



weekly worker



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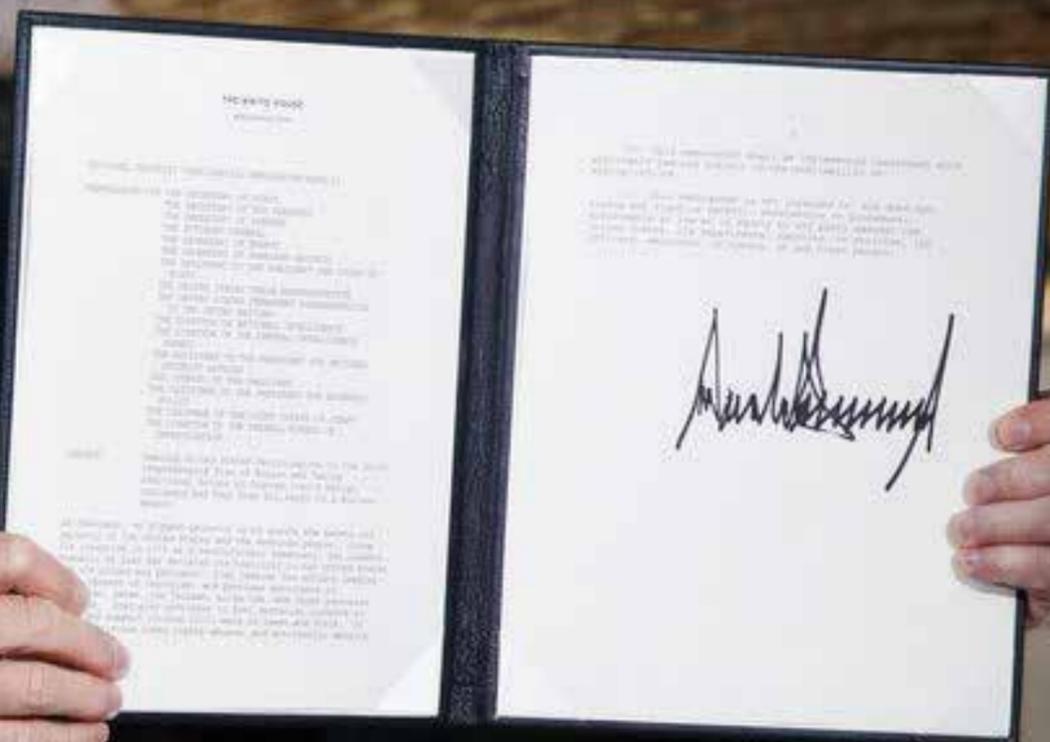
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- 70 years of nakba

No 1202 Thursday May 10 2018

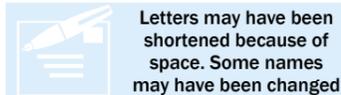
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Those who believe
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are badly mistaken



LETTERS



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

Standing aside

In his letter on the forthcoming Public and Commercial Services union conference, Dave Vincent makes his usual pertinent points about the absence of a serious strategy when resisting cuts and attacks on members' conditions (Letters, May 3).

He writes: "The main issue is ... wider membership apathy and low combativity across the movement. There has been no united action of the public-sector unions over the 1% pay cap that was actually agreed at the September TUC congress in 2017. PCS cannot win alone."

Absolutely correct. But what about the politics? As comrade Vincent well knows, it is essential for any fightback to be waged at the political level first and foremost. Along with most of the left, he recognises the significance of Jeremy Corbyn's election as Labour leader, but, just like the Socialist Party in England and Wales, he thinks unions like PCS should stand aside from the battle to transform Labour. He states:

"My view on affiliation remains unchanged - I am still opposed. If all the super-unions with all their tens of millions of pounds in donations, plus the largest Labour membership in decades, have not pulled the party left, a union the size of PCS will make no extra impact ... The back-tracking by Corbyn, the anti-democratic coup in Momentum, the continual overwhelming hostility of the majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party and the leadership's failure to support deselection of these traitors convinces me that PCS will make no difference."

The first point to note here is that a union of almost 200,000 members is hardly insignificant, as comrade Vincent seems to believe. But it is not just PCS which is considering affiliation. At this very time the 80,000-strong Rail, Maritime and Transport union is engaged in a membership consultation and will make a decision on whether or not to reaffiliate to Labour very soon. And they are not the only ones. What if the National Education Union, with its 450,000 members, decided to come on board too?

It is absurd to claim that such forces can have no effect on the outcome of Labour's internal battle - although at least comrade Vincent does not follow in SPEW's footsteps by saying that affiliation would not give the union 'value for money'! But does he think it is impossible to transform Labour into a fighting, working class party? If he believed that, his stance would be even more backward than SPEW's, which does at least call for such a transformation - it is just

that SPEW wants to stand aside and leave it all to others!

What about "the largest Labour membership in decades"? It is true that an individual socialist who joins Labour will not be able to transform the party on their own, but, when we are talking about tens of thousands of working class activists, it is just plain wrong to say that they are having, and will have, no effect. It is a long battle, but many local parties are in the process of being transformed - take Haringey, for instance.

It is essential for all pro-working class forces to join the battle. Of course we can win! The Labour machine is hardly invincible and it is perfectly possible to give Corbyn some backbone by our own actions. What else should we do? Just shrug our shoulders and forget about the politics?

Peter Manson
London

Slow progress

I agree with the sentiment expressed in the headline to Tony Greenstein's article in last week's paper: 'Corbyn: grow a backbone' (May 3). As Tony says, Corbyn has totally capitulated to Labour's right wing over so-called anti-Semitism. Now we have their expulsion of Marc Wadsworth. So if Corbyn ever gets into No10 what do we expect he will do?

The Labour left and Momentum members, the activists and people who saw in Corbyn someone who could realise their aspirations of transforming the world, generated enough of a motivation to join the party and to tirelessly work to get Labour councillors and MPs elected. This commitment is a demonstration of the willingness of those members to attempt to change the direction of the party and take back control from the right wing, represented by Progress, Labour First and the entrenched interests who test the rule book to its limit. But Corbyn's concessions to the right and lack of leadership have created a vacuum where there should be inspiration.

It is now over two years since Momentum was founded and, although huge progress has been made, there needs to be more coming from Corbyn to inspire and provide direction to the members. It's not that fatigue is a problem, but that there is a lack of differentiation of politics at local level - almost to the point of giving up on the battle and compromising with the right. As Corbyn is not providing a "backbone", this will eventually feed down to local level.

This is one aspect: another is the total lack of democracy in Momentum - the message being, campaign at local level, win new members, but that is it. All parties can campaign locally over potholes or litter, but it is the bigger issues - the long game of winning power in the party and holding representatives to account - that

are what really matter.

It's slow progress, but local campaigners need the political education about the journey, going forward.

Simon Wells
email

'Jewish problem'

Anyone who believes there is no anti-Semitism in the Labour Party and that it is just a big conspiracy between rightwing Labour MPs, the Tory Party and sections of the media should read three recent books dealing in depth with the issues: Dave Rich's *The left's Jewish problem: Jeremy Corbyn, Israel and anti-Semitism*; Bob Fine and Phil Spencer's *The left and anti-Semitism: the recurrence of the Jewish question*; and Dave Hirsh's *Contemporary left anti-Semitism*.

Peter Burton
email

Another CPSU?

Paul Flewers' excellent article on the misplaced enthusiasm of Sydney and Beatrice Webb for Stalinism is a reminder of the perception some people continue to have of the Labour Party and socialism ('Stalin's fellow travellers', April 26).

Paul argues that the Webbs admired Stalinism because they imagined it had realised their ideal society. At the heart of this was rule by an elite of professionals and experts. The Webbs believed that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was an elite institution, guided by the principles of science, service, order and progress. It was therefore more advanced than capitalism. It was a new civilisation, controlled by a superior caste of educated leaders.

According to Terry Austrin ('Fabianism and Stalinism' *Critique* No27, 1995), the Webbs were followers of the French positivist philosopher and founding father of sociology, Auguste Comte (1789-1857). Comte not only argued that all forms of inquiry should conform to a scientific method, based on observation and experience, but that scientists should become priests of a new religion of humanity. This religion would replace service to god with service to humans.

The Webbs projected this idea onto the Soviet bureaucracy, whose sociology purported to be Marxist. They compared the CPSU to a religious order, which required the constant checking of the ideas and behaviour of its members. As Paul observes, the Webbs approved of regular purges as a means of ensuring 'quality control'. They thought the idea of members being made to stand trial, confess their shortcomings and answer accusations helped to improve national efficiency. The confessional nature of it convinced the Webbs the CPSU was similar to Comte's priestly order of scientists.

Within the Webbs' positivist utopia, a superior caste of the scientifically enlightened controlled workers' ideas and behaviour. The Webbs were therefore glad the Soviet state had incorporated the trade unions. They admired the role trade unions had in making workers work harder. They praised the "comradely courts" trade unions set up to shame lazy workers. They agreed that the trade unions' use of so-called "socialist competition" and "shock brigades" were necessary to increase productivity.

Although the Webbs' influence on the Labour Party has been in

decline for many years, there remain elements that remind me of their positivist vision of 'socialism'. Presently members are experiencing one of the Labour's regular purges of its activist left. Under the pretext of cleansing the party of anti-Semitism, leftists are being expelled and isolated - especially if they claim to be influenced by Marxist ideas of socialism or communism. The Labour Party demands that members answer accusations, stand trial and confess their political sins. Coupled with elevating the leader to the status of a saviour, this gives Labour a quasi-religious character.

Moreover, it appears that middle class professionals tend to dominate the Labour Party. This social layer - if not a 'priesthood' - seems to be concerned chiefly with bureaucratic administration, service to the disadvantaged and underprivileged, and solving the problems of an unproductive, discontented workforce through Keynesian demand management.

Of course, there are differences between the Webbs' vision and the contemporary reality of the Labour Party. For example, despite their leaders' history of craven subservience to repressive legislation and their willingness to collaborate with and advise bourgeois governments, trade unions in the UK have yet to be fully transformed into an arm of the state. The reaction to such a move would force workers' organisations underground - a risk the British ruling class and its allies in Labour seem to be unwilling to take right now.

Paul B Smith
Ormskirk

Sectionalism

In response to Rex Dunn, I'd like to say a few words - and quote a few - about the relationship of oppressed groups and the movement for a better world ('The alternative to patriarchy', May 3). Like Rex, I too oppose the politics of 'intersectionality' - or sectionalism, as we might more properly call it. But let us focus on the opposite mistake - what could be called *class idealism*: the notion that the working class should ideally be united, and that any observation at all of different sections is politically divisive.

Karl Marx had an opinion on that, writing more than a century ago about new technology (knowledge, 'social wealth') and

the splits within the working class: "The greater the social wealth, the functioning capital, the extent and energy of its growth, and, therefore, also the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productiveness of its labour, the greater will be the industrial reserve army [the unemployed] ... But, the greater this reserve army in proportion to the active-labour army, the greater is the mass of consolidated surplus population, whose misery is in inverse ratio to its torment of labour. The more extensive, finally, the Lazarus layers of the working class and the industrial reserve army, the greater is official pauperism. *This is the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation*" (original emphasis *Capital* Vol 1, chapter 25, London 1954, p602).

In the 1870s, the working class was already made up of sections - the employed, unemployed and the 'redundant' - generated by the process involved in the mode of production. A few more layers of underpaid immigrants, low-paid youth and unpaid women only add to the actual divisions.

As for acknowledging racism and the like, that well-known poststructuralist liberal, VI Lenin, had an opinion on this - specifically, in his day, on the attitude of party members to those from national minorities of the Russian empire: "... internationalism on the part of oppressor or 'great' nations ... must consist not only in the observance of the formal equality of nations, but even in an inequality of the oppressor nation, the great nation, that must make up for the inequality that obtains in actual practice ... It is necessary to compensate the non-Russians for the lack of trust, for the suspicion and the insults to which the government of the 'dominant' nation subjected them in the past" ('The question of nationalities', December 31 1922). This is actual solidarity, not an immediate assumption of real equality.

Perhaps the requirement that we see the class as an undifferentiated bloc comes from Labour and Stalinist leaders looking for a mass of voters or activists to follow orders. Those of us looking for something more need to acknowledge the differences of resource, morale and experience that distinguish the working class and the diverse groups that we must attract to get anywhere.

Mike Belbin
email

Fighting fund

Productive

Another productive week for our May fighting fund. Thanks first of all to comrade TT, who added £40 to his subscription cheque, making it a nice round £100. GL (£25) and NR (£10) also sent in cheques.

Then there were nine standing orders - thank you, AC, HN and CG (£30), GD (£25), DV and BL (£20), NR (£18), SWS (£15) and SM (£10). Finally CT (£20) and PM (£15) clicked on our very much under-used PayPal button, helping to take our total for the week to £308. That means that our May fighting fund stands at exactly £500 towards our £1,750 target.

That's not bad after just nine days (as I write), which means we need another £1,250 in three

weeks - well within reach. But I'm not counting my chickens - as GL wrote in the letter accompanying her donation, "I thought I'd get in early near the start of the month, knowing how much you worry!" I suppose it's my job! But so far this year I've not had too much to worry about, with readers and supporters queuing up to show their appreciation for, amongst other things, our coverage of Labour's 'anti-Semitism' smear campaign. Care to join them?●

Robbie Rix

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

London Communist Forum

Every Sunday, 5pm

Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1

May 20

**The passionate love affair between US Jews and Israel
How it started and why it is coming to an end**

Speaker: **Moshé Machover**

May 27

From May 1968 to colour revolutions

Speaker: **Mike Macnair**

Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk

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

PALESTINE



Gaza: concentration camp

Zionist chutzpah

On the 70th anniversary of the *nakba*, Moshé Machover notes a remarkable piece of hypocrisy

The besieged people of Gaza have been marking the 70th anniversary of their dispossession and ethnic cleansing, the *nakba*, by a series of unarmed mass demonstrations - a largely symbolic attempt to assert their right of return and break out of their repeatedly ravaged cage, the world's largest concentration camp. Israel, for its part, has also been marking the anniversary: it has deployed well-trained *marksmen*, instructed to kill or maim those daring to approach the prison fence, using ammunition designed to cause horrendous injuries.¹

The British media have hardly reported on this ongoing massacre: they have been too busy accusing Labour Party members supporting Palestinian rights of 'anti-Semitism'. The main Israeli media (with the honourable exception of *Ha'aretz*) and the overwhelming majority of Hebrew Israelis, have been wholly supportive of 'our children', who are 'defending' the beleaguered homeland against 'terrorists' threatening its destruction. This moral blindness - the inverted perception of who is the victim and who is the oppressor - pervades Israeli Hebrew society, from the ideologues at the top right down to the 'Kill all Arabs' mob.

But in this month of *nakba* anniversary I would award the first prize for a combination of hypocrisy, cynicism and lack of self-awareness to brigadier general (retired) Ephraim Sneh, a former Labor Party minister and currently head of the Strong Israel mini-party. So, in Israeli terms, he belongs to the centre, or even centre-left, rather than to the extreme right.

In an article published on May 7, he proposes what he obviously wants to be regarded as a fair historical deal between the worldwide "Jewish people" and the Palestinian Arab people. He sets up an apparent equivalence or symmetry between two conflicting claims over the whole of the "Land of Israel" (that is, pre-1948 Palestine). And he urges both sides to give up their right to return to certain parts of it:

... anyone wishing to advance an agreement in the Land of Israel - and

such an accord is ineluctable - must create a narrative of conciliation, built not on ignorance, but on an understanding of the sensitivities of the other side ...

The most sensitive and loaded emotional issue for both sides is their historical affinity to this land, in its entirety ... Palestinians must understand that the cradle of the historical legacy of the Jewish people lies in the heart of the West Bank. Jeremiah and Amos did not prophesise in Bat Yam or Holon, but in Anatot and Tekoa. Our national past is rooted in Shiloh and Beit El, on the road to Efrata.

Yes, we have a right to return to these places. However, all Israelis who support a two-state solution and a division of this land relinquish the exercising of this right, even at the heavy, but unavoidable, cost of evacuating tens of thousands of Israelis who have exercised this right. This concession is aimed at enabling a peaceful life in the Land of Israel, which includes a Jewish and democratic state on most of its territory.

The Palestinians cleave to the 'right of return', but they have relinquished the return. Abbas said so publicly with regard to his family home in Safed, attracting heaps of abuse from Hamas. They know refugees will not return to live within the boundaries of a sovereign State of Israel. There is a reason Hamas finds it difficult to mobilise masses to participate in its provocative displays on the Gaza border. However, when they say 'right of return', the Palestinians are referring to their historical affinity with Jaffa, Lod, Ramle and hundreds of villages that were abandoned in 1948. We as Israelis must understand and respect that.

One must distinguish between a right and its realisation. A narrative of conciliation can be built on the understanding that for the sake of coexistence between two national entities in this land both sides relinquish the exercising of what each one of them sees as their historical right.²

Note that in his hypocritical advocacy

of 'sensitivity' there is no recognition that the Palestinian people have been the victims of Zionist colonisation and ethnic cleansing by Israel. He refers to their right of return in scare quotes, making it seem suspect. But his claim of a Jewish right of return is apparently in no need of any reservation. His sense of history makes one gasp in amazement. He forgets to mention that the Palestinians were deliberately exiled from their homeland *by Israel*, within living memory.³ Not even the most ardent Zionist could claim that the Palestinian Arabs expelled the Jews from their homeland, many centuries ago. The widespread story is that the Jews were expelled by the Romans; but as a matter of historical fact this is a myth, for which there is no evidence. There was no expulsion.⁴

Sneh is so devoid of self-awareness and so full of self-righteousness that he wants us to accept that the Palestinian right over the homeland of which they were dispossessed in his own lifetime is inferior to that of the "Jewish people", which is based on an ancient religious myth. He proposes a partition of "the Land of Israel" (aka Palestine), in which "a Jewish and democratic state [would keep] most of its territory" in exchange for allowing its indigenous people to hold on to the fragmented leftover.

But this piece of *chutzpah* is the best you can expect even from a relatively moderate Zionist ●

Notes

1. For evidence suggesting the use of expanding ('dumdum') bullets, see the Médecins Sans Frontières report of April 19, 'Palestine: MSF teams in Gaza observe unusually severe and devastating gunshot injuries': www.msf.org/en/article/palestine-msf-teams-gaza-observe-unusually-severe-and-devastating-gunshot-injuries. See also Satar on Twitter: https://twitter.com/Satar_Gaza/status/982562328477683713.
2. E Sneh, 'The mutual right of return' *Ha'aretz* May 7: www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-the-mutual-right-of-return-1.6060664.
3. This is now admitted even by the main Jewish newspaper in the US: "The *nakba* was the result of a deliberate policy of mass expulsion, dispossession, and ethnic cleansing - a strategy designed to ensure that the Palestinians who had lived on the land for generations would be barred from ever returning." See *Forward*, special *nakba* issue, May 1 2018: <http://forward.com/editorial/unearthing-truths-israel-the-nakba-and-the-jewish-national-fund>.
4. A useful summary of the well-established contrary evidence is in Shlomo Sand's *The invention of the Jewish people* (London 2009).

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday May 13, 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'état": the second duma' (continued). Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk; and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

#Justice4Marc speaking tour

Labour Against the Witchhunt, Jewish Voice for Labour, the Labour Representation Committee and Grassroots Black Left are sponsoring a national speaking tour with Marc Wadsworth, who has been expelled from the Labour Party for criticising Labour MP.

London, Tuesday May 15, 6.30pm: Indian YMCA, Games Room, 41 Fitzroy Square, London W1. With Alexei Sayle, Jackie Walker and Moshé Machover.

Liverpool, Wednesday May 16, 6pm: Crawford House Community Enterprise Centre, Upper Warwick Street, Liverpool L8.

Chester, Thursday May 17, 7pm: St Werburghs Parish Centre, 26 Brook Street, Chester CH1.

Birmingham, Friday May 18, 7pm: Committee rooms 3 and 4, Council House, 1 Victoria Square, Birmingham B1.

Sheffield, Wednesday May 23, 6.30pm: DINA, 34 Cambridge Street, Sheffield S1 (upstairs). With Martin Mayer (secretary Sheffield Trades Council and former member of Labour Party NEC), Lee Rock (Sheffield Left List) and others.

Meetings are also being planned in Swansea, Bristol and Manchester. Please get in touch if you can help out organising these events or if you can arrange one in your locality.

www.labouragainsthewitchhunt.org/justice4marc

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday May 15, 6.30pm: Series of talks on human origins, Daryl Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1. This meeting: 'Returning to religion: why a secular age is haunted by faith'. Speaker: Jonathan Benthall. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group:

<http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

70 years of nakba

Friday May 11, 5.30pm: Protest, opposite Israeli embassy, Kensington High Street, London W8. Stand up for Gaza, stop the killing.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign and others:

www.palestinecampaign.org.

New deal for working people

Saturday May 12, 11am: National march and rally against austerity and for wage increases.

Assemble Victoria Embankment, London WC2 and march to Hyde Park.

Organised by TUC: www.facebook.com/events/1534163209986439.

No to Football Lads

Saturday May 19, 11am: Countermarch. Assemble Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester M1. Protest against the Football Lads Alliance.

Hosted by Stand Up To Racism Manchester:

www.facebook.com/ManchesterStandUp.

Ragged-trouserred philanthropists

Saturday May 19, 1pm: Film screening, Red Shed, Vicarage Street, Wakefield WF1. Showing of *Still ragged* about Robert Tressell's famous book, followed by discussion.

Organised by the Wakefield Socialist History Group:

www.facebook.com/groups/542669395814652.

Right of return

Sunday May 20, 9am to 4.30pm: Conference, RADA Studios, 16 Chenies Street, London WC1. Solidarity with expelled Palestinians.

Entry: £12. Concessions and PSC members: £8.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign:

www.palestinecampaign.org/events/psc-returnconf.

Stop the witch-hunters

Tuesday May 22, 11am: Lobby and protest, Southside, 105 Victoria Street, London SW1. Let the NEC know what we think of the smear campaign.

Organised by Labour Against the Witchhunt:

www.labouragainsthewitchhunt.org

Cracks in the wall

Tuesday May 22, 7pm to 10pm: Book launch, Amnesty International UK, 25 New Inn Yard, London EC2. Pluto Live and Amnesty International host the official book launch for Ben White's new book

Cracks in the wall: beyond apartheid in Palestine/Israel. Tickets £3.

Event page: www.palestinecampaign.org/events/cracks-wall-beyond-apartheid-palestine-israel-ben-white/.

Remembering apartheid's defeat

Thursday May 24, 7pm: Celebration and exhibition, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1.

Hosted by Marx Memorial Library:

www.facebook.com/marxlibraryandschool.

Solidarity with the People of Turkey

Saturday May 26, 2pm: SPOT AGM, NEU/NUT headquarters, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1.

Organised by SPOT: <http://spotturkey.co.uk>.

CPGB wills

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

ELECTIONS

No big swings

The local election results should warn us that a Corbyn government is not a shoo-in, writes **Eddie Ford**



Barnet count: only London borough to see Tory net gains

Ever since the last general election there has been a prevalent notion amongst some sections of the left that a Labour victory at the next election is certain: Jeremy Corbyn will be the next prime minister. But last week's local election results in England should act as a warning that this is far from inevitable.

Indeed, this publication has always warned that, even if the Labour Party emerged as the majority party in the Commons, that does not necessarily translate into a Corbyn-led government - it is the monarch and the privy council - the establishment - which approaches the politician they think can command a majority in the Commons. Yes, that is usually the leader of the largest party, but it does not have to be. In other words, it is by no means certain that, even if Labour won the next general election outright, Jeremy Corbyn could actually command a majority in the Commons. Remember the 172 Labour MPs who supported a motion of no confidence against him almost two years ago? And what about the army generals who said they would rather "mutiny" than obey orders from a Corbyn government? Yet for some reason the left fails to understand what should be a fairly basic point for any Marxist - the bourgeoisie will do what is necessary if it feels its position is under threat.

For communists, however, the crucial question is not dreaming about the next Labour government, but working for the transformation of the Labour Party, especially when you see who stands behind Corbyn at the despatch box - most with sharpened daggers in their hands.

Anyway, with regards to the recent local elections, there has essentially been no change since the general election - no upsets or major swings towards any party. Stalemate. Hence, on a 36% turnout - the same as

four years ago - Labour gained 77 councillors on a very modest swing, but ended up with no change to the numbers of councils they control (74). It failed to take several key targets from the Tories, such as Wandsworth and Barnet, but it won back Plymouth and became the largest party in Trafford and Tower Hamlets. In fact, Labour had its best performance since 1971 in London on a 4% swing - winning 47% of the vote and picking up 60 seats (it performed more strongly in boroughs where it already had a healthy lead over the Conservatives when the seats were last contested four years ago).

Meanwhile, the Tories made a net loss of 33 seats and two councils with 30.8% of the vote - gaining Redditch from Labour, but losing control of Kingston upon Thames, Richmond upon Thames and South Cambridgeshire to the Liberal Democrats. In London the Conservatives lost 101 seats to finish with 511 councillors, its lowest ever tally of seats in a London local election. However, they retained control of seven councils.

As for the Lib Dems, they had a relatively good night - gaining 75 seats and four councils. But the party still remains far off the vote share it had before entering the coalition government in 2010. Meanwhile, the Greens gained eight seats overall, mainly in London and the UK Independence Party had a predictably disastrous night, losing nearly all of the 126 seats it was defending, with only three councillors re-elected - Ukip won a mere 0.4% of the vote in London. All this caused Paul Oakley, Ukip's general secretary, to compare his party to the "Black Death" - albeit on the optimistic grounds that the plague had "led to economic growth and the Renaissance".

Based on these local election results, the BBC projected a national vote share of 35% for both main parties

(Labour up 8% since 2017 and the Tories down 3%), with the Lib Dems on 16% (down 2%). A dead heat. On this forecast, at least according to Sir John Curtice - who famously predicted last year's shock general election result - Labour would win 283 Westminster seats (compared to 262 won in 2017) and be the largest party *just*, with the Tories only three seats behind.

However, it goes without saying that such projections are notoriously imprecise: Michael Thrasher, a rival forecaster, puts Labour on 261 seats, essentially the same number as the party got a year ago. Historically, oppositions that win elections start a parliament well ahead on the projected national vote measure: Labour in 1993 was 10 points ahead and the Tories were 12 points ahead in 2006. Either way, the figure is well below the 326 required for an overall majority. Turbulent times ahead, which could possibly see a period of precarious majorities, hung parliaments and minority governments - or even national governments seeking to 'rescue the nation' from the forces of chaos and anarchy (and Brexit).

Peak Corbynism?

The first thing that must be said is you would expect something more from Labour, the opposition party, under normal conditions (but, of course, we are not living under normal conditions). When you have an obviously struggling incumbent government - seemingly clueless about how to proceed with Brexit, featuring ever sharpening internal divisions, steadily losing votes in the Lords and having just presided over the Windrush scandal - you would expect it to be heavily punished at the polls.

Instead, the Tories came out of the election breathing a genuine sigh of relief - they only suffered a little and the level of pain was acceptable. In the estimation of the *Financial Times*, the Conservative vote "held up tolerably",

when you consider that the party has been in power for close to eight years and its "policy efforts have been wobbling like a shopping trolley with a bad wheel" (May 4).

Then again, if it had not been for the collapse of Ukip the Tories *might* have been more heavily punished. Yet it was always to be expected that Ukip would lose its purpose in life after the 2016 European Union referendum and cease to exist sooner or later - probably much sooner, as we are now seeing. Not least when Theresa May did a hard Brexit turn, making Ukip all but redundant - why vote for a joke fringe party with a different leader almost every day when you can vote for the real thing and *get things done*? Most Ukip voters tended to be Tories in exile, without pushing the point too much, and are returning home.

But, returning to Labour, it did worse than predicted - or at least worse compared to its *own* predictions: Owen Jones had grumbled a day before the election that the party was "guilty of failing to manage expectations" (*The Guardian* May 2). Conversely, George Osborne's *London Evening Standard* and various Tory spin doctors hyped up the prospect of a Conservative armageddon, clearly hoping to frighten Tory voters into the polling stations - with some effect, it seems.

Probably more in wishful thinking than psephological analysis, Justine Greening - the former Tory education secretary - said the results revealed that Labour had reached "peak Corbyn" since last summer's general election. Rushing straight into battle, figures on the Labour right promptly called for an "inquiry" on what went wrong. Particularly annoyed was Chuka Umunna, who at one stage was the great black hope of the Labour right until he pulled out of the leadership contest three years ago under slightly mysterious circumstances. He told the

BBC's *World at One* programme that advances which could be expected at this stage in the electoral cycle under a "divided and incompetent" government had failed to materialise - "the whole Labour leadership" had to address this failure, arguing that the party's national executive committee should appoint someone to do a "proper post-mortem".

Alastair Campbell was also irate, bitterly complaining to a Progress meeting that "if we cannot beat this shamble of a Tory Party, we don't deserve to be in the game" - before hitting out at Momentum on the BBC's *Today* show: "We are really clutching at straws," he said. "If I see one more person from the Momentum side saying, 'These are the best results since 1971' ... What planet are they on?" These are bad results, Campbell went on, especially when we are talking about "possibly the worst government in living memory". Communists would certainly agree that Momentum's belief that all we need is one more big shove to see Jeremy Corbyn safely ensconced in No10 is deluded.

Jeremy Corbyn, whatever the brave face, must have been disappointed by the results - after all, he had been booked to go to Barnet to celebrate Labour's success (hopefully he had a refundable ticket). Unlike the rest of London, Labour lost seats in Barnet - doubtlessly the 'anti-Semitism' campaign was a major factor in the defeat, as Barnet has the largest Jewish population in the country at 15%.¹ In a beautiful irony, the Labour Party in Barnet is controlled by the right, including the Jewish Labour Movement - with one former councillor and JLM member, Adam Langleben, calling upon the Labour leader to come to the borough and apologise to the Jewish community (or a section of it).² The anti-Semitism smears were clearly believed by some voters in Barnet, so you could argue that the right brought it upon themselves.

As our readers know, the JLM has led the way in spreading those smears, demanding that Corbyn speeds up the expulsions of anti-Zionists, and so on. By another beautiful paradox, a former Labour parliamentary candidate for the borough (Finchley and Golders Green) was none other than a certain Jeremy Newmark - also former chair of the JLM and chief executive officer of the Jewish Leadership Council. Newmark, of course, has now parted company with both the JLM and JLC after *The Jewish Chronicle* - widely read in Barnet, naturally - published an internal audit report into his conduct whilst JLC's CEO, with accusations of financial malpractice and an ongoing police investigation. You would surely think that this scandal might also have something to do with Labour's relatively poor performance in the borough.

What the anti-Semitism furore is really about, needless to say, is the Labour leader's position on Israel and Britain's relationship with the US and its alliance with Israel. Jeremy Corbyn clearly represents an important and welcome change in that respect, Labour historically having been close to Israel and Zionism. ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. Or, to be exact, subscribe to Judaism: www.barnet.gov.uk/jsna-home/demography.html.
2. www.times-series.co.uk/news/16211877.
Corbyn should apologise to Barnet's Jewish community, says former councillor.

TUSC

Its final outing

Peter Manson looks at what was a disastrous political project from the very beginning

What is the point of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition? Founded in 2010, Tusc was the successor to the short-lived Campaign for a New Workers' Party, and both organisations were open in their aim - made explicit in the CNWP's name - of establishing a new mass party to replace Labour.

However, following last week's council elections in England, when Tusc stood 111 candidates for 33 different local authorities - with the accustomed very poor results in the vast majority of seats - it is more pertinent than ever to be clear about Tusc's purpose. According to the 'updated' statement of aims on its website, Tusc was set up "with the primary goal of enabling trade unionists, community campaigners and socialists to stand candidates against pro-austerity establishment politicians" (October 2016).¹

But that is being economical with the truth. It was the Socialist Party in England and Wales which was the prime mover in both the CNWP and Tusc and, in the words of SPEW central committee member Clive Heemskerck, writing in *The Socialist* on February 3 2010:

The Socialist Party believes that the Labour Party has now been totally transformed into New Labour, which bases itself completely on the brutal logic of capitalism. Previously, as a 'capitalist workers' party' (a party with pro-capitalist leaders, but with democratic structures that allowed the working class to fight for its interests), the Labour Party always had the potential to act at least as a check on the capitalists. The consequences of radicalising the Labour Party's working class base was always a factor the ruling class had to take into account.

Now the situation is completely different. Without the re-establishment of at least the basis of independent working class political representation, the capitalists will feel less constrained in imposing their austerity policies.²

While SPEW was clear that this could not come about immediately, the ultimate aim was

stated by comrade Heemskerck to be: "A new mass political vehicle for workers, a new workers' party". He explained:

For the Socialist Party the importance of Tusc lies above all in its potential as a catalyst in the trade unions, both in the structures and below, for the idea of working class political representation. It can *also play a role* in drawing together anti-cuts campaigns, environmental campaigners, anti-racist groups, etc (my emphasis).

So campaigning against cuts, etc was most definitely seen as secondary. First and foremost was the need to lay the basis for a new workers' party - the nature of which was made clear in the above quote: "working class political representation" primarily for the unions - in other words, a 'Labour Party mark two', as we in the CPGB have always called it.

How things have changed since Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader. In her article, posted on the SPEW website, following the local elections, deputy general secretary Hannah Sell writes:

... the support for Corbyn has created the potential for a mass democratic party of the working class, which is desperately needed. If it is not to be squandered, it is vital that there are no more retreats, but instead the start of a determined campaign to transform Labour into a party capable of opposing austerity with socialist policies, in deeds as well as words.³

Since the aim now is a transformation of Labour - previously deemed impossible - it is unsurprising that the call for "a new workers' party" has been dropped. Not that SPEW is prepared to lift a finger to aid the process in any way - for example, by encouraging unions like PCS and the RMT to affiliate (or reaffiliate) to Labour.

Two reasons

So why does Tusc still exist and why did it stand over 100 candidates against Labour? Comrade Sell gives two reasons. First, to highlight the need to oppose

austerity. According to comrade Sell,

It was ... absolutely correct that the Socialist Party, as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition ..., stood candidates in these local elections against some of the worst Blairite cutters ... we were alone in putting forward a fighting programme for anti-cuts councils and, by standing, were able to reach significant layers of workers and young people with our message, including some of the best activists in the Labour Party.

It is almost as though opposing the latest round of cuts - in contrast to those implemented last year and the year before, apparently - is now elevated above everything else for SPEW.

As explained in Tusc's own policy document, dated October 2015, elected councillors should "[u]se all the legal powers available to councils to oppose both the cuts and government policies":

We will support councils which in the first instance use their reserves and prudential borrowing powers to avoid making cuts. But we argue that the best way to mobilise the mass campaign that is necessary to defeat the dismantling of council services is to set a budget that meets the needs of the local community and demands that government funding makes up the shortfall.⁴

So, working entirely within the current funding system, Labour councils should "use their reserves and prudential borrowing powers" to keep their budgets in balance. But, if there is still a "shortfall", then they should demand the government makes it up. I wonder how likely the Tories would be to comply? Assuming the government declines, how long would a council be able to operate in this way? Very soon its reserves would be exhausted and no bank would be prepared to lend it a penny. And, as I have pointed out, this policy only applies to *new* cuts - those previous imposed would be left in place.

However, SPEW hopes that Tusc candidates - or, better

still, Tusc elected councillors - could inspire a broad fightback:

Even one councillor in a local authority taking a stand, if they used their position in the council chamber to appeal to those outside, could give confidence to local trade unionists and community campaigners to fight. A network of rebel councillors across the country could have an even bigger impact, building on Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity message in shifting the terms of the debate. A councillors' revolt could stop the Tory cuts!⁵

This is linked to comrade Sell's second reason for standing: it is strongly implied by Tusc that its electoral campaigns were also aimed at helping Corbyn win the internal Labour Party battle:

This was the most selective local election stand that Tusc has taken in its eight-year history, following the general recalibration of its electoral policy after Jeremy Corbyn's welcome victory as Labour leader in September 2015.

There was not a single Tusc candidate on May 3 standing in a direct head-to-head contest with a Labour candidate who had been a consistent public supporter of Jeremy Corbyn and his anti-austerity policies. Tusc only stood against rightwing, Blairite Labour councillors and candidates. The Labour candidates in the seats contested by Tusc included 32 councillors who had publicly backed the leadership coup attempt against Jeremy Corbyn in summer 2016, signing a national open letter of support for the rightwing challenger, Owen Smith.

However,

In a situation where Labour is still so clearly two-parties-in-one ... - with many local 'Labour' candidates standing more ferociously against Jeremy Corbyn than they do the Tories - the task is still there to make sure that politicians of any party label who support capitalism and its inevitable

austerity agenda are not left unchallenged.⁶

So that was the position in relation to the Labour right - expose them by standing against them. But what did Tusc (and SPEW itself) recommend in wards where there were pro-Corbyn candidates? The truth is, there was no call for a Labour vote *anywhere* - how was that supposed to aid the Corbyn wing?

By the way, the extracts above are from the Tusc post-election statement posted on its website on May 8. The previous posting had been on April 15 - in other words, for almost the last three weeks of its election campaign the Tusc website had been completely abandoned! That says a lot about the future of this 'coalition' (in reality, Tusc is made up overwhelmingly of SPEW comrades, together with a few so-called 'independents'. However, the comrades are still able to boast of a victory - the re-election of Tusc councillor and previous Labour defector Keith Morrell in Southampton. And the "next best score" was in a ward in Kirklees, "with Tusc winning 701 votes for a 14.2% share", while the "best performance in a single council was achieved in Waltham Forest, with Tusc polling 2,841 votes across the 12 wards (out of 20) contested there". But "The mean average vote for Tusc council candidates overall was 3.7%."⁷

And now, looking back proudly, Tusc announces that, following last week's elections, it has received a total of "just under 380,000 votes ... since the formation of our coalition in 2010". It was making real headway, wasn't it? But, rather tellingly, the Tusc statement concludes: "Whatever the outcome of the discussions within Tusc and its component parts on the way forward now, it has established its part in that wider debate."

In other words, don't expect us to be around for much longer! ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. www.tusc.org.uk/about.
2. www.socialistparty.org.uk/issue/610/8762/03-02-2010/trade-unionist-and-socialist-coalition.
3. www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/27313/06-05-2018/local-election-results-are-a-major-warning-sign-for-labour.
4. www.tusc.org.uk/policy.
5. *Ibid.*
6. www.tusc.org.uk/17399/08-05-2018/local-elections-2018-the-tusc-results-report.
7. www.tusc.org.uk/txt/424.pdf.

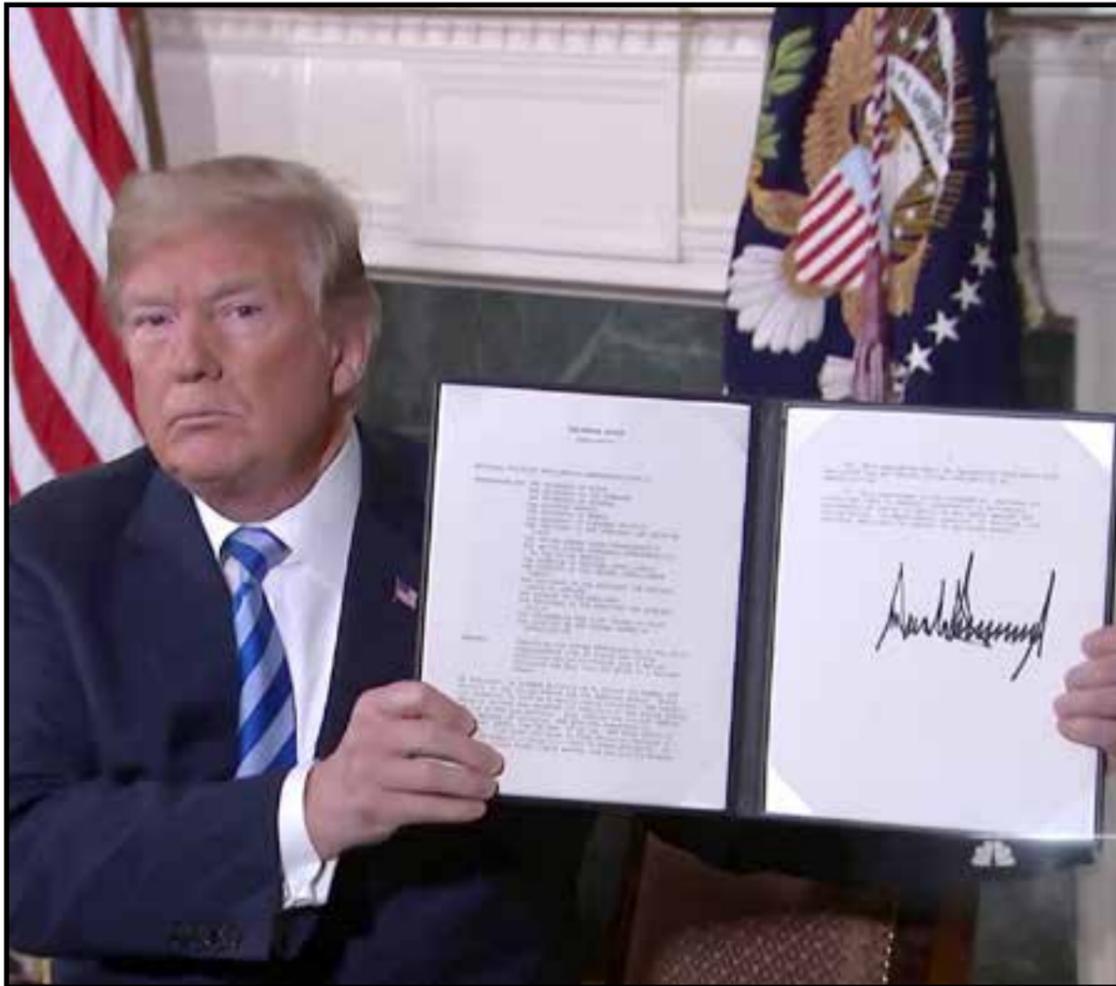


Narrow, myopic politics

IRAN

Playing Tehran's game

Those who believe Trump's withdrawal from the nuclear deal will damage the Islamic Republic are badly mistaken, writes **Yassamine Mather**



Donald Trump: memorandum on n-deal

When Donald Trump announced on May 8 the US's much predicted withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, it was accompanied by the usual neoconservative nonsense: not only is it a "decaying and rotten deal", but the Islamic Republic is apparently a backer of global terrorism, including al Qa'eda, Hamas and the Taliban!

Now anyone with a basic understanding of the Middle East will know that, although Iran is an unsavoury dictatorship - especially when it comes to the repression of its own working class - far from being an ally of al Qa'eda, it is an enemy of the group created and financed by Iran's arch-enemy, Saudi Arabia. True, there have been unconfirmed reports that one of Osama bin Laden's wives and her children have obtained asylum in Iran, but we all know that at the start of the 'war against terror' Iran supported US moves against al Qa'eda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, seeing them as competitors for its own brand of political Islam.

As far as Hamas is concerned, it is on the opposite side to Iran in the civil war in Syria and, although there was talk of some reconciliation between the two earlier this year, there is little sign of rapprochement as yet. What is more, many of the Arab emirates, which have close ties with Hamas, are considered by the US to be *allies* - although that may be too complicated for the current resident of the White House to understand.

The other nonsense in all this was Trump's reliance on Binyamin Netanyahu's absurd anti-Iran stunt on April 30. Even by the abysmal standards of PowerPoint presentations, this one was excruciatingly awful. It had been billed as demonstrating clear proof that Iran had been manufacturing nuclear weapons after the 2015 nuclear deal, and was aimed at helping Trump win the argument for abandoning it. As it

turned out, the Netanyahu show was a big flop, involving the recycling of old information - mainly based on documents written between 2005 and 2011. As Akiva Eldar, writing in *Al-Monitor*, commented, "Netanyahu is riding high on the Iranian files to divert attention from the police investigations dogging him and his wife".¹

Inevitably no-one except the idiot in the White House and the Saudi crown prince took the Netanyahu 'exposé' seriously. All the signatories to the nuclear agreement believe that Iran is in full compliance with its terms. So does the International Atomic Energy Agency. Yet Trump referred to Israeli "discoveries of continued nuclear development in Iran" during his announcement of the US withdrawal. Reactions to his speech were predictable: Angela Merkel, Emmanuel Macron and Theresa May all expressed concern about the US decision, saying they were still committed to the nuclear deal and urging the US not to obstruct its implementation. Australia, Japan, Russia and China were among those also favouring the deal's continuation, while the United Nations general secretary, António Guterres, also expressed his commitment to it.

None of this mattered to the US president, who is only interested in what Israel and Saudi Arabia tell him (both are involved in financing various corrupt and incompetent sections of Iran's 'regime change from above' opposition). And, true to form, immediately after Trump's speech, Netanyahu hailed his "historic move" and "courageous leadership".

Presumably the 'left' apologists for Zionism in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, *Spiked* and Platypus will echo Tel Aviv's position. If so they will be joined by supporters of 'regime change from above' amongst Iranian exiles - notably the royalists and the loony cult, Mojahedin-e Khalq. The case of these

exile groups is interesting. They all claim to care for the plight of the Iranian people. Yet there can be no doubt that the economic situation in Iran will be adversely affected by new sanctions and those who will suffer the most will be the majority of the population, the

country's working class.

Hours before Trump's statement the price of crude oil went up to \$76 a barrel. That might sound like good news for the Islamic Republic, but its main problem is the inability to repatriate oil income, given fear of increased sanctions in the banking sector and the country's continued difficulties in insuring oil tankers essential for export of its oil.

Thriving on crisis

Of course, it could be that Trump is actually keen to create "a mess" - a situation where the nuclear deal remains in force, but is undermined. So what is likely to happen now? For the time being it looks like Britain and the EU will keep to the deal, but the question remains: how will they circumvent the so-called "secondary sanctions" promised by Trump against non-US companies dealing with Tehran. Many economists believe that the threat of secondary sanctions will make the situation much worse.

Iran's immediate response soon after the EU's official statement of continuing support for the nuclear deal was predictable. President Hassan Rouhani's address was almost triumphalist: "We are sticking to the deal. It will be with the EU and the others." Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, asked EU leaders for guarantees regarding the future of the accord and, although he used harsh words to attack Trump, there were no direct threats to resume those parts of the country's nuclear programme the deal had stopped.

If anyone believes that the leaders of the Islamic Republic will suffer as a result of all this, they are seriously mistaken. This is a government that thrives on crises. If there was no crisis it would create one to maintain its rule. As for the economic plight

of Iran's senior clerics in both the reformist and conservative factions, how do you think they accumulated such astronomical wealth over the last few years? Hoarding, black market, sanctions busting...

The conservative factions of the regime have been *celebrating* the US decision. However, if the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia believe Iran will now attack its neighbours or immediately recommence enriching military-grade uranium, they are completely wrong. This regime has not survived four decades by making hasty decisions.

As for Iran 'bringing chaos to the region', all one can say is that the Islamic Republic has been astutely taking advantage of US wars in the region. The fall of Saddam Hussein in Iraq left Iran in a very good position. Its main enemy in the region had been overthrown and, thanks to the US, pro-Iran Shia groups took power in Baghdad. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's intervention in Syria, with the aim of curtailing Iran's influence in the region, also backfired. And now a Hezbollah-dominated Lebanon looks like becoming another ally of the Islamic Republic. The nightmare of Iran controlling a corridor stretching from the Mediterranean to Afghanistan is virtually a reality, thanks to blunders by Saudi Arabia and Israel.

And now Iran could in the longer term consider leaving the non-proliferation treaty and developing nuclear weapons in order to consolidate its current military advantage. No wonder very few are happy with Trump's announcement ●

yassamine.mather@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/05/israel-iran-benjamin-netanyahu-yitzhak-rabin-nuke-agreement.html#ixzz5Eoy9pcjl

For a national worker's organisation

In the light of the current situation there is no doubt that Hopi needs to up its activities - not only against possible new sanctions or even US military aggression, but also against the Islamic Republic's internal repression and in support of Iranian workers. That is why we support the initiative taken inside Iran by workers who oppose both regime change from above and attempts to 'reform' the clerical regime. We reproduce their May 1 statement.

Creating a national workers' organisation is a necessity. Iranian workers are increasingly appreciating this necessity in their workplace and have deeply felt its absence, especially during the current crisis and the increased attacks by the capitalists and the reactionary forces.

This necessity has been raised many times before from inside the workers' movement in Iran, and attempts were made a few years ago to bring it about. Unfortunately we are still far from achieving this task, so it is only appropriate to raise this once again on May 1 - the international day of workers' solidarity - and resolutely strengthen our efforts to achieve it.

Amongst all the internal or external alternatives and all the promises made for regime change or reforms, what is common is the inevitable deterioration of the situation of workers and toilers, and an intensification of attacks on their rights. The experience of the last decades has shown that, given the current balance of forces, independent workers'

organisations at the local level, or individual and isolated trade unions and associations, are easily suppressed and cannot seriously maintain sustained activity.

If the working class does not organise on a national level and fight for its common demands, not only will it not be able to achieve its most basic needs, but it will lose what it has already gained. Its power lies in its class solidarity and without the unity of the broadest layers of the Iranian working class around its most immediate and common demands this power cannot be mobilised and the attacks by the capitalist regime cannot be pushed back. Isolated local actions and organisations have not so far been successful.

Given the current crisis, the struggle around the most basic and common demands of the workers will not only unite large sections of the class, but draw behind it the support and solidarity of large sections of other oppressed and toiling layers. Freedom of expression and organisation, a minimum wage above the poverty line, unemployment benefits,

free health and education, and the removal of all inequalities based on gender, beliefs or nationalities are only a few of the demands of which hardly anyone can deny their national character. Consistent and united struggle around such demands can change the balance of forces in favour of the working class and its allies.

Wherever we are, we can start today building the local units of this national movement. This movement will not be in opposition to the current sectional struggles by individual unions or associations for their own specific demands. On the contrary, such a movement can only help those struggles by changing the balance of forces against the capitalist regime.

We, a group of worker activists, emphasise once again the necessity for a national organisation of the workers and in comradeship ask all those belonging to this class to redouble their efforts in publicising and promoting this call in their own area of activity and in taking active measures towards building it ●

TURKEY

Good enough for the east

Why has Erdoğan called snap elections? Esen Uslu looks at his regime's latest 'democratic' machinations



Erdoğan: staying in power comes first

In the 19th century, the privileged and selected few from the French colonies were sent to France to be educated in top schools. On graduation they were issued with diplomas bearing the phrase *Bon pour l'Orient* (ie, 'Good for the east'), which opened the door to lucrative careers in colonial administration. Over time the phrase applied to goods deemed defective by European standards, but which could be traded at a profit overseas. Ever since then, it has been a phrase dreaded by the emerging nationalist intellectuals of the Middle East.

That includes Turkey, where since the early 20th century the various forms of 'democracy' established proved to be merely *bon pour l'Orient*. And it has to be said that Turkey's rulers have been just as content with such forms as the 'civilised nations of the west'. They have been quite happy to operate from behind such a mask, while maintaining their power through authoritarian practices.

The regime of president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is a case in point, propped up as it is by the armed forces, security apparatus and bureaucracy. He has now called snap elections for both the national assembly and presidency, which are due to take place on June 24, while a second round for the presidency (if needed) will be held on July 8.

Following their attempted coup of July 2016, the top brass of the armed forces have now rallied behind Erdoğan. In order to achieve such a reversal of fortunes, Erdoğan quietly dropped all the promises of the early governments of his Justice and Development Party (AKP): gone is the drive for membership of the European Union and attempts to harmonise legislation with the European corpus; likewise the search for a negotiated solution to the Cyprus question and the normalisation of relations with Greece. Also gone is the commitment to an independent Central Bank, and the strict economic discipline aimed at reducing inflation and maintaining sustainable growth.

However, the dropping of one key promise - that is, the negotiation of a peaceful solution to the 'Kurdish problem' - could not be achieved on the sly. It has required the dropping of hundreds of bombs on the Kurdish people. While such fire and fury - in Turkey and across the border in Iraq and Syria - inevitably created a lot of noise, the western powers tended not to hear much of it.

While Erdoğan now has all the appearances of the strong man, he is also hostage to statist-nationalist forces. In order to maintain a semblance of multi-party democracy such forces have reverted to an old - tested, but failed - formula of the 1970s. That is, the infamous 'Nationalist Front': a coalition of the mainstream conservatives with the far-right racist-nationalists of the Grey Wolves, together with Islamist reactionaries and jihadists, the forefathers of the AKP.

In the 70s such forces were brought together, while the Grey Wolves were let loose on the left, as atrocities were committed under the benign gaze of the state security apparatus. But there was no electoral success and eventually a military takeover was required. The semblance of democracy was set aside, and years of military rule followed.

This time, however, despite the apparent goading of the nationalist-statist forces, Erdoğan is unable to recreate such a coalition. For one thing, both the far-right racist-nationalists and the jihadists are split.

The Grey Wolves broke with the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) because of the support its leadership has provided to Erdoğan. A sizable portion split and formed İYİ, the Good Party, which has made serious inroads into the MHP's voter base. In practice the MHP has become subservient to Erdoğan - most probably it would fail to reach the threshold needed for parliamentary representation, should it stand as an independent political party.

As for the jihadists, they are no longer represented by the AKP alone. Some of the old guard ousted by Erdoğan bided their time, but eventually formed the Felicity Party (SP). They severely criticise Erdoğan for his one-man rule, mismanagement of the economy and the corruption and nepotism.

The SP has been working towards a credible joint candidate against Erdoğan, capable of unifying the entire opposition. It proposed former president Abdullah Gül, who seemed willing to accept that role, causing quite a stir in the ranks of the AKP. Erdoğan responded by arranging for the chief of general staff to make an impromptu visit to Gül's villa - his helicopter landed on the lawn. Later it was explained that they were old school friends just getting together for a chat. Nobody believed it, but it was crystal-clear that the army top brass was worried by his

candidacy. Gül soon stated that he would decline the offer, as there was 'no consensus'.

Despite that the SP has managed to bring the CHP (Republican Peoples Party - a member of the Socialist International) and İYİ together in an electoral alliance. So apparently the polarisation is now almost complete.

Predicament

Since the June 2015 elections the predicament of the Erdoğan regime has been apparent. He is unable to win any vote outright or maintain a government without a parliamentary alliance. The referendum of last year to replace the parliamentary system with an executive presidency required desperate vote-rigging to bring the right result.

State control of the media and widespread repression were not enough in themselves, and the intervention of the courts and an electoral commission, reshaped according to the needs of Erdoğan regime, were essential to give a veneer of respectability to his shameless piracy. But he was aided by social democrats as well parties on the right - after all, it was necessary to fall in behind the state during its ongoing cross-border operations against the Kurds.

However, Turkey was now at odds with the US over Syria and suddenly the anti-western, and especially anti-American, rhetoric of the government sounded sweet to the ears of Islamist reactionaries - although it required a degree of precarious tiptoeing and eventually stopped short of crossing the US 'red lines'.

On top of all this came the downturn in the economy. Inflation has soared into double figures for the first time since the early 2000s, while the short-term credit that had previously flowed into Turkey dried up. The construction boom that came with this credit suddenly ended too. Now there are thousands of unaffordable flats and commercial units, leading to the collapse of major real estate companies. Ambitious housing projects have gone down with them and thousands of people have been left without homes.

There had also been massive infrastructure projects involving the building of new roads and bridges. Some were completed, but because of high tolls very few people are using them despite the attempt to force commercial traffic onto them. The privatisation of healthcare has also

provoked huge discontent.

In the meantime the repressive regime of 'emergency rule' declared after the coup attempt has become permanent, with even the most basic principles of justice being regularly trampled upon. Harsh measures have been employed against any form of opposition. While there is a great longing for democracy and popular opposition has been rising, there is no prospect of democratic demands being met under a new Erdoğan government.

It is in this context that Erdoğan, on the prompting of the MHP, decided to go for a snap election, hoping to thwart the opposition before it can become more organised. It was only after these elections were announced that legislation to harmonise electoral law with the new executive presidency was brought before parliament. Representatives of the AKP and MHP shed any remaining remnants of respectability and fell in behind their leaders' proposals.

The new system allows the formation of electoral alliances by political parties taking part as a single entity. Such alliances could allow a party which, standing alone, would not reach the electoral threshold to gain parliamentary representation. The AKP and MHP are hoping that they will be the big winners thanks to the alliance they have formed.

As the Kurdish freedom movement has borne the brunt of recent repression and suffered gross discrimination, the Kurdish vote is very important. That is why Erdoğan has kept the former leader of the Kurdish-based People's Democratic Party (HDP), Selahattin Demirtaş, as well as thousands of its local cadre, in jail. The aim is to keep the HDP under the electoral threshold and out of parliament. Erdoğan hopes that Kurdish votes would be wasted in this way, helping the AKP achieve a parliamentary majority.

But if HDP manages to pass the electoral threshold, there is a good chance this will force Erdoğan and the AKP to manoeuvre desperately to maintain their grip on power. If Erdoğan fails to win the presidential election in the first round, that would also be a major slap in the face. But he will use every trick in the book to ensure he emerges as victor.

In short, the *bon pour l'Orient* elections we are about to witness will not be the last we will see under the heels of repression ●

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.

weekly worker

**Greatest weapon
against Marxism
has been the
bloody disaster
of Stalinism**

Who remembers Marx?

Paul Demarty marks 200 years since the birth of the founder of scientific socialism

Young Alexander conquered India. He alone?
Caesar beat the Gauls.
Was there not even a cook in his army?
Bertolt Brecht, 'A worker reads history'

It is an odd time in history to bump into a Karl Marx anniversary. But here we are: in May 1818, Marx was born to a bourgeois professional family in Trier. In May 2018, we get to work out how to retrospect over this.

The abiding image so far has to be the five-metre-high bronze of the 'Great Man' in Trier itself - a gift to the town from the Chinese government. Its unveiling was subject to the precise array of protests and counter-protests you would expect - Alternativ für Deutschland, Free Tibet and Falun Gong types on one side, grizzled tankies on the other. This comes at a time when China is fighting to be counted as a free-market economy under World Trade Organisation rules.

British eyes will be reminded of the famously ghastly memorial to Marx in Highgate cemetery - a giant stone head after the fashion of Easter Island cult statues. The fact that the Chinese government is still capable of a piece of high-grade Stalinist kitsch is quite remarkable at this stage of its evolution into a pool of cheap labour for American manufacturing concerns.

The irony of this sort of Stalinist statuary is clear to many, including bourgeois commentators. The tragedy of Marx is that his belief in the power of oppressed classes to move history curdled into veneration of state power. When and how this happened is a matter of debate - for the bourgeoisie it followed inevitably from the nature of the communist project. For libertarian communists, the project was hijacked by 'middle class' parties like the Bolsheviks; for Trotskyists, by the Stalinist Thermidor. So whose Marx is remembered today?

Born into trouble

Born into a secularised Jewish family (his father had converted to Protestantism after the abrogation of Jewish emancipation in Prussia), Marx's youth took him into the care of many liberal opponents of the Prussian monarchy - and then, in Berlin, to radical intellectual circles.

The primary influence on the young radicals was Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, whose vastly ambitious philosophical project managed to serve both a clique of conservative professors as an apologia for the Prussian *status quo*, and Marx and his friends - Ludwig Feuerbach, Arnold Ruge, Bruno Bauer and so on - as a model of the triumph of reason over superstition, and also a picture of the dissolution and transformation of stable verities. Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* - a bravura account of religion's earthly origins - was especially influential. Feuerbach was trying to combine the philosophical materialism of the enlightenment with the audacious sweep of Hegel's religious idealism, and the result was a highly interesting book.¹ The radical intellectuals matured in part by settling

accounts with Feuerbach.

There were more important things with which to settle accounts, of course. The Europe Marx and his friends lived in was essentially the one left to them by the reversal of Napoleon's military victories and the subsequent Congress of Vienna, whose package of diplomatic measures survived long enough for the reactionary kingdoms of the continent to retrench themselves. In France, Napoleon's dictatorship gave way to violent counterrevolution and then a generation of more-or-less constitutional monarchy under the Bourbon and Orléans houses. Germany, meanwhile, remained fragmented into innumerable trivial principalities, dominated by Prussia and Austria. The democratic impulse had been awakened, however: combined (especially in Germany) with nationalist sentiment and (especially in France) with socialist doctrines, the powder was dry for another social explosion.

Marx's own political career had put him into Parisian exile as an ultra-democrat, where he confronted the nascent workers' movement for the first time. Utopian socialists like Étienne Cabet and Flora Tristan were beginning to attract working class followers. Marx remained sceptical of the working class's significance, however, until he became better acquainted - thanks in large part to the efforts of Friedrich Engels - with the Chartists in England, who demonstrated conclusively a class instinct for democracy. After his bitter disappointment with Prussian liberals and 'constitutionalists', the arrival of the working class in Marx's consciousness proved the decisive turning point. Marx, Engels and their followers fused in the end with a long-standing religious-utopian organisation, the League of the Just, to form the Communist League, on whose behalf Marx and Engels wrote the *Communist manifesto*.²

Age of revolution

A year later, finally, the levee burst: 1848 saw the ousting of Louis-Philippe in France, the Italians setting off on the road to unification and the Germans coming within spitting distance of the 'one and indivisible republic' that was the objective of the revolutionaries.

Marx and Engels revived their old paper, the *Rheinische Zeitung*, and threw themselves into the most radical wing of the democratic movement. The revolutionary wave, as we know, receded, and reaction set in; the Second French Republic gave way a few years later to

the corrupt dictatorship of Napoleon's nephew, Louis Bonaparte, and, when Germany was finally to be unified decades later, it was done forcibly by the Prussian army, in the name of the kaiser. There was to follow another long political freeze, and the 48ers were scattered, geographically and politically. Marx returned to exile, this time in London, where he wrote at a furious pace, researching the political economy of capitalism in painstaking detail.

It is sometimes thought that Marx was merely an obscurity in his own lifetime, but the reality is that the bonds forged in 1848 were firm: many of the defeated revolutionaries remained in contact, and Marx retained a vigorous epistolary life among them. It will suffice to mention that his influence over those 48ers who ended up in America - for instance, Joseph Weydemeyer - contributed to making out of the German immigrants a fertile source of committed troops for the suppression of the slaveholders' revolt in 1861-65. This highlights another aspect of Marx's political outlook, which is that it was properly global. It was the movement of working class solidarity with the union that occasioned the foundation of the International Workingmen's Association, in which Marx was an early and prominent participant.

It was at this time that the first volume of *Capital* was published, and Marx's alleged 'obscurity' is belied by the rapidity with which it was translated into all the major European languages. It was read with interest by some of the Russian Narodniks, some of whom - Georgi Plekhanov, Vera Zasulich - would go on to become political Marxists as a result. Though Marx's followers were marginal in the Paris insurrection of 1871, and though Marx advised holding back beforehand, his defence of the Communards and coruscating denunciation of their murderers presented his political project in immaculate literary form. Though the First International could not long survive the crushing of the Commune, the immediate result was the foundation of the first parties of the Second International; and it was people like August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht - somewhat eclectic followers of Marx and his rival, Ferdinand Lassalle - who made it happen.

Marx's legacy

There has never since been a time when ostensibly Marxist parties and organisations have been absent from

politics. This is a more significant fact than it first appears. Proudhonism - once hegemonic over large parts of the radical workers' movement - never recovered from its physical near-extermination at the hands of Thiers and friends. We could name many other examples. Bakuninist anarchism survives, but in reality overwhelmingly in hybrid forms with Marxism (the various 'libertarian communist' trends).

If the radical left is permanently altered by Marxism, so in reality is the ideology and even the operative functioning of capitalist societies. We are sometimes told that Marxism was all well and good in the 19th century, with children working 14-hour shifts in the mill, but is not appropriate to the age of universal suffrage, the minimum wage, and health and safety laws. This is to miss the point spectacularly: Marx never claimed that amelioration of conditions was impossible: merely that it was impossible without a fight. We have a more 'civilised' world, in the west at least, only because Marx's peers and his heirs scared their enemies into giving ground, and we shall lose it quickly enough if we accept that Marx's approach is 'outmoded'.

Still more ridiculous is the opinion that some combination of consumerism, digital technology and other novelties make Marx's economic theories obsolete. The wise old sages who write such gems do so, presumably, on computers that assembled themselves, from parts made out of minerals that dug themselves out of the ground.³ This is one aspect of a wider phenomenon: bourgeois macroeconomic theories (micro-modellers can, luckily for them, restrict themselves to calculating the prices of spherical cows in a vacuum) must always be defined against Marxism, as well as against each other. Providing a reassuring firewall against the theses of *Capital* and later writers in that tradition is part of the use-value of an economic framework these days. A pity that reality has been so cruel to Keynes, Friedman, Hayek and whoever else you like.

Of course, it is undeniable that Marx's name, today, is under a shadow - the shadow of a five-metre statue of himself. The greatest weapon of the bourgeoisie against Marxism is not the fatuous occasional polemics of its economists, or the scaremongering of the far right about 'cultural Marxists', but the lived experience of the 20th century and the bloody disaster of Stalinism. We ought to have learned,

by now, that it is not enough to merely not be Stalinist; to wish to avoid a similar outcome is not an irrational fear, and the commonplace idea that communism is 'a nice idea, but it will never work' does have evidence for it. It is just not conclusive evidence - and, indeed, far less conclusive than the evidence for the proposition that the continuation of capitalism shall have apocalyptic consequences. We have much work to do here - but, fortunately, the theoretical legacy and political example of Karl Marx is an extraordinary gift to us in this endeavour.

The fundamental problem with the big statues is that Marxism is, among other things, the most thoroughgoing and scientific debunking yet of the 'great man' theory of history, and its more vulgar contemporary complement in the cult of heroic CEOs and 'leaders' in the abstract. Brecht, in our epigraph, echoes Marx's famous formula, "How many cooks were caesars, and how many caesars cooks?" It was his good fortune to bring the message that the secret of the people we treat as archetypes was their bodies and their societies; that Caesar could not eat victory or honour.

The communist project is based on the certainty that this inverted world will in reality be righted, and that the conscious direction of society will fall to all its members rather than a self-perpetuating ruling class. Here's hoping our great-great-grandchildren will not celebrate the 300th anniversary of Marx's birth before it is achieved ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

- It is not without interest that the liberal theologian, Karl Barth, attempted mischievously to claim Feuerbach as one of the great Lutheran theologians. Suffice it to say that the Lutherans of his own day were not so impressed, and Feuerbach had basically to keep his head down for the rest of his life. Such is the lot of a prophet in his own land.
- A fine account of Marx's and Engels's political development to this point can be found in the first part of Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* Vol 1, New York 1977.
- My very favourite example of this genre comes from the futurologist charlatan (a tautology, if ever there was one), Jeremy Rifkin, who told readers of *The Guardian* that "Marx never asked what might happen if intense global competition some time in the future forced entrepreneurs to introduce ever more efficient technologies, accelerating productivity to the point where the marginal cost of production approached zero ... putting an end to profit and rendering the market exchange economy obsolete" (March 31 2014). Except, er, in the really famous bit about the falling rate of profit. See me after class, Jeremy ...

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