate
- Gaza protest
- CPGB aggregate
- Conspiracy theories

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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How revolutionary
were the bourgeois
revolutions?



LETTERS

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

Illusions

This is a response to Mike Macnair's comment (Letters, March 29) on Jim Creegan's article, 'Walking the tightrope' (March 22).

While Mr Macnair does raise several historical questions, the main polemical point of his intervention seems to be that we don't have to worry today about 'gradualism' but rather concentrate our struggles against imperialism. I wholeheartedly disagree.

Which is not to say that making a strong stand against imperialist aggression is not important. But when that becomes a substitute for challenging the power of capital at home, then I would say it is just a cover for sounding very 'left' while accommodating oneself to the ethos that 'There is no alternative'.

Sure, reformism is not on the agenda today the way it was in the 1950s, for instance, given the domination of neoliberal austerity. But the concept of gradualism encompasses much more than that. It's the expression on the political realm of pragmatism as an ideology. By this I don't necessarily mean the philosophy of James or Dewey, or the common sense notion that we have to work with the conditions that are given to us and not conditions as we would like them to be. Rather, this form of pragmatism is the idea that we must trim our goals to what is attainable within the system, what Trotsky characterised as "bowing down before the accomplished fact". This is the malady that pervades much of the DSA and *Jacobin*. Of course, revolutionary struggle in some immediate sense is not on the agenda today, but it is the responsibility of genuine leftists to fight for a perspective that opens the road in mass consciousness to revolutionary struggles. For a group like the DSA that means fighting for a decisive break from the Democratic Party and working toward an independent working class party based on socialist policies. Many of the Sanders supporters who have joined DSA could be convinced of that perspective were the argument for it made clearly.

And while gradualism in relation to reformist movements is not on the agenda today, what has replaced it is the form of gradualism that reduces the role of the left to ameliorating the pain caused by neoliberalism. Syriza is a perfect example of this kind of gradualism. Or, to be more accurate, Syriza is today playing a dual role - on the one hand, it has become the wilful proxy of the European institutions for inflicting pain on the Greek people dictated by Brussels. On the other hand, Syriza turns around and adopts its other hat when it faces its constituents by claiming to do everything it can to ameliorate the terrible conditions that are being imposed on Greece (as if they have nothing to do with imposing those conditions). It's a fascinating example of political acrobatics.

Syriza's record level of unpopularity in recent polls indicates that the marketability of this stage performance will soon expire. What happens after that will depend to a great degree on the ability of a genuine leftwing opposition to capitalist austerity, one that did not get caught up in the illusions of 'gradualism', to win the hearts and minds of the millions who placed their hopes in Syriza. To prepare for this conjuncture, the Greek left should not dismiss the idea of gradualism as an irrelevant remnant of a bygone era, but understand the destructive impact of the contemporary form of a gradualism tailored to the age of austerity.

Alex Steiner
email

From below

Comrade Creegan's letter (April 5) reasserts his original position. In substance, he is clinging to a 'strategic' orthodox view of the post-1956 'New Left' - including in this the Trotskyist groups which were influenced by the ideas of the 'New Left'. This is the

idea that it is mass strikes, and mass street action, which are the foundation of a revolutionary perspective: "the culmination of a succession of initiatives from below."

This strategic orthodoxy has been repeatedly tested to destruction by 'New Left' groups. In reality, a necessary consequence of this strategy is that unity has to be founded in agreement on tactics - the next "initiative from below" - not on the acceptance of a common political programme. The result is either simple sectarianism, or - as in the British Socialist Workers Party and many other groups - both opportunism on substantive demands and sectarianism on practical organisational issues.

The result is both a succession of ephemeral initiatives which lead nowhere, and the *Life of Brian* image of the far left. The consequence of this tradition and image is that, even where Marx is widely thought to be worth reading and there is a degree of broad radicalisation, as has been the case in recent years, there is a repulsion among newly radicalising forces from actually organising as Marxists, which leaves control of the broad movement in the hands of bureaucrats and their very tepid reformist political representatives.

Trying yet more of this stuff is a waste of all of our time because the ephemeral 'initiatives from below' divert attention from real organising work which could be done. And it serves as an indirect left flank guard for the capitalist regime - because its obvious worthlessness and the *Life of Brian* sectarianism it involves steers newly radicalising forces towards the bureaucracy's class-collaborationist projects.

The project is sanctified by the New Left's sanctification of Rosa Luxemburg and *dammatio memoriae* of those who disagreed with her tactical judgments in 1910. I am fairly sceptical as to whether the 'New Left' version is actually Luxemburg, as opposed to a selective version to fit the Cold War view, defended in different ways by both Schorske and Peter Nettle, that only the revisionist Bernstein and the romantic-utopian (interpretation of) Luxemburg represented real alternatives (see my outline discussion 'Her life and her legacy' in *Weekly Worker*, August 16 2012). The point of recent uses is, however, to effect an intellectual closure in favour of "from below" mass-action-ism.

In this context, I don't propose to enter into a long polemic about the counterfactual whether a 1910 escalation on the SPD side would have led to the German Reich cracking up, or to a big defeat for the SPD along the lines of the 1921 'March Action', which I think is far more likely. I certainly don't accept that the break-up of a *parliamentary coalition* is a sign that the rulers cannot go on in the old way: this is the small change of parliamentarism, and to give it too much weight is "parliamentary cretinism". I cited Day and Gaido for their *documentation* of the dispute on imperialism, not for their *interpretation* of it, which is perfectly orthodox 'New Left'. I drew attention to the fact that a significant part of the mass-action left joined the pro-war camp in 1914 - a point which comrade Creegan does not deign to answer.

Lastly, comrade Creegan claims: "I find Macnair's remark that gradualism was only an important issue when it was promoted by social democracy during the cold war a little on the bizarre side. Parliamentary gradualism has been deep in the DNA of bourgeois democracy since its birth..." I find this idea bizarre. Are we to call John Pym, Oliver Cromwell & co, or Robespierre & co, or the American revolutionaries of the 1770s, "gradualists"? Equally,

is the celebration by the capitalist politicians and media of 1989, of 1991, and of subsequent 'colour revolutions', "gradualism"?

The far left, clinging to a dogma which responded to Cold War conditions, has made fetishes of the revolutionary moment, of 'from below,' and of strikes and street actions. The result is complete disorientation when the capitalist regime turns to celebrating such moments.

Mike Macnair
Oxford

Referenda

Jack Conrad's articles are always compulsory reading and his one on referenda and the European Union was no less so ('Against a second referendum', March 8). However, taken as a whole, I felt Jack came down slightly on the wrong side of that dialectical contradiction within Marxism-Leninism, between democracy and dictatorship.

Jack and the *Weekly Worker* group argue consistently and correctly that democracy and dictatorship are two sides of the same coin, and one must always ask, democracy (power) for which class, and dictatorship *against* which one? Socialist revolution by the working class and its allies means overthrowing and smashing the rule and state of the capitalist class and the establishment in its place of a state of the working people. This is democracy for the working class and its allies and a dictatorship against the ruling classes which has been overthrown by the socialist revolution.

However, the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat has included a tension between democracy and power exercised by and/or on behalf of the working people. It is obvious both in theory and in practice that a dictatorship unconstrained by the genuine democracy and control of the class on whose behalf it is being exercised can become oppressive to sections of that very same class.

Included in my own conception of socialism and communism has always been a much higher degree of direct participatory democracy than at present. Government and the administration of society should be everybody's business. The working class and state power should be constantly accountable and subject to the peoples it serves, if it is to continue to be legitimate, to draw energy and inspiration from the masses and to lead eventually to the dissolution of formal state structures into public self-government by the working class and working masses.

People vote in their millions every week, and pay for the privilege, for crappy TV shows like *Britain's got talent* or *I'm a celebrity*. Why shouldn't we want the same people, but even more of them, to express their views on a similarly frequent basis on rather more important issues facing us, and therefore to participate more meaningfully and directly in both policy formulation and implementation?

If we support greater use of forms of direct democracy under socialism, then we should fight for them in the here and now under capitalism. Of course, there will always be a role for representative or delegate democracy, which may even continue to be dominant under socialism. But at the very least we, as democrats, socialists and communists, should be fighting for direct forms of democracy to supplement and enhance these.

I think it is perfectly appropriate for referendums to be held to take big, strategic decisions on questions of principle and societal directions of travel, including on moral questions, such as abortion, and then require other forms of decision-making and democracy to work through the detail and carry them out.

With reference to the title of Jack's article, I thought it right to have a referendum in 1975 as going into the then European Economic Community represented a significant change in the strategic focus and direction of the United Kingdom - largely throwing our lot into the European project and implicitly signing up to the integrationist agenda. As opposed to the traditional stance of remaining a declining imperialist power, aloof and hostile to Europe, a special relationship with the United States and the Commonwealth, and maybe a return to past glories.

I thought it equally right to hold a further referendum 41 years later in 2016, given Europe had evolved into something significantly different to what was claimed to be on offer in 1975, and given Europe had become such a major fault line in British politics, especially with the electoral success of Ukip (eg, coming first on 27% in the 2014 EU parliament election).

Yes, I thought David Cameron's 'renegotiation' was pathetic and I know the offer of a referendum was part of an unsuccessful attempt to contain internal divisions within the Conservative Party. Yes, both sides asserted, exaggerated, blustered and misled throughout the campaign. Nonetheless, it was still right to hold the referendum, all sides had fair opportunity to express their views and counter opposing points, and a decision was taken which should be respected.

Following that principle, I believe there should be a referendum on both the terms of the UK's exit from the EU and the proposed future relationship with the EU. The electorate should have options which include at least: endorsement; leave without an agreement; remain within the EU on current terms, renegotiate the terms of leaving.

Alvin Toffler, in his book *The third wave* (1980), discussed that, as opinion polling has become more sophisticated and accurate, and also that juries are (as per Magna Carta) selected at random and yet are able to exercise really fundamental decisions and consequences over accused, victims and wider society, why can't we (and nearly 40 years later with all modern methods of communication) use this to provide an element of decision-making within modern society?

While there may always be a role for elected representatives, whose main current work and expertise is devoted to the formulation and implementation of policy, this could be supplemented and enhanced by taking into account the views of randomly selected sections of the population, to ensure decision-making as a whole is properly reflective of the wishes of society.

These random, temporary selections would instantly engage sections of the people in decision-making without having to go through the weeding-out processes used by established bureaucratic political parties, which attract by definition people wanting to be career politicians and to make a living out of it. This approach would ensure that, although there might continue to be career politicians, real influence over decision-making would be placed in the hands of people who are not politicians and people whose main interest may not be politics as such.

We must start to develop an approach to democracy in line with Marx in *The German ideology* and Lenin's *State and revolution*, where politics is increasingly taken out of the hands of career politicians and bureaucrats, and starts to become literally everyone's business, alongside all the other aspects of people's work and lives. Politics is genuinely democratised and formal state apparatus and functions

gradually wither away in favour of ongoing, public self-government and administration.

There are therefore at least three sets of mechanisms we could use to govern and administer modern society:

1. Representative or delegate democracy (MPs, councillors, etc), who are selected/elected to spend a significant amount of time proposing, considering and scrutinising legislation and helping hold members of any executive authority (a government or administration) to personal, political and public account.
2. Whole-electorate referenda to determine key and fundamental questions of principle and direction of travel. These should include being able to be initiated by a sufficient number of ordinary electors, elected representatives, representative bodies (including councils, national assemblies, House of Commons).
3. Randomly selected sections of the electorate and population asked to express their views on a whole range of matters, including big questions of principle, matters of nuance and practical detail of implementation. These would support, enhance and supplement the operation of formal elected representative assemblies.

The respective balance between these three components (there may be more) would evolve over time, according to which are most effective and efficient at reflecting and meeting the needs of the population.

I think that raising comprehensive and consistent demands, which include at least three distinct, broad forms of democracy and their radical expansion, as being of vital importance in the here and now, and also in helping to define the form of the truly democratic, socialist and communist society we want to achieve.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

Sparks of war?

I seriously think we are in a period equal to that just prior to World War I, when a perfect storm was building and apparently unrelated conflicts started to converge, requiring only a single and relatively minor event to kick it all off. Of course, the conflicting powers were already up for it and looking for such a flash to ignite the touch paper.

Absurd though it seems, it looks like the 'western powers', Nato *et al* have chosen to seize on the attempted murder of an ex-Russian spy as the excuse to activate their global grouch against Russia. I will spare you the obvious factors mitigating against this bloke's fate being determined by some evil mastermind in the Russian government (doubtless with a monocle and a cat), with a spook rubbing a nerve agent on his front doorknob, then sneaking away without being seen, perhaps in a Mr Blobby chemical-proof suit. Particularly when you could hire a kid with a brick in a sock for £50, not to mention a hit-man with a high-power telescopic rifle with a mile range at not very much more money, no questions asked.

What is perhaps surprising in this rapidly deteriorating situation is that the so-called peace movement, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Stop the War Coalition, etc, have been silent. There have certainly been no urgent mass protests to stop the war - I mean *the* war: you know, the one we will be in!

Just as the 'left' seems scared to dismiss the 'anti-Semitism' scam, so it is with anti-Russia-ism. No-one wants to say that Putin is actually the fall guy here, so by default we allow the warmongering agenda a relatively safe passage - despite knowing how this propaganda game has been played over the last century, from the secret treaties to the Zinoviev letter, the dodgy dossier and much else.

A section of the Pentagon seems to believe that an actual shooting war

with Russia, as close to US soil as possible, is a good idea. Certainly, a Hillary Clinton victory could have seen the start of such an engagement within weeks, if not days, of her election, with the promised imposition of a 'no-fly zone' in Syria. This would have resulted in major ground and air battles with Russian forces, quickly spreading to their respective fleets. The election of 'the wrong president' stopped this imminent clash, but it has not taken too long to dint Donald Trump's proposed neutrality and isolationism. America is now on board, baiting the Russian bear and joining in the current bitter diplomatic spat over the alleged spy poisoning, not to mention reshuffling the pieces in the Syria theatre.

Throughout the period, Nato has continued to undermine the 'Russian buffer', winning more and more Slavic and former Warsaw Pact countries into its sphere. The rightwing coup against an elected president in Ukraine, with its rush to join the European Union and Nato, and the consequential ethnic cleansing and isolation of the Russian population, was a key strategic move - eased by EU funding and the promise of an early move towards membership and the possibility of migration to western Europe. Meantime, the largest movement of troops, tanks and artillery since World War II is continuing apace right around Russia's borders, with military aircraft stationed within striking distance of its cities and military bases.

And now we have the poisoned door-knocker allegation, and the need to stage the anti-Russian bogymime - upping the ante across the world, withdrawing diplomats, closing embassies, tightening sanctions, freezing accounts. Short on even a shred of evidence and flatly contradicted by Porton Down and before any international inspectors' report, we are told that Russia 'has form', including the previous clashes with perceived western interests in the Crimea and Ukraine, and Russian interference in the US presidential election. The vile provocations of Boris the buffoon, saying that Putin himself gave the order to have the spy killed and comparing the forthcoming World Cup in Russia with the 1936 German Olympic Games and Putin to Hitler, might in earlier periods have been enough to kick off a war on their own.

The conflagration, should it come, could be of epoch proportions. It is inconceivable that such a war would remain conventional or be short, although does anyone in the USA actually think there would be anything at the end of it which would look like a worthwhile victory? Perhaps there is a foolish belief that Russia would quietly accept the new situation and not get involved - or at least back off when it got to the nuclear stage?

My political involvement went up by several stages at the age of 14, when US warships were on a collision course with the Soviet navy - heading for Cuba with nuclear missiles, with the world standing on the brink of all-out nuclear war. I fear we are back at that juncture again - only this time nobody seems to believe it. Everyone is quite calm about the current situation, without even a verse of 'We shall overcome' from the once dynamic peace movement.

We seem to be sleepwalking into a worldwide nuclear engagement. Or am I reading too much into all this? Someone please tell me I am.

Dave Douglass
South Shields

Pleased

What a sheer pleasure it was to read last week's edition of the paper, given how it positively bulged with counter-offensive onslaughts allied to clear-minded appraisal. In the process, a healthy splash of futurism and a large dollop of dignity were reintroduced to our communist camp, for some peculiar reason those precious attributes often being neglected

or even actively undermined.

Inconspicuously tucked away elsewhere within online media last week, *The Guardian's* Gary Younge reported how he had asked one of Martin Luther King Jr's long-term aides why the man had delivered that famous speech about Vietnam, when MLK must have known it would "ruin his relationship with the White House and cost the civil rights movement a lot of support and funds" (as Younge posed the matter). "He had the Nobel prize," said O'Dell, "and he didn't know how long he was going to live. He wasn't but 39, but he wasn't going to live much longer, and that meant he didn't have but maybe a few more speeches to give. So he had to say what he was going to say."

If taking that report at face value, it seems Martin Luther King Jr held within his consciousness a 'dual' reality. On the one hand, he tried to portray the USA as being open to reform (and thereby to its own salvation); on the other hand, he knew perfectly well that capitalist/imperialist America is both structurally and unchangingly brutal. He recognised how America will be always murderous of any serious threat to its domination.

It occurs to me this revelation and set of facts, highly poignant in their own right and original context, also provide an insight into both why and how many Jewish people systematically fool themselves when it comes to acknowledging the true nature of Israel's state apparatus. And then directly following on, how and why they delude themselves about the always oppressive and often barbaric actions of its various governments.

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

Deep crisis

In order to sustain his theory of continuity within the Bolshevik Party, Lars T Lih omits to discuss the small matter of Lenin's *April theses* and *Letters to the party* in the run-up to the party conference a few weeks later; despite the fact that these documents reveal just how deep the crisis was in the party, following the February revolution.

Either it would be fit to lead the coming struggle or it would capitulate to the reformist tendencies within its own ranks (*cf.* the SDP and other parties within the Second International in 1914); ie, Kamenev and co who were tail-ending the provisional government. Yet, as Lih would have it, there was no need to 'rearm the party' in April 1917; that this is a falsification of history on Trotsky's part. The same scenario is played out again here in Lih's analysis of the secret treaties, *vis-à-vis* the question of defencism ('Biography of a sister slogan', April 5).

On the one hand, post the February Revolution, Lih is correct to point out that the Bolsheviks (including Lenin) had to abandon the principle of defeatism; because the party was now confronted by a new conjuncture, wherein a proletarian revolution was both possible and necessary. Albeit, unlike 1905, the country was in the midst of an imperialist war, which had already killed millions of Russian soldiers. Therefore, as long as the masses were prepared to defend the fatherland from German imperialism, the Bolsheviks had to adopt a defencist position (albeit not the kind envisaged by Kamenev and co). On the other hand, the Bolshevik's strategy of taking and holding on to power, via the Soviets (dual power), also changed; because the revolution, which was now underway, would have to go much further than previously envisaged. Clearly, as a result of three years of a disastrous war (despite the secret treaties, which revealed the equally predatory nature of the old regime), the Russian bourgeoisie (in the form of the provisional government) was subservient to its imperialist allies. Therefore, a bourgeois democratic

revolution was no longer possible. As long as the Bolsheviks supported this strategy (either by giving critical support to the provisional government or replacing it), Russia would end up as a vassal of its imperialist allies (or even Germany). Therefore, the programme of 'old Bolshevism', which Lenin subscribed to (ie, up until April 1917) was now redundant. Yet he was the first among the Bolshevik leaders to realise that this had to go (*cf.* Kamenev and co, who still clung to it). The new conjuncture meant that the strategy for a 'democratic revolution' had to give way to the struggle for a 'commune state', as a first step towards socialism. Thus, as Trotsky argues in his *History*, Lenin realised that the need to rearm the party politically was essential to the revolution. Cue the *April theses*.

Unlike Lih, Trotsky gives a dialectical-materialist account in his *History of the Russian Revolution*. But, as I have said in a previous article, there are two histories: the first was published in 1919, and although it is less well known, it is more reliable (ie, a less factional account) than the second - longer - *History*, which was published in the early 1930s. (Space prevents me from explaining why this is; suffice to say, it has a lot to do with the degeneration of the party, as a result of the civil war, wherein the ensuing factional struggle led to the defeat of Trotsky's Left Opposition and his expulsion from the party, etc.) Consider these extracts from the first version:

"Hoisting themselves on the shoulders of...the army, the petty-bourgeois parties [both in the provisional government and the soviets] overawed the proletariat and befogged it with 'defencism'. That is why Lenin at once came out furiously against the old slogan of 'the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry', which under the new circumstances meant the transformation of the Bolshevik party into the left wing of the defencist bloc. For Lenin, the main task was to lead the proletarian vanguard from the swamp of defencism out onto firm ground. Only on that condition could the proletariat at the next stage become the axis around which the toiling masses of the village would group themselves. But in that case, what should our attitude be towards the democratic revolution [dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry]? Lenin was ruthless in refuting 'the old Bolsheviks' who, 'on more than one occasion', he said, 'played a lamentable role in the history of our party, repeating senselessly formulas they have learned by rote instead of studying the peculiarities of new living reality.... Is there any reality in the old Bolshevik formula of comrade Kamenev that the bourgeois democratic revolution is not completed? No... there is not. The formula is antiquated. It is worthless...' [1919 version, p125. Note here Trotsky is quoting from Lenin's *Assessment of the situation*, written a few days after the *April theses*].

Trotsky then turns to Kamenev's editorial in *Pravda*, 15 March 1917: Following on from his now famous remark, "No; the people will remain intrepidly at their post, answering bullet with bullet and shell with shell", we can skip to, "our slogan is no empty cry 'Down with war!' which means the disorganisation of the revolutionary army and the army becoming ever more revolutionary. [Correct!] Our slogan is to bring pressure (!), an attempt(!) to induce (!) the warring countries to initiate immediate peace negotiations to end the war. Till then every one (!) remain at his post (!)" [Trotsky's exclamation marks. NB: He also reminds us that this is the same programme as that of Kautsky and co, *History*, p129].

Rex Dunn
email

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday April 15, 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 4, 'From revolution to "coup d'etat": the second duma'. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk; and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

Yorkshire and Brexit

Friday April 13, 9am to 5pm: TUC regional conference on EU withdrawal, Duke Studios, 3 Sheaf Street, Leeds LS10. Organised by TUC: www.tuc.org.uk.

Palestinian Prisoners Day

Tuesday April 17, 6:30pm: Lecture. SOAS Alumni Lecture Theatre, Paul Wembley Wing, Senate House, SOAS, WC1E 7HX. Speaker: Khaled Barakat of the Free Ahmad Sa'adat Campaign. Organised by Victory to the Intifada and Samidoun - Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity: www.facebook.com/victory2palestine/ and www.samidoun.net.

No to war

Wednesday April 18, 7pm: Public meeting, Central United Reformed dissec dissec vChurch, 80 Norfolk Street, Sheffield S1. Organised by Sheffield Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/STWSheffield.

What is anti-Semitism?

Wednesday April 18, 7pm-9pm: Open meeting for ALL Labour Party members - bring your membership card. Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester M2. Speaker: Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi. Chair: Alison Harris. Organised by Jewish Voice for Labour, www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk. Tickets: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/what-is-antisemitism-tickets-44751948282>.

Your Q&A: War

Thursday April 19, 7pm: Audience and panel discussions and questions. Bournemouth University, Poole House, Talbot Campus, Fern Barrow, BH12, Poole. Facebook event: www.facebook.com/events/372032289948477/. Organised by Bournemouth Stop the War: www.stopwar.org.uk/.

Israel and apartheid

Saturday April 21, 10am to 3.30pm: Day school, Rivercourt Methodist Church, King Street, Hammersmith, London W6. Entry: £5 (£1 unwaged). Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org/events/israel-question-apartheid.

For an anti-war government

Tuesday April 24, 7pm: Public meeting, 15 Priory Street, York YO1.. Speakers include Chris Nineham, Stop the War vice-chair. Organised by York Against the War: www.yorkagainstthewar.org.uk/.

Marxism and the rate of profit

Tuesday April 24, 7pm: Lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Speaker: Simon Mohun. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.

End the witch-hunt

Wednesday April 25: Lobby of Marc Wadsworth's NCC disciplinary hearing in London. Details to be confirmed. Organised by Labour Against the Witchhunt: www.labouragainsthewitchhunt.org.

15 years of war

Thursday April 26, 7pm: Launch of Iraq Solidarity Month, Alumni lecture theatre, School of Oriental and African Studies, Paul Webley wing, 10 Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1. Organised by Tadhmun Iraqi Women Solidarity: <https://solidarityiraq.blogspot.co.uk>.

Housing co-operatives

Thursday April 26, 6pm to 8.30pm: Public meeting, 'Housing co-operatives: past, present and future'. Holyoake House, Hanover Street, Manchester, M60. Free - registration required. Event page: www.uk.coop/uniting-co-ops/events-calendar/greater-manchester-housing-co-operatives-past-present-and-future. Organised by Co-operatives UK: <https://www.uk.coop/>.

For a new foreign policy

Saturday April 28, 1pm: Public meeting, St Anne's church hall, Aberystwyth SY23. Organised by Ceredigion Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/AberStoptheWar.

Iraq Invasion 15 Years on

Monday April 30, 6pm: Public meeting, Daysh Building G.05, Newcastle University, NE1. Facebook event: www.facebook.com/events/358764411265778/. Organised by Newcastle Stop the War: www.northeaststopwar.org.uk/.

Marx Memorial Library

Tuesday May 1, 10am to 3pm: Open day with special events, free tours, and stalls. Marx Memorial Museum, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. 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.

PALESTINE

Another agenda

After the March 30 Israeli massacre of unarmed demonstrators in Gaza, Tony Greenstein examines the hypocrisy of Britain's Zionists

Two thousand people joined the Palestine Solidarity Campaign's demonstration opposite Downing Street on Saturday April 7 to protest against Israel's massacre of unarmed demonstrators in Gaza and the British government's failure to condemn the killings. Jeremy Corbyn sent a message of support, but this was at odds with his appeasement of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Jewish Leadership Council, both of which support Israel's massacre, blaming it on the Palestinians themselves.

Faced with a hermetically sealed siege for over a decade, a lack of fresh water, electricity, medical supplies and food, people in Gaza were protesting at the border fence, demanding the right to return to where they came from. Israel's response - 33 people shot dead and over a thousand injured, all of whom were within concentration camp Gaza.

Many Jews were among the demonstrators, and the presence of the tall banner of Jewish Voice for Labour exposed the claim of the BoD and JLC to represent British Jews. Labour Against the Witchhunt was there, with placards demanding 'Stop the Labour purge', 'Jezza, stand up to the witch-hunters', along with 'Anti-Semitism is a crime, anti-Zionism is a duty'. Momentum, to its shame, was noticeable by its absence - except, of course, for the Brighton banner.

The most recent wave of false 'anti-Semitism' claims began with the thinnest of pretexts - a six year old mural, long since erased, that Luciana Berger MP, a former director of Labour Friends of Israel, had stumbled upon. It wasn't even clear whether the picture of six bankers playing monopoly on the backs of black workers was anti-Semitic. Only two of them were Jewish. Indeed, if you associate bankers automatically with Jews then it is you who are anti-Semitic. But any pretext will do when needs must. Berger, who was parachuted into Liverpool Wavertree, has a history of making false allegations of anti-Semitism from her student days.¹

This pretext was, however, enough for the Zionist BoD and JLC to launch their 'anti-racist' Enough is Enough! March 26 demonstration outside parliament, which drew such well known anti-racists as Norman Tebbit of 'cricket test' fame.² Also present were those well known anti-racists from the Democratic Unionist Party such as Ian Paisley Junior, who, when not calling forth hell-fire and damnation upon Catholics, is doing his best to prevent the scourge of sodomy from infesting Ireland's green and pleasant land. In 2007 young Ian was quoted as saying: "I am pretty repulsed by gay and lesbianism. I think it is wrong ... I think that those people harm themselves and - without caring about it - harm society. That doesn't mean to say that I hate them. I mean, I hate what they do."³

On March 28, the heads of the unelected BoD and JLC, Jonathans Arkush and Goldstein, in an open letter to Corbyn, made it crystal clear that the 'anti-Semitism' they were talking about was integrally related to anti-Zionism:

"Again and again, Jeremy Corbyn has sided with anti-Semites rather than Jews. At best, this derives from the far left's obsessive hatred of Zionism, Zionists and Israel. At worst, it suggests a conspiratorial



Downing Street protest: anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism

worldview in which mainstream Jewish communities are believed to be a hostile entity, a class enemy."

In response to Corbyn's apology for Labour's almost non-existent anti-Semitism, Arkush and Goldstein presented a set of preposterous preconditions to be fulfilled before a meeting could take place. They demanded: 1. The appointment of an ombudsman "to oversee performance" in anti-Semitism disciplinary cases, who should report to the Labour Party, the BoD and JLC.⁴ 2. MPs, councillors and party members should not share platforms with people who have been suspended or expelled for anti-Semitism and, if they do, then they themselves should be suspended or, in the case of MPs, should lose the whip. 3. "The party should circulate the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism, with all its examples and clauses", and make "a clear list of unacceptable language". 4. The party must "engage with the Jewish community via its main representative groups", but "not through fringe organisations who wish to obstruct the Party's efforts to tackle anti-Semitism".

If Jeremy Corbyn were to adhere to any or all of these demands he may as well resign, which is the whole purpose of such demands. The idea that Labour's disciplinary process should be subject to an external ombudsman who reports to the unelected anti-Labour Board and JLC is too absurd for words.

The demand to demonise people who are suspended - and therefore presumed innocent - is outrageous. But those expelled, too, are often innocent, given the National Constitutional Committee kangaroo court that still decides disciplinary cases in the Party today. It is nothing less than McCarthyism to make a list of people you cannot even speak alongside.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Association 39-word definition of anti-Semitism⁵ is pretty useless. It is open-ended, uncertain in meaning and anything but a definition, and has been more than adequately criticised in Defining Anti-Semitism⁶ by Sir Stephen Sedley, a former Court of Appeal judge, and in an opinion by Hugh Tomlinson QC. It states:

"Anti-Semitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious

facilities" (*my emphasis*).⁷

The question is what else anti-Semitism may be expressed as - anti-Zionism?

These Zionist leaders complain that it is a "smear" to suggest that their concern over anti-Semitism is dictated by their support for Israel. Yet what else is one to make of their demand that the Labour Party circulate not just the definition, but all of the 11 examples, seven of which relate to comparisons with Israel, which are not part of the IHRA definition. So, for example, anyone denying the right of the Jewish people to self-determination or saying that Israel is a racist state is automatically an anti-Semite.

What makes this worse is the hypocrisy of both these Zionist organisations. Both 'leaderships' are unelected by the Jewish community in Britain. The Board is based on synagogue membership and Zionist organisations, thus entirely bypassing secular Jewry. The JLC is entirely self-appointed, previously consisting of Jewish capitalists but now various Jewish community organisations.

When they dismiss "fringe" organisations, they mean anything that is at all radical or anti-racist. We saw what they meant when Corbyn went to a seder evening with Jewdas on April 2. The *Jewish Chronicle* reported that "Board of Deputies president Jonathan Arkush has launched a scathing attack on the controversial Jewdas group", suggesting they are a "source of virulent anti-Semitism" and claiming that their members "are not all Jewish".⁸ But this Jewish group has contributed more to opposing fascist organisations and racism in its short history than the Board has done in its nearly 280 years existence.

In the 1930s the BoD told Jews *not* to oppose Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists. In the late 1970s it refused to work with the Anti-Nazi League in its fight against the National Front because it held that anti-Zionism was worse than fascism. Now, at last, it claims to be organising demonstrations against racism - in order to campaign against Corbyn with right-wing Tories and sectarian Ulster Protestants!

It is a great pity that Corbyn has agreed to meet with these people at all. Their real agenda is not combating anti-Semitism, but giving unflinching support to Israel. This was made clear in the wake of the March 30 massacre of Palestinians in Gaza. The Board blamed Hamas for using civilians and children as "pawns". It had nothing to say about

the deliberate use of live ammunition against unarmed demonstrators. This is just a continuation of its shameful record concerning Israel.

Jonathan Arkush himself is a prime hypocrite. When Donald Trump came to power after using all sorts of anti-Semitic hints, ads, dog whistles and allusions to Jewish financial power, Arkush welcomed him and his anti-Semitic advisers, Steve Bannon and Sebastian Gorka.⁹ As Dana Milbank wrote in the *Washington Post*, "Anti-Semitism is no longer an undertone of Trump's campaign. It's the melody."¹⁰

If anti-Semitism was the target of Arkush or Goldstein, they would question the Tories' links in the European Parliament, where they are members of the Group of European Conservatives and Reformists¹¹, together with Poland's Law and Justice Party and the Latvian For Fatherland and Freedom Party.

Poland's Law and Justice Party is not only far-right and racist but many of its members are explicitly anti-Semitic. *Ha'aretz* reported that Antoni Macierewicz, now deputy party leader, has asserted that the anti-Semitic *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is true. In 2002, Macierewicz told Radio Maryja, a right-wing Catholic station, that he had read the *Protocols* and, while they may not be authentic they are nonetheless true! The Nazis took the *Protocols* as their bible and Hitler praised them in *Mein Kampf*.¹²

In January 2018 the Polish parliament passed a law which outlawed any mention of Polish complicity in the Holocaust or Nazi crimes, on pain of a 3-year jail sentence. Yet it is a fact that in July 1941 villagers in Jedwabne in the East of Poland herded up to 1,600 of their Jewish compatriots into a barn which they then set on fire. Two Polish historians, Anna Bikont in *The crime and the silence*¹³ and Jan Tomasz Gross's *Neighbors: the destruction of the Jewish community in Jedwabne, Poland*¹⁴ detailed what happened.

In 2009 the Jedwabne controversy broke out in the UK when David Miliband criticised the then Tory opposition for their links with the leader of the ECR group, Michal Kaminski.¹⁵ Jonathan Freedland, *The Guardian's* liberal Zionist commentator, also got in on the act in an article, "Once no self-respecting politician would have gone near people such as Kaminski".¹⁶ What was the reaction of the Zionists? Did they jump up and down about David Cameron's tolerance of anti-Semitism? Perhaps the *Jewish Chronicle* had some particularly pungent articles criticising anti-Semitism in the Tory Party?

Not a bit of it. *JC* editor Stephen Pollard wrote that "Poland's Kaminski is not an anti-Semite: he's a friend to Jews".¹⁷ How, one might ask, was the MP for Jedwabne and the surrounding area (where other similar pogroms had occurred) and who had been a strong supporter of the Committee to Defend the Good Name of Jedwabne, a group dedicated to denying the village's complicity, and who opposed a national apology for the massacre, a good friend to the Jews? Well Pollard's answer was that Kaminski, although he was a fascist sympathiser, was also "one of the greatest friends to the Jews in a town where anti-Semitism and a visceral loathing of Israel are rife." In other words he was a strong supporter of Israel, just like Trump and his friends, which therefore exonerated him. Pollard also defended Latvian

Fatherland and Freedom Party MEP, Robert Zile, also in the ECR group, who every year took part in a demonstration with the veterans of the Latvian Waffen SS. He too was a strong supporter of Israel, even if he wasn't too keen on Latvia's Jews!

And what of the BoD and JLC? What was their reaction to Kaminski? Well in October 2009 Israel's Ambassador to the UN, Ron Prossor, spoke with Kaminski on the Conservative Friends of Israel platform at the Conservative Party annual conference. When the President of the BoD, Vivian Wineman, wrote to Conservative leader, David Cameron, querying whether the Tories had checked out Kaminski's political record, asking "Is Michal Kaminski fit to lead the Tories in Europe?"¹⁸ Kaminski's Zionist allies rushed to his defence.¹⁹ Wineman's innocuous letter to Cameron caused a rift with the JLC. One JLC member described colleagues as "livid" at the timing of the letter. Another was "incandescent".²⁰ Despite all this, nine years later the Conservatives are still members of the ECR group in the European Parliament with the same far-right parties.

I have a suggestion for Jeremy Corbyn. He should refuse to meet with Arkush and company until he sees concrete evidence that they are going to hold their Tory friends to account, and insist that they dissociate themselves from Polish and Latvian anti-Semitic parties. Indeed the composition of the ECR group is so toxic that he should insist the Tories pull out altogether ●

Notes

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2. When he was an MP, Tebbit remarked: "A large proportion of Britain's Asian population fail to pass the cricket test. Which side do they cheer for? It's an interesting test. Are you still harking back to where you came from or where you are?" Tebbit was of the view that British Asians really belonged back in India and Pakistan. In 1991 he told Woodrow Wyatt that "some of them insist on sticking to their own culture, like the Muslims in Bradford and so forth, and they are extremely dangerous" - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cricket_test.
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CRIME

Barking up the wrong tree

A new moral panic over violent crime in London has generated the usual batch of silly initiatives and pseudo-solutions, argues Eddie Ford

Following a series of killings last week in London, mainly by stabbing, there has been a moral panic about the supposed escalating levels of violence in the capital - if not the entire country. Though probably more a coincidence than a long-term trend, breathless headlines tell us that the Met "have lost control of the streets"¹ as "knife and gun crime rockets across England and Wales"² with "London deadlier than New York"³. The largely media-driven outcry has predictably generated a bout of silly initiatives and pseudo-solutions from the government and mainstream politicians.

The first killing to make the news was of the 17-year-old Tanesha Melbourne-Blake on April 2 after a drive-by shooting in Tottenham. Two days later the media made a big fuss over Israel Ogunsola, aged 18, stabbed to death in Hackney. But far less reported was the fatal police shooting on April 9 of a man in his 40s in Romford, taking the total number of killings so far this year in London to just over 50 - including a suspected burglar fatally stabbed to death by a 78-year-old man in Hither Green.⁴ This represents a figure up by a half on the same period last year, but hardly amounts to a national crisis.

In fact, since 1990 there has been an average of 171 murders committed each year across London. During this period the lowest annual figure was 89 in 2012 and the highest 204 in the financial year 2003-04. Between 2003-04 and 2008-09, the number of annual homicides decreased by 27% from 204 to 148. After further reductions, with a low of 83 in 2014, it seems the number of recorded homicides in the London region has risen - with 130 recorded in the year ending September 2017, although this will include the combined total of nine deaths in the London Bridge and Finsbury Park terror attacks. Once again, although each death represents a human tragedy, taken together they hardly indicate a terrifying spiral of violence.

As for the comparisons with New York, they are fairly daft. Last year 290 New Yorkers were murdered, more than double the number of Londoners. America's 'intentional killing rate' is 4.8 per 100,000 inhabitants whilst Britain's is 0.9.⁵ Within the EU, Britain is far better than the eastern European states, and also better than France, Sweden and even peaceable Denmark. Overall, the UK is marginally worse than Germany, Italy and Spain. As for London, as we have seen above, its murder rate on average has been steadily falling since the 1990s - it rose in the 2000s, actually dropped during the recession, and is still a quarter lower than it was just a decade ago.

But public-governmental policy on crime, alas, is notoriously immune to evidence-based research or logic. Appeasing the rightwing press is far more important. Consequently the demand that 'something must be done' has got increasingly louder, almost irrespective of efficacy or consequences. Any quick fix will do if it gets the right headline. Hence the calls to arrest more people, introduce yet tougher penalties and laws, return to a regime of aggressive stop and search, and so on.

Numbers

Of course, this has led to the ritual row about police numbers based on a widespread mistaken belief - or delusion - that there is some sort of causal link between the number of cops and crime levels. Recent home office statistics reveal that since the Tories came to power in



Stop searching, start listening

2010 police budgets have been cut and officer numbers have fallen by more than 20,000. The figures, released in November, also showed a 20% annual rise in "reported incidents" of gun, knife and serious violent crime across England and Wales - albeit weighted towards London. According to the home office, "traditional crime" nationwide has dropped by almost 40% since 2010. Yet there is nothing more argued about than crime statistics.

Naturally, the Met's commissioner, Cressida Dick - defending her patch - has issued regular dire warnings about how her force will struggle with the additional cuts it has to make as police numbers across the capital are predicted to fall to 28,000 if funding is further squeezed. In October she spoke of the need to find "hundreds of millions of pounds worth of savings" on top of the £600 million of cuts the Met had already made - saying that she finds it "incredible that anybody would think that over the next four or five years we should lose that much extra out of our budget". Her predecessor, Sir Bernard (now Lord) Hogan-Howe, too talked about "warning lights flashing" during his last speech as incumbent in February 2017. Putting it even stronger in a *Guardian* interview last November, Neil Basu - the head of counter-terrorism at New Scotland Yard - argued that "national security" was being endangered by cuts to local policing, which amounts to a potential "disaster" in the fight to stop terrorism such as Islamist and neo-Nazi attacks.⁶

Amber Rudd, the home secretary, has dismissed claims that police cuts are to blame for last week's spike in violent crime - saying "the evidence does not bear out claims that resources are to blame for rising violence". She also said, stating what should be the obvious, that violent crime was a "complex" area: "you cannot arrest your way out of this" - though that seems to be exactly what she is planning. Rudd went on to tell the BBC that a reduction in some areas in the number of police community support officers (PCSOs) was down to local decisions - "It's up to different police and crime commissioners to make their decisions about how the money is spent," she remarked. "Some forces are increasing their numbers of PCSOs, some are cutting them in order to have more funds available for local policing of a different type". Trying to capture the moral high ground, but not particularly successfully, Angela Rayner - the shadow education secretary - accused Rudd of being "very naïve" for thinking

that losing nearly 21,000 police officers does not have an effect on crime levels, adding that cuts to youth services and education has had a knock-on effect as well: "It's not just about police, of course it's not, it's about the wider public service and supporting families to make the right choices."

At the beginning of the week, the home secretary launched an anti-violent crime strategy backed by £40 million of home office funding - something which government officials have apparently been working on for months. A taskforce will be set up bringing together ministers, councils, police commissioners, health and education experts, plus uncle Tom Copley and all. This new strategy, if you can call it that, includes an offensive weapons bill with tougher powers to seize acid from people who cannot provide an acceptable reason for why they are carrying it and a crackdown on so-called "zombie knives" that can be purchased online for as little as £10. Coming in bright colours, these knives often have serrated edges and are emblazoned with words like "zombie killer" or "slayer", like something out of a jokey horror movie. There is also talk about putting more pressure on social media companies to take down content "glamorising" or "celebrating" violence or perpetuating gang feuds. Exactly what that means in practice remains a bit of a mystery - but it will almost certainly involve an irrational crackdown on freedom of speech (or 'anti-extremism'). In typically grandiose but meaningless rhetoric, Amber Rudd declared that "the time for political quarrels is over" - now is "the time for action".

Unfortunately for the home secretary, her 'initiative' was overshadowed by yet another rather synthetic row about police numbers - with the *Guardian* getting hold of documents which home office officials had prepared in February on the alleged factors behind the recent rise in violent crime. Marked as "official - sensitive", a section on police resources says: "Since 2012-13, weighted crime demand on the police has risen, largely due to growth in recorded sex offences. At the same time officers' numbers have fallen by 5% since 2014. So resources dedicated to serious violence have come under pressure and charge rates have dropped. This may have encouraged offenders. [It is] unlikely to be the factor that triggered the shift in serious violence but may be an underlying driver that has allowed the rise to continue" - with a highlighted box emphasising the point: "Not the main driver but has likely contributed."

When Rudd admitted or claimed she had not read the documents, Angela Rayner huffed and puffed about how the home secretary is either "incompetent" or "chose to mislead" over the impact of police cuts on violent crime. And Yvette Cooper, who chairs the Commons home affairs committee, tweeted that this was a "shocking" revelation. However, the home office documents do argue that it was unlikely that "lack of deterrence" was the catalyst for the rise in serious violence as "forces with the biggest falls in police numbers are not seeing the biggest rises in serious violence" - pointing out that half the rise in robbery, knife and gun crime can be explained by improvements in *police recording*.

Significantly, the home secretary's strategy focuses heavily on the links between illegal drug markets, particularly for crack cocaine, and violent crime - especially identifying rising crack cocaine use as a "key driver" behind rising violence, and also for fuelling urban crime gangs moving into rural areas to sell drugs (known as "country lines"). According to yet more home office figures, but treat with caution, between 2014-15 and 2016-17 killings where either the victim or the suspect were involved in using or dealing illegal drugs increased from 50% to 57%. In addition, there has been a 14% rise in the number of people seeking treatment for crack cocaine between 2015-16 and 2016-17.

But Amber Rudd and the government fail to draw the obvious conclusion from all this research, which is that drugs should be legalised precisely in order to *break* the link with crime - violent or otherwise. Nothing would do more to quickly reduce violent crime than drug decriminalisation. Instead, the home secretary recklessly wants to do the exact opposite, with more anti-drugs crackdowns and prohibitions. Perversely, she has highlighted the recent banning of legal highs as an example or model of the way forward - when it has been a totally predictable disaster driving users into the hands of more dubious criminal dealers who ultimately do not give a damn about quality control or safety, only increasing their profit margins.

Sounding like a mainstream politician himself, Jeremy Corbyn proffered the view that Amber Rudd has been "completely undermined" by the leaked home office documents - which "make a nonsense of the Tories' repeated claims that their cuts to police numbers have had no effect". He also demanded that the home secretary

"explain herself" to parliament. In this spirit, Corbyn hosted a roundtable meeting on April 10 that included police officers, families who have lost children, and organisations working to end knife and gun crime. Labour sources, rather desperately, pointed to Sadiq Khan's pledge of £45 million of "new money" over three years for disadvantaged young people in London and compared it with the government's £40 million serious violence strategy for the UK as a whole, of which £11 million will be spent on youth services over two years.

In other words, if we are to believe Jeremy Corbyn, more police is the answer - plus a few more youth centres. No mention, of course, of changing Britain's mad and irrational drugs laws - that would be to court controversy, something the Labour leader has no intention of doing. Play it safe, play it respectable.

Societal

Returning to the London/New York comparison, that city's shift over the last two decades from being one of the most violent places in America to one of the safest has been endlessly cited as proof that 'zero-tolerance' policing works. As Simon Jenkins put it in *The Guardian*, this "period has been studied to destruction" (April 6). However, Jenkins refers to the work of Mary Tuck, the home office's chief researcher in the 1990s. She regarded urban crime as reflecting demographics, age groups and the urban culture of cities like New York with high levels of poverty associated with illegal immigrants forced to live outside the law. She predicted that New York's then appalling crime rate would fall when newcomers settled down and accepted domestic patterns of group behaviour - thus the decline of the mafia. They would move out of illegal employment, especially anything related to drugs. Tuck also thought the murder rate would improve if New York did something about its dire hospital trauma services. Essentially, all this came to pass - New York's violent crime rate has halved since the 1990s.

Indeed, study after study has found no causal relationship between urban crime and incarceration, sentencing or police numbers. Nor is there, anti-gun liberals please take note, any relationship between gun crime and local gun controls. Trying to ban guns altogether, or obsessing about the undue political influence of the National Rifle Association, is completely barking up the wrong tree. After all, we need weapons to make revolution - we will not wake up one fine morning to find that we are magically living under socialism. But as communists have always argued, crime is not the product of aberrant individual psychology, or irredeemably 'bad people', but of *social conditions*. Any socialist who bangs on about the need for more 'bobbies on the beat' or getting tough on 'law and order' is not worthy of the name ●

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HISTORY

Victory of Dutch bourgeois revolution: 'Banquet of the crossbowmen's guild' (1648) by Bartholomeus van der Helst

Pulling the handbreak

How revolutionary were the bourgeois revolutions? Neil Davidson spoke to Communist University about the lessons for today

Bourgeois revolution is now a historical concept, but there are three reasons why the study of it, along with particular examples, are important.

One relates to those ideologues who pretend that capitalism just came into existence as a natural development. That it simply emerged as an economic system and that revolutions are unrelated political events. It is important for socialists to show that this is not true; that in fact capitalism was established through revolution, through the destruction of the old states and the creation of new ones.

The second reason concerns the historical meaning of those revolutions. When the Tea Party was emerging it referenced back to 1776 - a revolutionary moment in American history, which it was trying to claim as feeding into a contemporary rightwing agenda. In Britain, 1649, the civil war and the execution of the king is a bit too radical, so the 'glorious revolution' of 1688, because of its supposed peacefulness and smooth transition, is held up as a preferred alternative. Even when people accept that revolutions have taken place, there is a struggle over their significance in today's world.

The third reason is that some supporters of the capitalist system have tried to claim the term 'bourgeois revolution' back from the left. Norman Stone wrote that Thatcher was completing Oliver Cromwell's job by 'modernising Britain' in a capitalist direction. Christopher Hitchens claimed that by invading Iraq America was going to introduce the bourgeois revolution into the Middle East. These were ex-leftists taking over our vocabulary and using it to justify what imperialist states are doing in various parts of the world.

However, there are two problems for the left in getting to grips with the notion of bourgeois revolution.

Firstly, there is the notion of the 'bourgeois democratic revolution'. This is one of the most misleading concepts. The term was not used in 1848 and only emerged in debates in Russia leading up to 1905. Everyone

(except Trotsky) wrongly thought that the coming revolution in Russia would be bourgeois - to be followed by a period of capitalist development until such time as socialism was on the agenda. But there would also be a separate democratic revolution that would establish parliamentary democracy and allow the working class to take part in political life.

But under Stalinism this 'bourgeois democratic' notion became a cast-iron category - bourgeois revolutions in the past were now categorised as bourgeois democratic. And, of course, it was a stage that countries had to go through to get to the point where socialism was a possibility. In the 1920s Chinese communists were told that they were at the bourgeois-democratic stage and should not attempt to take power, as in Russia in 1917.

This Stalinist foreign policy meant holding back revolutionary movements - as in 1930s Spain, for example. But the concept of 'bourgeois democratic revolution' also got read back into history, so that this was what was supposed to have happened in France in 1789 or England in 1640, for example. But the trouble is, there are not many revolutions that conform to this kind of model. The French revolution especially was an exceptional event in European history. There are hardly any others like it.

Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn, although not Stalinists, partly borrowed from this notion. They argued in the 'Nairn-Anderson thesis' that England had not undergone a proper bourgeois democratic revolution. This is bizarre. Of all the revolutions that have happened, the English was the one that was structurally nearest to the French. No other matches up to the French in terms of the masses' involvement, the dynamic shifts, the move leftwards, the radical nature of the destruction of the monarchy, its territorial expansion and all the rest. However, bourgeois revolutions do not have to be democratic.

The second problem with the notion of bourgeois revolutions is the assumption they are carried out by capitalists - not the bourgeoisie,

but an actual capitalist class. There is a revisionist tendency, starting in the 1950s and 60s, where usually rightwing historians would point out that the French and English revolutions were not actually carried out by industrialists, bankers, merchants and so on. Therefore, they cannot have been anything to do with capitalism.

This is a sleight of hand. The bourgeoisie is bigger than capitalists alone. But this revisionism was picked up by leftwing thinkers as well - Marxists like Robert Brenner and his school, Ellen Meiksins Wood, George Comninel and various others. In essence they said those revolutions were nothing to do with capitalism. There was a way in which capitalism developed - in England particularly, and that spread around the world - but those revolutions had nothing to do with this.

In response let me make a couple of distinctions.

The first is between political revolution and social revolution. In the 1790s Tom Paine said that all previous revolutions had been purely political events - but the French was the only revolution that achieved something completely new in how it rearranged power and the state. But after him most people rejected even that. If you read standard works of people on the left from the 1820s and 30s they all say there has not yet been a social revolution - all revolutions up till then had been purely political. Effectively all that revolutions had done was to perfect the state, keeping class relations in place - the state had not been destroyed. That was still to come: the social revolution will be the socialist revolution.

This is the argument that Marx and Engels inherited in the 1840s. If you read their early works they talk about the social revolution still to come. It is not true that they derived the notion of bourgeois revolution from reading French historians of the restoration period - that is a legend of political Marxism. In fact they arrived at their notion of revolution through their engagement with Hegel. Eventually, they saw the working class as the agent

for transforming the world. What they did then was to read back the discovery of the proletarian revolution to the bourgeoisie itself.

Their argument, in about 1844-45, goes something like this. If the working class is going to make a revolution and create a new world, then the bourgeoisie must have done that themselves to transform feudalism into capitalism. That did not mean that they thought the bourgeoisie made the revolution in the same way the working class will. In a sense they created the category of bourgeois revolution by retrofitting it from their notion of proletarian revolution.

Notions of political and social revolutions are important. Political revolution changes the nature of the political regime, not society. There have been hundreds of revolutions of this sort. 1848 in France, for example, was that kind of revolution. Social revolution though is extraordinarily rare and I can identify three types: the revolution from slavery to feudalism in a small part of southern and western Europe around the 4th and 5th century; the bourgeois revolutions; and the socialist revolution. These are social revolutions that transform entire systems and entire societies.

So the bourgeois revolution was a type of social revolution, transforming the entire feudal world - which does not mean every single country has to go through its own bourgeois revolution.

That is the first distinction I want to make: political and social. The second is between class struggle *within* a system and class struggle that can *transform* a system. Slaves fighting against slave masters, peasants fighting against feudal lords - these are struggles that take place within slavery and feudalism: they do not have the intent or capacity of transforming society.

Peasants cannot provide the basis of a new system - we know of huge peasant risings throughout history, but they have never resulted in a new system. Likewise slaves - even a successful slave revolt essentially meant escape rather than transformation. All Spartacus and his army wanted to do was get the hell out of Italy and back

to where they had originally come from. There cannot be a new mode of production based on slaves any more than one based on peasants. So these were struggles within a system and generated by it, but they do not have the possibility of transforming it.

But with the bourgeoisie it was different. An alternative system of capitalism developed within feudalism. The bourgeoisie is, of course, a minority class, but under feudalism it was also an oppressed class as well as an exploiting class. It had the possibility of expanding the productive forces and transforming the world. It is clear that only the bourgeoisie and the working class had and have this potential to create a different kind of world.

We judge bourgeois revolutions by their consequences, their outcomes. It is the end result that matters, not the process and there are different ways to a capitalist state. This is where the 'bourgeois democratic' notion is completely wrong: it assumes a particular thing - democracy - which is not necessary.

Stalin was very fond of box-ticking: you're a nation if you have geographical unity, a common language, etc. They might be significant in particular cases, but it is the end result that matters: the destruction of a feudal state and the creation of a new form - one that is actually geared towards the reproduction of capital and capitalist relations. That is what a bourgeois revolution is and, as we have seen, it takes different forms.

Preconditions

So what were the preconditions for bourgeois revolutions? There are five, which follow on from and build on each other.

The first is a crisis of feudalism. That feudalism had reached the limits of its expansion - not just territorially, but in terms of the productive forces. There is some controversy about exactly when this happened and it varied from place to place. You can see that by the time the Black Death arrives in the middle of the 14th century feudalism had reached its limits. This seems to be the starting point for the

possibility of bourgeois revolutions.

Secondly, there must also be an actual alternative and in reality the capitalism emerging from the feudal system provided such an alternative. The elements that go into capitalism - merchants, trading, markets, wage labour etc - have existed throughout history. But under capitalism these are brought together into a dynamic new system. They are pooled into a relationship based on wage labour and on competitive accumulation.

It is a fallacy to reduce capitalism to markets. We have to be a bit more serious about this. Developing the productive forces is as much a human activity, an act of human agency, as the class struggle. The productive forces do not develop by themselves: people have to develop them. That means people have to do things that will change the world in which they operate.

Think about it. You are a peasant - endless toil for yourself and your family. You want to reduce that by having more efficient means of ploughing, or of manuring, so you hire people to do some of the work for you. You get more technical means of growing more crops. This allows you to sell more on the market, which allows you to hire more people to labour. You can see all sorts of reasons people would want to do this and have the possibility of doing it in certain conditions, so it is not the case that there is some kind of mechanistic way in which the productive forces develop. People consciously turned to what we now see as capitalist ways of organising economic activity - they were better than being a serf.

Thirdly, some things happen accidentally or contingently. Think about the great wars fought in absolutist states in the 14th and 15th centuries - you need armour, cannons and ships and it takes hundreds of workers to produce them. So, as a by-product of the need for better production, new economic relationships are formed that provide the basis of, or feed into, a new system.

In other words, the possibility of capitalist alternatives emerged out of feudal crisis. And then the existing state was a negative factor - controlling and holding back. In most parts of the world there were extraordinarily powerful states - what people used to call 'Asiatic' (although that is not a very useful term: we now refer to the tributary mode of production and tributary states - in China, Mughal India, the Ottoman and South American empires). These are a particular kind of state, run by a bureaucracy, in which land is not owned by private landowners, by and large, or by lords. The lords tended to function as a layer of bureaucrats given special powers by the empire, by the crown. These states were much more powerful and cohesive than the states that tended to arise in Europe. In supposedly centralised states, in England for instance, there was much more localised power.

Marx talks about the interstices of the system - capitalism developing in the gaps within the feudal system. He is partly thinking about this not as a geographical thing - feudal power was nothing like as total as the tributary power of the east. And this is one of the reasons why capitalism develops in the west: ie, the west's backwardness. The great empires of China or Mughal India had been much more developed than Western Europe for centuries. But, because they were so developed, there was no inbuilt process that might have led to capitalism, as was the case in Western Europe - especially the Netherlands and England, where the first revolutions began to happen.

The fourth precondition is the bourgeoisie itself as a revolutionary class: a class that sees itself as an alternative to the old feudal world. Now here we have to make a distinction between capitalists and the bourgeoisie in a wider sense. I think the best

discussion of this is by the American Marxist, Hal Draper. In the second volume of *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* he talks about imagining the capitalist class as a series of concentric circles. In the middle is the actual capitalist class - bankers, industrialists and capitalist landowners, etc, who are at the heart of the system. But around are other parts of the bourgeoisie - people who do not necessarily exploit workers directly, but whose income is derived from the exploitation of the working class: journalists, soldiers, priests, ideologues ... These people become the outer core of the bourgeois class and are usually far more numerous than the actual capitalists. They are extremely important.

In this context it is worth mentioning a myth about Lenin - that he said the working class needed leadership from outside in order to become class-conscious, organise and so on. Various people, such as Draper and Lars T Lih, have pointed out that this is not true. Rather, Lenin said that revolutionary consciousness did not emerge automatically from the process of working in factories and so on: it had to come from outside the real experience of the workers and their situation. They would develop a form of consciousness in that situation, but not necessarily a revolutionary consciousness. However, that does not mean that middle class intellectuals need to tell workers how to organise. It means that *something outside the daily experience of the class* is needed - some scientific way of looking at the world.

Nevertheless, when it comes to the bourgeoisie, in some ways it is true that it needed leadership that was not tied up with the daily competition between different capitalists: people who took a broader view, precisely because they were not directly involved with the economic processes of capitalism. If you think about the bourgeoisie in the French revolution, what were they? Journalists, lawyers, etc, rather than capitalists.

EP Thompson has a great line about this: industrialists and bankers are not renowned for rushing to the barricades with bandoliers on their shoulders. Correct! They are usually somewhere else! Revolutions are violent upheavals, in which property gets damaged, so you do not go there unless you are really desperate - or you get someone else to do it for you, which was usually the case with the bourgeoisie.

So this 'non-economic bourgeoisie' - let us call it that for convenience - has advantages because its components are not in competition with each other. This is the thing about capitalists - they can never be completely united against the working class. As Adam Smith says in *The wealth of nations*, capitalists do not make for good governments, because they only pursue their own interests. They may not even think about the broader interests of their own system, because they are too busy competing with one another. In many respects Adam Smith was a sensible guy.

But it is not only about the state: it is also about political leadership. Because lawyers, journalists and so on are not competing with each other in that way, they are capable of taking a broader view on what needs to be done. Crucially, they are capable of transgressing property rights if necessary. Think about Year Two of the French revolution. Some of the laws that are passed are truly damaging, or at least restricting, in terms of capital. But they were necessary to win the struggle against the counterrevolutionary armies, defeat internal plotting, etc. So on a temporary basis the leaders of the revolution were prepared to transgress property rights in a way that actual capitalists would not.

This 'non-economic bourgeoisie' is also closer as a group to the petty bourgeois masses. It shares more their style of life, and is able to give

them leadership in a way that rich and very rich capitalists could not. Why would you listen to some capitalist who is exploiting people and has amassed huge wealth? But someone like Robespierre was able to speak to these masses and mobilise them.

Fifthly, we need ideologies of transformation to give people the courage or motivation to take on the absolutist state. There is a great passage in *The eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* where Marx talks about how people making bourgeois revolutions always look back to someone before them as the model to follow: Cromwell looked back to the *Old Testament*; leaders of the French revolution looked back to the Roman and classical worlds; in 1848 they looked back to 1789. This is what partly distinguishes bourgeois from socialist revolutions.

Radicalisation

Let us now consider the actual revolutions themselves. The two earliest bourgeois revolutions are in the Netherlands from 1567 onwards and in England from 1640 - unsurprisingly, in the states where capitalist production was most developed (I insist that the Netherlands was a highly developed capitalist state, as opposed to some political Marxists, who claim it was not). In both cases, initially anyway, it was a radicalised form of Calvinism that provided the ideology for the revolutionary movement.

In the Netherlands there were some merchants involved in the leadership of the movement. But a lot of it was driven from below by the petty bourgeoisie. Calvinism was an iconoclastic ideology that attacked Catholicism and its symbols - not just the absolutist state, but a foreign one: the Spanish Hapsburg state, which ruled the Netherlands. So it was a struggle against external absolutism, whereas in England the absolutism was native.

Because capitalism was so advanced in the Netherlands and England, the destruction of the existing state removed the final barrier to capitalism's free development. It did not matter what the reasons were for acting against the existing state, even if they were intensely religious; together with the monarchy, it was smashed, allowing the possibility for a new system to emerge. Attempts to roll things back by Charles II and then James II were ultimately unsuccessful. 1688 was the final stopper - the final nail tap that finished off the possibility of absolutist revival in England (although not yet in Scotland at this point).

This is usually seen as decisive in English terms and it was, but not in global terms. At that point the Netherlands economy had gone into a decline, so England was the only substantial capitalist state in the world in 1688, although its empire had not yet expanded to the point where it dominated everything. The Italian city-states that started the transition to capitalism were smashed in the 14th century by the local feudal lords and by the Spanish Hapsburgs, while in Bohemia the beginnings of an agricultural capitalism were destroyed at the Battle of White Mountain in 1620. Feudal absolutists had done pretty well in seeing off the capitalist threat in all these places over 500 years.

Until the middle of the 18th century there was no guarantee that capitalism was going to emerge as a world system. We have to be clear about this: it was not inevitable, but depended on political events. The turning point was about 1759, when two things happened.

First, Scotland - the counterrevolutionary heartland in the British Isles, which held the possibility of a kind of absolutist resurgence, based on the Stuart monarchy supported by France - was finally smashed after the battle of Culloden. Scottish feudalism was then abolished legally - it was the only place in Europe, apart from France, where this was actually written into law. Abolition of people's right

to hold weapons, of certain kinds of feudal tenure and so on was wiped out in Scotland. The counterrevolutionary threat was destroyed.

Then the Seven Years War from 1756 to 1763 saw the final triumph of Britain over France in Canada, in the West Indies, in India and in West Africa. This meant that the global system would be based on what Britain had done rather than on the French empire. The Seven Years War is not usually seen as a decisive moment, but I think it was: it set the seal on what had happened up to that point and meant that a capitalist world was now inevitable. How each country got there was different, but from that point it was clearly beginning to happen. Even if you look at France through the defeats of the 1750s and 60s, you can see the monarchy beginning to allow elements of capitalism to develop. France was the most advanced feudal state at the time; this had to happen if it was to compete with Britain.

The French revolution was an exceptional event. Like the Netherlands and like England it was a mass event, particularly in Paris and the large cities (that was also true of the English revolution and London). But in France capitalism was less developed than in the Netherlands or England. That allowed radicalism to flourish because there was not an already entrenched set of capitalist relations: the feeling in France was 'We want to be like Britain'. In some cases that was also true of lowland Scotland after 1760: 'Why are we bound by this feudal system that was overthrown 100 years ago in England?'

So there was a conscious attempt to imitate - but, of course, attempts to imitate rarely end up in the way intended and it was somewhat different in France. The French Revolution was the highest point of popular involvement in a bourgeois revolution, but for that reason it also acted as an awful warning about what can happen if things get out of control. This was particularly clear during the revolutions of 1848. Everyone, including Marx and Engels, expected that 1848 was going to be the moment when 1789 would be reproduced - especially in Germany and other parts of Europe - but that did not happen, not least because the bourgeoisie itself was quite cowardly.

Marx showered abuse on the German bourgeoisie for its cowardice and miserable backwardness, partly because he was trying to goad it into action. But there is a political reason why it did not imitate the French bourgeoisie: it had seen what happened during the French Terror. The French bourgeoisie feared the radicalism of the masses, but something else too: it also feared the *backwardness* of the masses. Think about events in Naples or in Spain, where sections of the peasantry lined up with the monarchy against the liberals and radicals - supported, of course, by the British.

So this fear of both the radicalism of the masses and their reactionary nature - which meant they might line up with the old ruling class - paralysed the bourgeoisie to the extent that it was unwilling to push the revolutionary movement to the necessary stage of actually overthrowing the various monarchs, particularly in Germany.

What happened instead was extraordinary. Otto Von Bismarck - not a member of the bourgeoisie, but of the landed nobility - was one of the Prussian Junkers who put down the revolution of 1848-49. He knew that if there was going to be a revolution it would have to be made by the bourgeoisie, rather than risk what might happen if it was driven by the working class. Against the wishes of some of his own class, most of whom were not as far-sighted, Bismarck pushed through a bourgeois revolution, in wars against Austria, Denmark and France (which led incidentally to the Paris Commune - that was not in the plan!),

and Germany emerged from it all as a coherent power.

Something similar happened in Italy, and in Japan with the Meiji restoration, with sections of the old ruling classes pushing through a bourgeois revolution. That meant it was done in a conservative, undemocratic way and usually retained all the paraphernalia of empire, just as in Germany.

But that is not so different from Britain. Towards the end of the 19th century the monarchy in Britain took on its current role, becoming the great bloated thing that is supposed to be such a significant national institution - quite similar to the creation of the German emperor.

Scotland after 1746 was a forerunner of that process. There was a top-down revolution, in which the political aspect is dealt with and then the system was transformed to one dominated by capitalism. Something similar also happened in Canada, where under the auspices of the British colonial regime a new state was created. And in America too - but here it was different because there was an actual capitalist class waging a struggle against the pre-capitalist regime of the Confederacy. And again things went further than was originally intended: Abraham Lincoln went into the war not in order to free the slaves, but to maintain the union. But by the end of the war not only had he adopted abolition as a goal: he had black troops fighting against the Confederacy. In the struggle to crush the south, the USA is probably the last moment when what you might call the popular element of the bourgeois revolution surfaced.

Theoretically the bourgeois revolutions should have come to an end as a possible political outcome on October 25 1917, when Lenin said at the congress of soviets: "We shall now begin to construct the socialist order." From that point on it should have been socialism that was on the agenda. But, as we know, that did not happen - Stalinism played an extraordinary role in driving the counterrevolution in Russia, which was achieved by the late 1920s. Elsewhere, however, it played a different role - in some places in enacting what are essentially political revolutions, as I defined them earlier on: for example, in eastern Europe. State capitalism by Russian tanks.

But Stalinism was a revolutionary force as well - in China above all, and in Vietnam, Yugoslavia and Albania. All had Stalinist parties that made revolutions. But these revolutions were effectively the modern version of the bourgeois revolution - state capitalism. But that is a debate - depending on whether you think state capitalism exists or not. If you do, it seems logical to conclude that, if Bismarck can create capitalist states top-down, then there is no reason why Stalinist bureaucrats cannot do the same thing on a nationalist basis.

However, that process reached its climax in the mid-1970s. Think of the destruction of the Portuguese empire in Africa: Guinea Bissau, Mozambique and Angola; also the destruction of the old regimes in Indochina and the overthrow of Haile Selassie's Ethiopian empire - all of this between 1973 and 1975. So this is the absolute high point: the final destruction of the old.

Marx once said that revolutions are locomotives of history. He was challenged on that by Walter Benjamin, who disputed the analogy. A revolution is not a locomotive, in his view: a socialist revolution is more like somebody pulling the handbrake to stop the train going off the edge of a cliff.

In a way that is a nice metaphor. Bourgeois revolutions were indeed locomotives of history, but the socialist revolution will be us pulling the handbrake - in order hopefully to create a new society ●

IRELAND

Defeat is victory

Gerry Adams may take pride in the legacy of Sinn Féin under his leadership, but Kevin Bean wonders how he will ultimately be regarded

One of the most frequently reproduced images of the Irish Republican Army's 1994 ceasefire was of a Sinn Féin car cavalcade driving through west Belfast with tricolours flying and bystanders cheering. Its message was clear: the IRA was undefeated and the Provisional movement remained a force to be reckoned with. In a language that would become familiar over the next 25 years, the IRA's statement announcing the ceasefire argued that republican objectives could now be pursued politically through "unarmed struggle" and dialogue as part of an Irish peace process. It continued:

Our struggle has seen many gains and advances made by nationalists and for the democratic position. We believe that an opportunity to secure a just and lasting settlement has been created. We are therefore entering into a new situation ... determined that the injustices which created the conflict will be removed and confident in the strength and justice of our struggle to achieve this ... We urge everyone to approach this new situation with energy, determination and patience.¹

This statement and the orchestration of these events in the early stages of the peace process tell us a great deal about the politics and strategy that Gerry Adams and his comrades in the Provisional leadership would pursue in the future. For the next quarter of a century Adams would constantly repeat that political retreat was a form of advance and that defeat was victory. There was a "new situation" and a "new phase of struggle", marking the "beginning of the transition towards an Ireland of Equals".² Even in his final speech summing up his political legacy to the February 2018 *SF ard fheis* he continued to argue in a similar vein.³

However, throughout these years, such claims were not uncontested, either by unionists or, most importantly, by republican and socialist critics of the Adams' leadership. Ian Paisley, for example, could quite accurately claim in one of his valedictory interviews that he had successfully "smashed Sinn Féin" because of its participation in government as "ministers of the crown" and the party's *de facto* acceptance of the constitutional status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom.⁴ For unionists, Martin McGuinness's historic handshake with Queen Elizabeth in June 2012 was the icing on the cake and a symbolic confirmation of the final political accommodation made by the Provisionals.⁵

As if to confirm this unionist self-satisfaction, from the beginning many republicans were completely sceptical that Adams' strategy could be successful in achieving the goal of a 32-county socialist republic.⁶ At various stages

throughout the 1990s and 2000s, these critics mounted political challenges to both the ideological and organisational dominance that Gerry Adams exerted over the Provisional movement.⁷ At all the key turning points in the journey from guns to government - the acceptance of the 'Mitchell principles' committing the Provisionals to exclusively "democratic and peaceful politics" in 1997; SF's welcome for the Good Friday agreement in 1998 and its participation in the executive in 1999; the formal ending of the IRA's armed campaign and the complete decommissioning of its weapons in 2005; SF's support for policing and the justice system in 2007; or, following the St Andrews agreement, participation in government with the Democratic Unionist Party in that same year - Adams faced quite serious internal opposition, which he was always able to see off with varying degrees of ease.⁸

Tide of history?

In the two previous articles, I have outlined some of the factors that might have contributed to the success of Adams' revisionist project from the 1980s, including the internal dynamics of the Provisional movement, developments in the political economy of both the Northern and 26-County states, the changing social and political composition of the nationalist population, and the significantly altered external and international political terrain on which republicans operated after 1989.⁹ This new configuration clearly aided the Provisional leadership and as a result, in comparison with both their internal opponents and 'dissident republicans', they appeared to be strongly swimming with the tide of history. Consequently it was easy for Adams and his followers to dismiss dissident opposition as "out of time" or "conflict junkies" - especially in the wake of their botched operations

and shootings of police officers.¹⁰

By the 2000s, Adams electoral strategy seemed to be paying dividends on both sides of the border. In Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin's share of the vote grew in tandem with its movement into the mainstream and into government: before the ceasefire it polled 12.5% in the 1993 local government elections, rising to 17.7% in the first assembly elections in 1998. In the 2001 Westminster poll SF narrowly beat the Social Democratic and Labour Party in terms of votes, with a 21.7% share, before going on to consolidate its position as the leading nationalist party throughout the 2000s. Following the St Andrews agreement with the DUP in 2006, the party's share of the vote continued to grow, reaching 27.9% in the 2017 assembly elections - just 0.2% and one seat behind the DUP. A similar process was evident in the 2017 Westminster election, which saw SF maintain its place as the dominant nationalist party.¹¹

One significant outcome of this long electoral march was Martin McGuinness's election as deputy first minister in 2007; another, the appointment of Sinn Féin members of the legislative assembly (MLAs) to important ministries in the executive. Whilst south of the border the growth has not been so dramatic or rapid, the Adams strategy has increasingly seen Leinster House as the key electoral battle ground. Drawing on the 'reflected glory' of the northern peace process and by positioning SF as a radical anti-establishment voice, it increased its representation to five TDs in 2002 and two MEPs in 2004.

The collapse of the Celtic Tiger, and the ensuing political and economic crisis after 2008, have provided excellent electoral opportunities for Sinn Féin: in the 2011 general election it more than trebled its TDs to 14, whilst Martin McGuinness's 13.72% vote in the presidential election in the same year further consolidated the party's base. In the 2016 general election SF representation continued to grow - its 23 TDs made it the third largest party.¹² Even before Gerry

Adams and the old guard stepped down from the leadership in February 2018 (to be replaced by Mary Lou McDonald's new generation), SF's focus was increasingly on the possibilities of coalition politics and the prospects of ministerial positions in the southern state.¹³

Successful career

In the conventional terms of bourgeois electoral politics, Gerry Adams' career could be counted a success. Even the current stalemate in the devolved government of the north and the continued political polarisation between SF and the DUP at Stormont can be said to work in the party's favour.¹⁴ As the most energetic and determined defenders of the nationalist electorate, Sinn Féin successfully mobilised voters in the 2017 assembly and Westminster elections with forms of communalised politics and rallying cries to defend the gains of the Belfast agreement in the face of unionist bigotry and sectarianism.¹⁵

However, when nationalist and unionist politicians battle with equal determination over flags, languages, communalised housing and resource allocation, it becomes increasingly difficult to tell the sham from the real fights - except perhaps that the 'real' are frequently marked by their remoteness from the issues actually relevant to the lives of the people in the Six Counties.¹⁶ For republicans and socialists, this defenderist and particularist nationalism is a far cry from even the limited promises of Adams in 1998 - much less the democratic, universalist republican demand for Irish reunification. The Good Friday agreement was sold by the Provisional leadership as a "great experiment", which opened up the possibilities for a transition towards reunification, by providing the "architecture for an all-Ireland government". It would be

part of the seed that could grow into all-Ireland governance ... the possibility of all-Ireland justice and policing, accountable to the people; an all-Ireland economic strategy, or growth path, for a human rights-based economy; all-Ireland governance of environmental, health, rural development, education - not just a united Ireland, and a New Ireland of Equals, of Human Rights.¹⁷

Despite the positive rhetoric of the new generation of Provisional leaders and the seemingly unchallengeable electoral proof of success in both jurisdictions, the promises made by Gerry Adams throughout the peace process remain unfulfilled. The transition towards a

united Ireland in the terms laid out in the Good Friday agreement has not only remained *unachieved* in the 20 years since 1998, but, given the need to obtain unionist consent, will remain *unachievable* for much more than the next 20 years - irrespective of the hopes placed by desperate Provisional politicians in border polls and the shifting demography of the northern state.

The current consociational dispensation ushered in by the Good Friday agreement, and confirmed by the St Andrews agreement, places severe structural limitations on the possibilities of any real political development, even for such a partial and communal project as contemporary Provisionalism. Given these barriers to even limited change, much less the realisation of the revolutionary, transformative agenda of Irish reunification, how long will the Adams' strategy of angling for parliamentary power be able to satisfy Sinn Féin's electoral base?

His success looks to be very time-limited indeed. Thus, despite the superficial signs of electoral success, the future of the inheritance that Gerry Adams' passes on to the new generation of leaders looks far from certain.¹⁸ Will the very factors that underpinned the 'success' of the Adams project in the Six Counties ultimately contribute to its eventual decline on both sides of the border? ●

Notes

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2. For an example of this rhetoric see 'Gerry Adams addresses Sinn Féin all-Ireland conference on border region', October 24 2006: www.irelandofequals.com/news/2074.
3. www.irishtimes.com/news/full-text-of-gerry-adams-speech-1.836516.
4. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7285912.stm.
5. www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/jun/27/queen-martin-mcguinness-shake-hands.
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9. K. Bean, 'A man and his movement' *Weekly Worker* February 15 2018; and 'Genesis of "new" Sinn Féin' *Weekly Worker* February 22 2018. For an account of these wider background factors see also K. Bean *The new politics of Sinn Féin* Liverpool 2008, pp16-50, pp138-73.
10. See, for example, 'Murderers are traitors to Ireland-McGuinness' *The News Letter* March 11 2009; and 'The curse of the conflict junkies' *The Economist* December 2 2010.
11. www.ark.ac.uk/elections.
12. <http://electionsireland.org/results.cfm>.
13. P. Leahy, 'Mary Lou McDonald: a Dubliner with deep republican roots' *Irish Times* February 13 2018.
14. Peter Robinson, former first minister and DUP leader, suggested in 2007 that any future DUP/Sinn Féin government would involve 'a battle a day' (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern-ireland/6414637.stm>).
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16. P. Mitchell, G. Evans and B. O'Leary 'Extremist outbidding in ethnic party systems is not inevitable: tribune parties in Northern Ireland' *Political Studies* 2009 Vol 57, pp397-421.
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Gerry Adams and Charles Windsor. No wonder Unionists claim that they won the victory

AGGREGATE

Waiting for Zola

The April 8 joint CPGB/Labour Party Marxists aggregate had two agenda items - the battle in the Labour Party and the danger of war in the Middle East. **William Sarsfield** reports that there was plenty to think about

John Bridge kicked proceedings off with an item on the Labour Party. The comrade gave us a useful summary of the battle that has unfolded in the Labour Party since Corbyn became leader in September 2015. He emphasised that the historic opportunity to transform Labour was not the result of the traditional symbiotic relationship between left and right wings in the party; this was a chance development, delivered to us on a plate by a gaggle of right wing "morons", as they accurately designated themselves.¹

Their agonies continue and are gratifying, of course. However, the comrade emphasised that the background of the situation in the Middle East - and Gaza specifically - "shines some sort of light" on why the bourgeoisie is still aggressively hostile to any idea of a Corbyn government. As you would expect of the man, his take on Gaza has been relatively mild, but still a clear moral stance against the actions of Israel and in solidarity with those gunned down by its soldiers. A stark contrast to foreign secretary Boris Johnson's invisibility on the issue.

There are also domestic reasons. The Confederation of British Industry has warned that Corbyn's programme of nationalisation (comrade Bridge paused at this point and wondered aloud - "what programme of nationalisation?") would be "worse than a hard Brexit". He observed that "to equate a Corbyn government" - with its insipid proposals for some limited renationalisations here and there - with the rupture of Brexit indicates the real fear amongst big business.

Of course, there is more to it than this. "It is Corbyn's past, his statements against Nato, his stance on wars like Iraq" and - crucially, the comrade emphasised - the perception of the ruling class that the election of a government led by the man might well spark a "crisis of expectations". The comrade's assessment is that a great deal is being projected onto both Corbyn as an individual politician and a future Labour Party led by him. "The scare tactics" deployed by the bourgeois media and its friends in the Parliamentary Labour government - which have included Corbyn's links with Hamas, the IRA, the spectre of his "Marxism" - have just not worked and the ruling class is rattled by the "danger" of a Corbyn victory.

So we have seen the serial leaks from the Labour right wing, open rebellion culminating in shadow cabinet resignations and the 172-strong PLP no confidence vote against him, the second leadership contest with McNicol's disenfranchisement of thousands of potential Corbyn supporters (including one Catherine Starr, who was suspended for writing "I fucking love the Foo Fighters"), etc. Comrade Bridge noted that although this squalid guerrilla warfare was "surreal and quite clearly a fix directed against Corbyn", the press chimed in with the basic mantra of the right - Corbyn was out of his depth, he was incompetent, he would lose the next general election and lose it badly.

Comrade Bridge reminded us that he too had expected a Corbyn-led general election campaign would see big losses for Labour. Like many commentators, he admitted, wrongly.



Zionist CAA besiege Labour HQ

Complacency and the sentiment that 'peace' needs to break out in the party is a dangerous illusion, however. "In my view", he underlined, "the civil war began well before Corbyn was elected, and until Corbyn is totally tamed and the left is purged from the Labour Party, this civil war will not stop."

Before the right of the party laid hold of the extremely effective anti-Semitism provocation, they tried out others. What was interesting about this, the comrade noted, was that they were often "laying hold of the weapons of the left to use against the left." Eg, a window broken at Angela Eagle's office was rebranded as "homophobia". Implausibly, her Constituency Labour Party was "rife with homophobia", we were told.

Anti-Semitism trumps them all, however. Labour is now "awash" with this foul prejudice, we are meant to believe. In fact, it is "extremely marginal" and the comrade reminded the meeting that, when we have encountered anti-Semitism, we have dealt promptly and firmly with it.² Of course, he observed, this was an utterly "cynical" campaign by the establishment, given its fetid history of anti-Jewish prejudice and persecution.

Corbyn's placid, yielding demeanour in the face this onslaught is his tactical/personal choice, comrade Bridge underlined. But "with every concession he gives, with every blow he takes without retaliation, every apology he issues for some imaginary 'offence' the rest of us are tainted. It is clearly not his conscious intention, but his Christ-like appetite for submission to suffering and passivity "opens the door for anyone to be charged with causing 'offence' or with the extraordinarily elastic category of 'anti-Semitism'".

Where are the voices of sanity in the mainstream media, comrade Bridge asked? "I really am waiting for our equivalent of Emile Zola", he said. "Where is our great public intellectual, who can dissect this nonsense and nail this provocation, to say 'J'accuse...?'"³ The last thing the venal Labour right and their allies in the mainstream media want is a rational, sane debate on this issue. If it happened, "they would lose and lose very badly", the comrade

bluntly stated.

Winding up, comrade Bridge suggested we need to ring the alarm bell against complacency in the Labour ranks. For the reasons already stated, the notion that the ruling class would be sanguine about Corbyn casually strolling into No10 Downing Street in the event of a Labour victory in the next general election is foolish.

The majority of the PLP remain implacably hostile and will remain so even if he delivers them a victory. The constitutional monarchy system requires the leader of the biggest party in the Commons to assure the monarch that they can command a parliamentary majority. It's not too hard to imagine that - against a media barrage of hysteria over the prospect of a 'Marxist' in No10 - others might step forward to side-line him. Who? "How about Keir Starmer?" Comrade Bridge speculated. It would not be too fanciful to imagine a figure like him getting the support of 'left wing' Tories, Lib Dems and perhaps the Scottish National Party? The ongoing nightmare of Brexit then disappears along with the Corbyn bogeyman. The comrade underlined that "I'm not saying that will happen, but the left ought to be conscious" of the danger.

The future is uncertain - full of dangers and possibilities. It presents huge tasks for the left - sections of which, stupidly, remain outside the Labour Party - "voluntarily", he pointedly noted.

In the discussion, comrades took up three broad themes.

First, anti-Semitism. Comrade Moshé Machover - a guest at the meeting - commented on the fluid nature of the definition of 'anti-Semitism'. This 'new anti-Semitism' is "not a recent invention" of pro-imperialist groups like the Alliance for Workers Liberty and "not even an invention of the local enemies of Jeremy Corbyn." The comrade flagged up as important a developing "crisis" between Israel and Jews throughout the rest of the world. This was something that we should recognise as "one of the motives" behind the witch-hunt in Labour.

James Harvey reported on the situation in his local CLP where

Momentum members are consciously avoiding any serious discussion of anti-Semitism. It's "too difficult a topic", people are told. He notes a "chill factor" on the left's ability to even talk about it. The problem does not just stem from the right and its bellicose campaign; the left's notions of "offence" and "identity politics" issues have contributed.

Second - rationality. Mike Macnair pointed out that part of this process involved the stage by stage abolition of freedom of speech. There is an implication in that movement that "war is not far off", a confirmation of the adage that "truth is the first casualty." So, this furore in Labour is intimately "linked to developments in the Middle East." The really "scary thing" however is the connection to "a lot of bellicose noises against Russia". A confrontation that implies a great power war.

I backed up comrade Macnair's point about the authoritarian irrationality and the restrictions on people's ability to think and speak critically. The attacks of the right wing are often not simply "an attack on people's rights, on their freedom of speech - they're an attack on rationality" itself, I said. An expression of the fact that the right are aware that they cannot win in an open and honest debate.

Stan Keable mentioned the circular from Jennie Formby informing comrades that while discussing issues - concretely, the anti-Semitism controversy - you "mustn't criticise anyone" or be "unhelpful" by calling out peoples' motives for raising the issue. This sort of hypersensitive irrationality is endemic in Labour, and not simply on the right.

Third - political independence. I commented that we needed to get "a sense of urgency" about this question of the political independence of the working class and - more concretely - the independence of the left from Corbyn and Corbynism. Not an easy task, I thought, given its "endemic tailism". I get "moans in the pub" after meetings; no "notion of a coherent organised platform" that would support Corbyn when he is supportable and draw a hard line against him when he's not.

Comrade Keable suggested that the

Achilles heel of the Labour left as far as political independence goes is the obsession with "electability". In pursuit of this the left will accept stringent restrictions on itself and its ability to take an independent stand.

Comrade Macnair pointed out that this was an incredibly hard task, given that our movement "has so much lost elementary forms of class political independence" in general. That said, the mere fact of Corbyn's leadership victory "opens up in the Labour Party and the labour movement ... a fluidity, a chaos period" where a great deal can be achieved.

War danger

The second agenda item - on the Middle East - was introduced by Yasmine Mather and was an expansion of her article in last week's paper.⁴ "We live in uncertain times", she observed - primarily because the Trump presidency has divested itself of all the "sane" people, as the Democrat opposition had dubbed the departees. Her opening looked at the convulsions in the White House, the unstable nature of the Trump administration as evidenced by tensions and friction between individual rivals, and the consequences of recent changes in personnel.

A theme running through all of this is the question of the nuclear deal with Iran, so the comrade took some time to explain national security advisor Bolton's vision for that country - "just as he had a vision for Iraq", the comrade pointedly commented. While his appointment does not make an attack on Iran certain, it adds to the uncertainty in general, she said.

The comrade spent a considerable amount of time on the 'Bolton vision' - shared by Trump - for a post theocracy Iran, and then answering questions and comments on this from the meeting. What is this alternative? "It's a cult", she told us. "It's called the Mujahedin-e-Khalq" - a perverse and greatly diminished sect kept half-aflot by Saudi money and living, weirdly, in a tower block in Albania.

The key points comrade Mather made were that the MEK are simply not a viable alternative to establish a regime in Iran (or anywhere on the planet, frankly). The US can wreak havoc in Iran or anywhere else in the Middle East - with or without nuclear weapons. In the aftermath of the defeat of Iran, a project might be the break-up of the country into national entities. But comrade Mather illustrated the problems involved with this, given the inter-penetration of the peoples of the area and the reliance of local elites on Tehran - an enormously complex picture.

The Iranian regime has shown that it is capable of retreating. But it faces a government in Washington "that is not into nation-building", she said. "It is actually in favour of break-ups and destruction."

"Uncertain times" indeed ●

Notes

1. As characterised by Margaret Beckett MP.
2. 'No place for anti-Semitism' *Weekly Worker* September 18 2014.
3. 'J'accuse...!' ('I accuse...!') was an open letter published in January 1898 by the writer Emile Zola, accusing the French government of anti-Semitism over the jailing of Alfred Dreyfus, a French army general staff officer imprisoned for espionage.
4. 'Triple alliance piles on pressure' *Weekly Worker* April 5 2018.

POLEMIC

That's what they want

Who's afraid of conspiracy theorists? Not Paul Demarty for one

The world is abuzz with talk of conspiracy theories.

There are two immediate causes. Firstly the attack on Sergei and Yulia Skripal is back in the news; British intelligence services now claim that they have pinpointed the lab from which the nerve agent used came. The finger definitely points towards Russia, with the two remotely plausible options being that this was an authorised Russian state hit or the work of 'rogue elements' in the Russian security services. However, the dark soil of espionage and counter-espionage was ever fertile ground for more exotic explanations of events, and so people (notably the former ambassador Craig Murray) continue to talk about Porton Down and the Ukrainians and MI6 and whoever else.

Elsewhere, the anti-Semitism scandal continues to spread outside of even its notional bounds, never mind the bounds of reason. We highlight in this connection, firstly, Nick Cohen, whose increasingly one-note output seems to have even exhausted the patience of the *Observer* and *New Statesman*, leaving him only the *Spectator's* website to froth out of. In yet another shrill fusillade on the subject of supposed left-wing Jew-hatred, Cohen cited not softness on dreadful Islamists as the problem for once, but hostility to "high finance", "every denunciation of [which] on the modern left sooner or later invokes 'the Rothschilds' rather than 'the Goodwins'"'.¹ A similar note was struck by Brendan O'Neill, the editor of the *Spiked!* website, in an article arguing that the left's anti-Semitism 'problem' stems from its conspiratorial critique of capitalism, as exemplified by the Occupy movement which O'Neill despised from beginning to end.²

Both Cohen and O'Neill are guilty, ultimately, of cherry-picking; Cohen is somehow still obsessed with this blasted mural in East London, believing it somehow represents the truth about the left; O'Neill picks out four or five isolated incidents in order to build up an image of leftwing Jew-hatred, necessarily ignoring 99.9% of all the goings-on in his hated Occupy camps, and on his hated pro-Palestine demonstrations. There is something interesting about this procedure, to which we shall return.

There are two aspects to this question, then: one is the role of conspiracy theory in the intellectual life of the political non-mainstream, especially in this connection the left, but also the right; the second is the role assigned to conspiracy theory in the polemics of the political mainstream against its opponents.

Shadows

The first thing that needs addressing is - why do people believe conspiracy theories? But that in turn is unanswerable without first asking: what is a conspiracy theory?

We could list examples of the genre that all would agree on: the stories, for example, that the moon landings were faked for Cold War propaganda purposes; that the leaders of world Jewry are conspiring to dominate the world through the banks and the socialist movement; that the September 11 attacks were an operation of the US deep state; and so on. The through-line would appear to be the explanation of some set of complex world phenomena by the referral to some super-powerful cabal operating in the shadows.

The trouble with leaving it here, of course, is that by the same token the idea that the Democratic presidential campaign of 1972 was systematically sabotaged by a clique of people around the president, including senior staff at the FBI and CIA, is equally a conspiracy theory. However, it happens to be true. In short: there really are conspiracies,



Some conspiracies are real ... others plain wacky

sometimes involving very powerful people who really ought to know better. (An even greater illustration would be post-war Italian history, in which prominent actors included the far-right elite Masonic lodge *Propaganda Due*, state-sponsored fascist terror groups and the Vatican bank; only David Icke's lizards are missing.)

I feel confident in citing these two examples because neither are in any real doubt. There are probably more flat-earthers than there are believers in Richard Nixon's innocence; the literature around P2 and Operation Gladio is also extensive, although it shades into the esoteric at points. An important feature of real-world conspiracies is that they are devilishly difficult to keep secret. The security of any system is the vulnerability of its weakest link; human beings are very weak links, however, and if their moral qualms don't get them, their cowardice will when asked tough questions by prosecutors.³ You can, of course, noble the prosecutors; but that merely introduces more human beings into the system, and thus more points of weakness.

The conspiracy theorist, then, must be the person who believes in conspiracies in which it is not reasonable to believe; there is ample evidence that things happened more or less as they are said to have done, yet somehow no evidence will ever be enough. The conspiracy theorist relies on rhetorically impressive but logically weak arguments; any evidence given by, say, a state agency about the sequence of events on September 11 2001 is dismissed on the *ad hominem* basis that 'they would say that'; any snag in the official theory is presented as a knockdown argument for its general falsity; responses to snags in the conspiracy theory lead not to more economical explanations but ever more layers of baroque complexity, as befell the defenders of geocentric cosmology in the late middle ages.

Now some of this sounds familiar - indeed, we have enumerated among these features precisely the sort of cherry-picking we previously identified in the articles by Cohen and O'Neill, but they are not usually called conspiracy theorists.⁴ So to meet the common-sense definition of the term, one needs also to escape the protective umbrella of official politics. That leaves some of our more simple-hearted comrades on the left, and a rum old crew on the right.

Hills

The right-wing form of the conspiracy theory is not a new phenomenon, and it has real social roots.

The right's opposition to the extension of democracy and economic egalitarianism is, on the face of it, a

problem for it; for the very small numbers of people rewarded by such inequality cannot of themselves provide enough social weight to support the structure. They thus demand, in general, *false* beliefs to promote to putative plebeian supporters, of which conspiracy theories are merely one particular variety (the timelessness of the British constitution and the efficiency of markets are others). This contradiction has the result that plebeian rightism is dominated by a few individuals, with the ordinary folks playing the role of 'angry mob'. It is thus quite atomising; it does not provide a truly satisfactory collective life, creating a kind of ratchet effect in which, for some, the circle enclosing 'the enemy' gets wider.

The conspiracy theory in its 'usual' rightwing form finds its place here, drawing a link between tyranny and the left (or liberals - there is usually scarcely much difference so far as these believers are concerned), and ultimately to traitorous mainstream rightists.

The model here is the aforementioned *Protocols*, which was aggressively promoted by the tsarist regime to the great misfortune of Russian Jews and socialists - never mind when the Hitler movement got hold of the same basic ideas in Versailles-crippled Weimar Germany. Yet it persists today, most clearly in elements of the American right, whose national plebeian ideology of hatred of (especially foreign) tyranny leads to the phenomena of 'survivalists' hiding out in the hills of Montana from the New World Order, armed far-right movements of the sort that gave rise to Timothy McVeigh, and now the alt-right, which frequently indulges in anti-Semitic conspiracy theorising.

Perhaps this also illuminates the parts of the left that overlap with the conspiracy-theory counterculture. The enlargement of this layer in recent years coincides with an extended period of defeats for the left and the workers movement, with the result that leftist politics suffered from atomisation itself. In Britain, the Corbyn surge represents a partial reversal; but the insistence on the part of its leadership - both in Corbyn's inner circle and in the form of Momentum - on Bonapartist and plebiscitary political forms retards the cultural recovery we might hope for.

Abyss

We speak in the last paragraph specifically of leftists who explicitly endorse 9/11 trutherism and suchlike; but the likes of Cohen and O'Neill address themselves in reality to a vast amalgam of their own creation, which ultimately includes leftist sentiment against bankers, oil companies and whoever else.

It is clearest perhaps in O'Neill's case,

when he writes:

There have been many outbursts of left anti-Semitism in history. The latest one can really be traced to the post-Cold War moment, to the strange 1990s and the emergence of a new, moralistic, anti-intellectual left outlook that viewed capitalism less as a relation of production than as a conspiracy of the wealthy, or 'the 1%' as they would come to be known.

Note that, for all his implicit huffing in defence of some sort of Marxism ("capitalism ... as a relation of production"), his *explanation* for this phenomenon is purely a matter of its promotion by certain unnamed anti-intellectuals (he does go on to mention Adbusters, mainly so he can smear Occupy by association with a single article of theirs he finds dodgy from 2004). The fact that it is really the case that the financial industry has become much more directly politically influential in the core imperialist countries in that period, that wealth inequality has widened to a point that '1%' is actually a pretty mealy-mouthed estimate of the proportion: all these factors are invisible to O'Neill.⁵

But then his own political response to the end of the Cold War - along with the rest of the then Revolutionary Communist Party, as they rather unconvincingly put on a show of liquidating themselves into a network of think-tanks - was to set himself up as an anti-liberal troll on the basis of a naive enthusiasm for capitalist progress; for the RCP, and now for *Spiked!*, it is an article of faith that it is better to be a climate change denier than a green, because greenism is 'misanthropic', and in general it is worse to have an unsophisticated critique of capitalism than not to have one at all.

By enforcing a hard distinction between analysis of capitalist social relations and talk of 'conspiracies of the wealthy', however, O'Neill *prima facie* rules out any critique of capitalism with any purchase on the world as it *actually is*, which is to say, full of human agents pursuing agendas. Corrupt interrelationships between elements of the elite are part of how capitalism works, and the error of Occupy-type left-liberalism is merely that they are not the *whole* of how capitalism works. If O'Neill genuinely believes that there is no link between the bloated US military budget and the careful strategising of arms industry flacks, or that Goldman Sachs's Washington connections did not help it at all in the 2007-08 crash, then perhaps he might consider investing in my initial coin offering.

So this is the essential dilemma of generalised anti-conspiracy-theorism: that, by refusing to acknowledge the limited real basis of its target, it inverts itself pretty rapidly into a hysteria about a specific group of people promoting unreason among wider society, in an exact mirror image of tinfoil-hat ramblings about CIA black propaganda fooling the 'sheeple'. Wild leaps of intuition - between protests against rising inequality, Palestine solidarity and Jew-hatred - are made, just as for the conventional conspiracy nut, 'everything is connected'. The fact that a growing part of bourgeois ideological aggression takes the form of conspiracy theories about conspiracy theories is presumably not unconnected to the fact that the usual diet of lies and unexamined assumptions is hardly doing the job, in the age of Trump, Corbyn, Orban and Sanders.

As for the health of our own movement, we frankly need to get some perspective. Leftwing opinion is, occasionally, disfigured by conspiracy-theorism in its correction-resistant forms; but this is merely one of a vast range of heteroclitic admixtures, from nationalism to identity politics to social imperialism to religion, and hardly the most serious. In all cases, the answer surely lies in part in a *positively attractive alternative* becoming available; but we can hardly expect a ranter like Cohen, or an ex-leftist and self-appointed unsatisfiable Freudian father like O'Neill, to help us out with that ●

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Notes

- <https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2018/03/corbyn-has-won-the-battle-for-the-left/>.
- www.spiked-online.com/news/article/the-return-of-the-socialism-of-fools/21265#.WsPJNpWYg5.
- I'm arguing here on the basis of cybersecurity best practice, which is illustrative, for in spite of the usual media image of a young gentleman in a hoodie hunched over a laptop "hacking into the mainframe", it is much more common that a human operator of the target system is fooled into giving over their password, allowing the gentleman in the hoodie to swan right in the front door.
- We leave aside, this time, *Spiked!*'s initial spur to creation, when its predecessor was shut down by libel action stemming from their promotion of conspiracy theories about the Bosnian war, and its long (possibly ended) history of climate change denialism, which also probably counts as a conspiracy theory according to 'common sense'. The point is that O'Neill is not called a conspiracy theorist on account of his belief that the left is anti-Semitic.
- As is the fact that agitational focus on a named subset of the capitalist class long predates the end of the cold war; it was a standard feature of western European Stalinism, for example, to propose alliances with parts of the capitalist class against the "hundred families", the big monopolies, or whatever else you like. This was hardly a good idea from the point of view of Marxist strategy, of course, but it makes a nonsense of O'Neill's periodisation.

Fighting fund

Slow second week

After breaking through the £2,000 barrier for the first time in March, and the first few days of April bringing in a welcome £342, the financial flow has slowed a little. The second week of the month brought £125 into the *Weekly Worker* bank account, including £30 from GG and £25 each from FK and GD, plus £20 (VV), £10 each from SM and AN, and £5 from AP. A further £27.20 in subscriptions came into our PayPal account from JS (£7.20) and £5 each from JJ, GH, MD and JG. That makes a total of £544.20 in 12 days, which puts our April target of £1,750 within reach. But with the paper playing

such a pivotal role in exposing the hypocritical fake anti-Semitism smear campaign aimed at unseating Jeremy Corbyn, why not pull out the financial stops and make the two grand achieved in March the norm. That doesn't only mean reaching into your own pocket - it means spreading the load wider. When did you last ask your workmates for a collection for the paper? ●

Robbie Rix

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

ECONOMY

Trump, trade and the tech war

With globalisation and growth on pause for a decade, Trump's trade wars aim to keep the biggest US hi-tech and intellectual property companies on top, argues
Michael Roberts



Trump and Xi: smiling all the way to a trade war

President Trump has now moved on from steel tariffs (with exemptions for some allies) to the real battle - stopping China from gaining market share in America's key industries: technology, pharma and other knowledge-based sectors. Can China make further inroads globally or will Trump's policies stop them?

The first thing to note is where things are right now. Economists at Goldman Sachs, the US investment bank, have looked at the data. They find that "the US position as a global technological leader remains strong. The US's economy-wide productivity remains high compared to other advanced economies, and its shares of global R&D, patents and IP royalties remain impressive." China has been catching up though, but in medium value-added goods sectors and hardly at all in knowledge-based tech. So, while overall, the US share of global high-tech goods exports has declined as China's share has grown, the US trade sector deficits have been concentrated in medium-high-tech goods rather than in the most advanced categories. Indeed, the US share of global knowledge-intensive service exports has held up, contributing to a rising trade surplus and higher employment in those sectors.

Take overall productivity, as measured by output per hour worked. On this broad measure of the productivity of labour, the US remains ahead, even compared to other advanced economies in Europe and Japan. China's labour productivity level is just 20% of the US, although that is a quadrupling since 2000.

The US continues to invest a relatively large share of its GDP in research and development. While the US share of global R&D has declined, in part due to a rapid increase in China's

share, the US remains the global R&D leader, accounting for nearly 30% of the world total, about 1.5-2 times the US share of world GDP.

Total patents granted for new inventions show that the US share has held roughly steady at around 20%. China's share of total patents granted has risen very rapidly over the last decade to over 20%, but most patents granted to Chinese innovators have come from its own domestic patent office, with far fewer granted abroad. The US share of the world total of royalties on intellectual property has declined somewhat as the EU's has grown, but it remains very large. China's share remains negligible. That means US capital is still taking the lion's share of global profits in technology.

The 21st century US economy relies increasingly on advanced knowledge and technology sectors for its growth. The share of US GDP for these sectors is now 38%, the highest of any major economy. But China is not far behind with 35% of its GDP in these sectors, amazingly high for a 'developing' economy.

Where Trump is now concentrating his ire on China is on the share of hi-tech goods sales in world markets. While the US is the largest producer of high-tech goods, its share of world exports has shrunk considerably while China's share has grown. This rising Chinese competition has caused US manufacturing firms to reduce their patent production, which has been accompanied by reduced global sales, profits, and employment.

But on the services side, the US is the largest global producer of commercial knowledge-intensive services and second only to the EU in exports. China's share remains quite small. If China gains market share in this area, it will really hurt US capital.

That's because, although the US runs a deficit on trade in tech and knowledge industries, that deficit has shrunk from the early 2000s. The US is more than holding its own in this area even since China joined the World Trade Organisation in 2001. Indeed, it runs a surplus in knowledge-intensive services, which has grown over the last decade. It is this that Trump seeks to protect.

While US jobs have been lost to technology replacing labour (capital-bias)¹ and the shift of US industry to China in manufacturing, the employment share of hi-tech and knowledge sectors has risen to about one-third of all US jobs. Trump claims to be restoring the 'smoke-stack' sectors where he won some votes, but in reality the battle for those jobs is already lost, thanks to US industry shifting out. The real battle is now over profits and jobs in the knowledge-based sectors, where the US still rules.

But these sectors are highly concentrated in just a few firms, the technology leaders. There are wide swathes of American industry, including tech, which benefit little from this US superiority. Just five firms have over 60% of sales in biotechnology, pharma, software, internet and comms equipment. The top five in each sector are taking the lion's share of profits too.

What this shows is that, contrary to the mainstream economic idea that international 'free trade' will benefit all, the gains from trade are concentrated in just the leading firms which take advantage of network, scale, and experience and gain a larger market share. The rising industry concentration has in turn boosted their corporate profit margins. As Goldman Sachs puts it: "global trade is particularly concentrated, with "export superstars" accounting for a very large share

of exports in many industries and countries."

Contrary to the Ricardian theory of comparative advantage, international trade is transacted by companies, not countries and, as such, value (profit) gets transferred to those with technological advantage and they gain at the expense of others. Trade represents a form of combined development, but capitalism delivers this unevenly.

As I argued in a previous post, over the last 30 years or so, the world capitalist economies had moved closer to 'free trade' with sharp reductions in tariffs, quotas and other restrictions - and many international trade deals.² But since the Great Recession and in the current Long Depression, globalisation has paused or even stopped. World trade 'openness' (the share of world trade in global GDP) has been declining since the end of the Great Recession.

It is this decline in globalisation as world economic growth stays low and the profitability of capital remains squeezed that lies behind this new trade war. Trump's blundering blows on trade have an objective reason: to preserve US profits and capital in the key growing tech sectors of the world economy from the rising force of Chinese industry. So far, the US is still holding a strong lead in hi-tech and intellectual property sectors, while China's growth has been mainly in taking market share at home from American companies, not yet globally. But China is gaining ●

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

Notes

- [1. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2016/12/10/trump-trade-and-technology/>.](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2016/12/10/trump-trade-and-technology/)
- [2. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2018/03/19/trumps-trade-tantrums-free-trade-or-protectionism/>.](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2018/03/19/trumps-trade-tantrums-free-trade-or-protectionism/)

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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John Bolton and his MEK friends

Strange road to Albania

Yassamine Mather looks at the Mojahedin-e Khalq cult backed by Trump's national security advisor

As Donald Trump's new national security advisor, John Bolton, took office on April 9, the world press, including sections of US media, have been speculating on his relationship with Iran's Mojahedin-e Khalq organisation. As always, some of the information about this group is inaccurate or out of date. I will attempt to give a chronological record of their history and more recent activities.

When the MEK was set up in 1965 in opposition to the Shah's pro-Western dictatorship, the group's initial ideas were firmly based on Islamic-liberation ideology. In the following 10 years, they were involved in a number of armed operations that killed, or was aimed at killing, American military personnel in Iran. Nowadays MEK deny that history and blame all military operations on a 'breakaway' organisation, MEK (Marxist-Leninist)/Peykar, that actually only came into existence in 1975.

MEK (ML), later Peykar, was founded in October 1975 when a number of MEK leaders who had not been imprisoned voted to accept Marxism and declared the organisation Marxist-Leninist. A pamphlet entitled *Manifesto on ideological issues* described the new position: "After 10 years of secret existence, four years of armed struggle, and two years of intense ideological rethinking, we reached the conclusion that Marxism, not Islam, was the true revolutionary philosophy."¹

The Islamic faction became increasingly conservative and looked for alliances with the Shia clergy, including ayatollah Khomeini, who was in exile at the time.

Mujtabi Taleqani, son of senior ayatollah Taleqani, was one of the MEK who "converted" to Marxism. Hossein Ruhani was another prominent Peykar member. He became a candidate for the Islamic parliament after the revolution and exposed for the first time that MEK negotiated with Khomeini. At the time his claim caused a lot of controversy for both the Islamic government and the MEK. Peykar was one of the first groups of the radical left who had opposed Khomeini, calling him a "mediaeval obscurantist" and his regime "fascistic and reactionary".

Religious MEK supported Khomeini and the Islamic government after the uprising of February 1979. Their policies included support for the Islamic Republic's military intervention in Kurdistan, and the takeover of the US embassy. However the organisation's leader, Massoud Rajavi, was barred from standing in the country's first presidential election and this was a turning point.

According to historian Ervand Abrahamian: "By late 1980, the Mojahedin was brazenly accusing Khomeini's entourage, especially the IRP, of "monopolizing power", "hijacking" the revolution, trampling over "democratic rights", and plotting to set up a "fascistic" one-party dictatorship. By early

1981, the authorities had closed down Mojahedin offices, outlawed

Saddam Hussein up to and during the US-UK invasion of Iraq in 2003.



Tirana, Albania, 2017: John Bolton (second from left) and MEK supremo Maryam Rajavi

their newspapers, banned their demonstrations, and issued arrest warrants for some of their leaders; in short they had forced the organization underground..."²

In the summer of 1981 Islamic authorities in Tehran attacked supporters of the MEK after anti-government demonstrations in major Iranian cities, and the leadership of the organisation fled to Baghdad and Paris, where they set up the National Council of Resistance, with the Islamic Republic's deposed president Bani Sadr.

They were also welcomed in Iraq by Saddam Hussein, who, in the middle of a war with Iran, was seeking new alliances with the Iranian opposition. From Iraq MEK launched an armed struggle to topple the Islamic Republic, claiming responsibility for the assassination of several high-profile figures.

During the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), they carried out a number of military operations in western Iran, acts that were coordinated with the Ba'athists in Baghdad. These operations were considered treachery by Iranians, including those opposed to the Islamic Republic. MEK lost a lot of support after the last of these military incursions. Operation Eternal Light took place in July 1988 at the end of the war, with air support provided by Iraq.

They subsequently supported

So far MEK's story is not different from that of other exiled military groups seeking an alliance with the enemies of their country's rulers. What distinguishes MEK, and what has led to them being called a 'cult', were the series of events that started in 1985. The group's leader Massoud Rajavi decided to marry Maryam Azdanlou, who was already married to one of his close associates, Mehdi Abrishamchi. She divorced her husband in order to marry Rajavi. In an organisation that had strong Shia views, many MEK members in Iraq expressed anger and rebelled. The leadership's response was to claim that the marriage was a 'cultural revolution' - Massoud Rajavi claimed he and Maryam would be equal leaders. Again, according to historian Ervand Abrahamian:

Rajavi said he was emulating the prophet - Muhammad - who had married his adopted son's wife to show he could overcome conventional morality. It smacked of blasphemy. Rajavi liked having women around him and overhauled the command structure to replace the men with women - this time calling it a 'constitutional revolution'. It was also politically astute and added alluring spice for their public-relations campaign in the West.³

Discontent continued in the ranks, and

that is when the leadership organised 'mass divorce ceremonies', culminating in 1990 when, according to former high ranking MEK member Massoud Bani Sadr, Rajavi declared: "All members must divorce their spouses". Bani Sadr added: "My own wife had already left the group by then. All members accepted these terms, and it [applied to] everyone except the leader and his (third) wife Maryam. In a single day, everyone became celibate."⁴

Other reports suggest some members were encouraged to marry new partners while others were told they should "forget about personal relationships and dedicate their life to the cause".

In the 1990s there were other accounts of cult-like behaviour from members who managed to escape the group's bases in Iraq. According to Nadereh Ashrafi, a former member of MEK: "Every morning and night, the kids, beginning as young as one and two, had to stand before a poster of Massoud and Maryam, salute them and shout praises to them."⁵

Many were held in the camp's prisons for disobeying the leadership. Others escaped, writing and speaking of the dreadful situation inside the camps. After the collapse of Saddam, the group was disarmed by the US army and eventually relocated to camp Liberty, a former US military base near Baghdad. Initially they had to be surrounded by US troops, partly for their own protection. MEK members were rightly fearful for their lives, as successive Iraqi governments close to Iran's Shia leadership were threatening to deport members of the group to Tehran.

That is when the group started its lobbying activities, some say funded by Saudi money, first to reverse US classification of their organisation as a 'terrorist' group and later to present themselves as a serious opposition group.

Between 2003 and 2011 they won the support of former CIA directors, R James Woolsey and Porter J Goss; a former FBI director, Louis J Freeh; a former attorney general, Michael B Mukasey; president George W Bush's first homeland security chief, Tom Ridge; president Obama's first national security adviser, general James L Jones; big-name Republicans like the former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani and Democrats like the former Vermont governor Howard Dean; and former top counter-terrorism official of the

state department, Dell L Dailey - not to forget John Bolton.

American 'supporters' of MEK are well rewarded. They are recruited through agencies and they get paid at least \$10,000 to \$50,000 for speeches delivered at the organisation's gatherings in Paris.

Eventually, in 2012, after extensive lobbying, the then US secretary of state Hillary Clinton removed the group from the list of designated terrorist organisations. A year later an agreement was signed between the Albanian government and the Obama administration, paving the way for the transfer of the few hundred remaining MEK members from Iraq to Albania. By the summer of 2016 all MEK members had been moved out of Iraq.

In Albania, where it occupies a block near the town of Manez previously owned by a private university, the group has kept a low profile, partly because their presence is not welcomed by local residents.

Now that Bolton has taken up his post as national security adviser, his connection and association with MEK has once again drawn attention to what most Iranians consider to be a 'loony cult'. The US press warns that Bolton might use his position to funnel misinformation from the MEK regarding Iran's nuclear and ballistic missiles. The group is well known for exaggerating the Islamic Republic's military capabilities. Others worry that Bolton will use his position to give more prominence to MEK in Washington's corridors of power.

However the reality is that MEK is not taken seriously by most Iranians inside and outside the country. Sections of the US press warn of similarities between MEK, in proposed regime change plans, and Chalabi, who was Dick Cheney's choice as a replacement for Saddam, immediately before the occupation of Iraq, in 2003. But surely even Bolton cannot seriously imagine that MEK is fit to govern a post-regime change Iran ●

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Notes

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