

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



# weekly **worker**



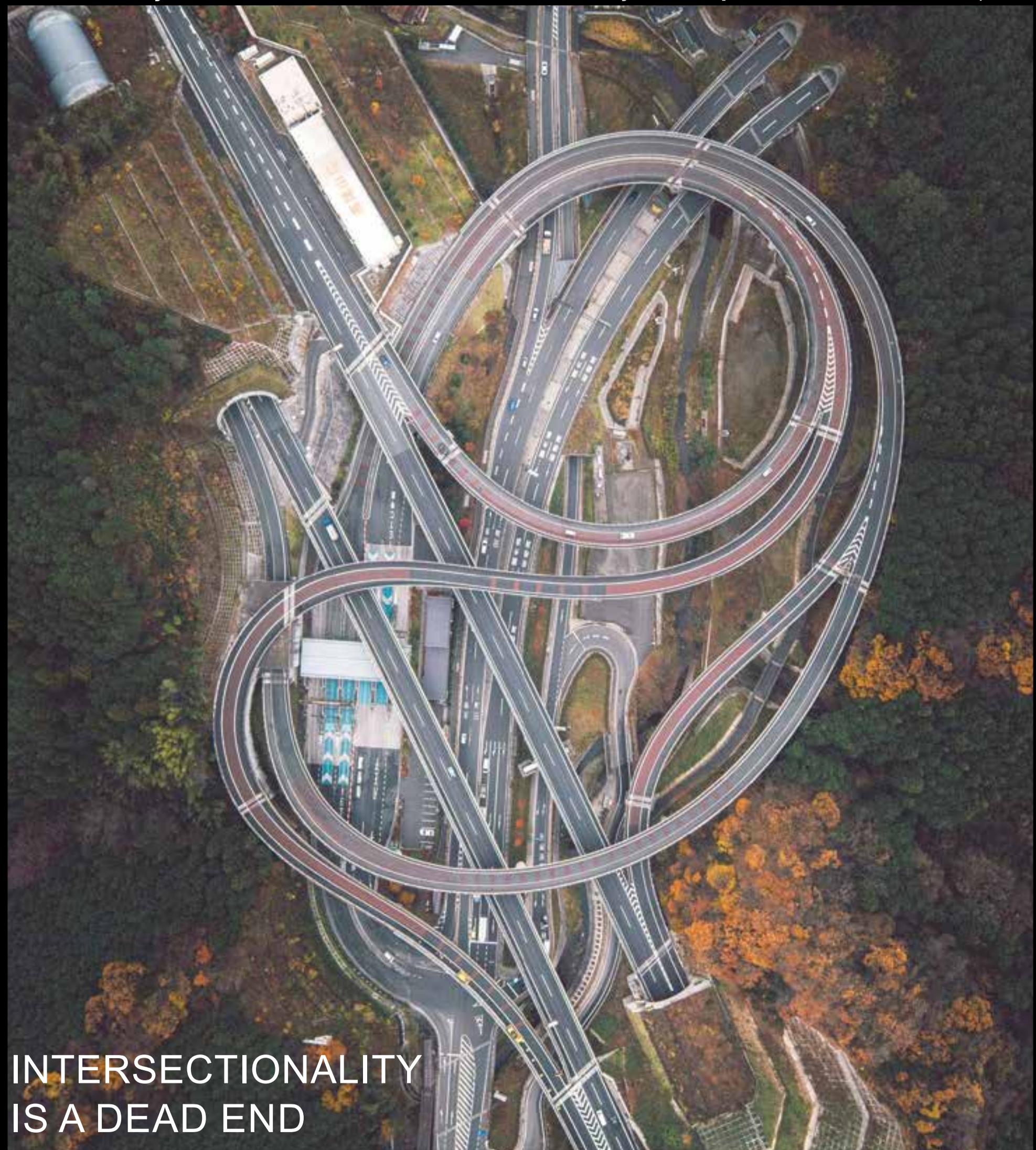
**A very British cover-up:  
Jeremy Thorpe, Norman Scott  
and the lessons for today**

- John McDonnell and LRC
- Italy's coalition
- Arkady Babchenko
- Art for art's sake

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**INTERSECTIONALITY  
IS A DEAD END**

# LETTERS



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

## Tactical retreat

I agree with Jim Grant that Ken Livingstone being in effect forced and hounded out of the Labour Party is a black day for that party ('A black day for Labour', May 24). I think, however, that Ken deciding to resign was the right decision and showed a particular form of courage and bravery. Sometimes knowing when to tactically retreat and to do so in a timely manner requires more bravery (and judgement) than fighting on to the bitter end.

It is clear that Mr Livingstone has been placed under immense and completely unacceptable strain and stress. I have no idea if he has become depressed, as Jim suggested he might, but a bullish and self-confident exterior is absolutely no indicator of whether someone is vulnerable to or suffering from clinical mental health issues.

The physical and verbal harassment of Mr Livingstone by the loud-mouth and frankly thuggish John Mann MP in the immediate aftermath of the 'Zionism and Nazism' comments was disgusting and offensive (Match 28 2016). Mr Livingstone looked visibly shaken, elderly, frail and vulnerable. The TV cameras 'by chance' happened to be in place to witness Mr Mann's verbal and neophysical assault on Livingstone. We caught Mr Mann a couple of times looking directly and smirking into the cameras.

I agree with the Labour Against the Witchhunt letter in the same edition about Baroness Chakrabarti. She is meant to be the shadow attorney general, for goodness sake. Yet I too could not believe watching that *Sunday politics* interview the way she completely cast aside any concept of due process, objectivity, balance and judgment by 'demanding' Livingstone be expelled and even threatening to resign if not.

Chakrabarti has got to be one of the most shallow, weakest and inadequate of politicians. Whenever she appears on TV, she takes pious simpering with a shaky-breaky voice to the point of caricature and sometimes appears at the point of tears and a breakdown. The idea that lady could operate in government with any sort of robustness, independence or challenge (as the most senior law officer) is ridiculous. Why is she there?

However, Jim and other writers in the *Weekly Worker* systematically miss the point which got Livingstone into trouble. It was nothing to do with whether Zionists ever collaborated with the Nazi regime. It was Livingstone stating "Hitler was a Zionist" - not only failing to withdraw or genuinely apologise for that, but repeating and maintaining that accusation.

Before the actual establishment of the state of Israel, Zionism was simply the ideology which advocated a national homeland for Jewish people in Palestine. I would regard that aim as fundamentally reactionary and unacceptable, but to assert that Hitler and the Nazi regime was 'in favour of a homeland for the Jewish people' is utterly nonsensical both at the time of the 1930s, not to mention how things actually turned out in the 1940s.

Yes, it is true that some Zionists collaborated with the Nazi regime to save their own skins. Yes, it is true that some Zionists collaborated with the Nazi regime to ensure the escape of some Jewish people from Germany. Yes, it is true that these saved Jews were disproportionately petty bourgeois or bourgeois. Yes, it is true that some Zionists were more concerned to save Jews who would directly emigrate to Palestine. Yes, it is true some Zionists are politically highly reactionary and extremely rightwing.

If some Zionists collaborated with the Nazi regime, then the Nazi regime by definition had some positive dealings with those Zionists. Clearly, they were hoping to try and alleviate and break the Jewish trade and business boycott of Nazi Germany. There was a tangential and

rather minor coincidence of interests in the big scheme of things at a point in time.

It would, however, be a quantum leap of astronomic, illogical proportions to draw from the above that either Nazi Germany was Zionist or that Zionism is Nazism. Hitler and the Nazis hated and had total contempt for Jewish people. They implemented the most harsh discrimination, attacks, brutalisation and oppression of Jewish people in Germany and in the conquered lands. They regarded and treated them as *Untermenschen* - subhuman.

This hatred and contempt led to the so-called holocaust, in which people who were Jewish under Nazi Germany, alongside political and other ethnic categories, were murdered on an industrial scale, deliberately and as a consequence of callous disregard.

This did not happen because "Hitler went mad", as the accompanying Livingstone comment put it, but as integral to the whole aims and objectives of the Nazi regime from the very outset, and as a consequence of starting to lose the war, finding a huge number of people in concentration camps and ghettos unable to be 'evacuated to the east', as was the original plan, and leading to mass, industrialised murder of prisoners and detainees.

We have to be extremely clear and careful about not confusing anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism. I was at a union meeting and international event over the weekend - actually the main subjects were Cuba and Columbia. The post-meeting discussion inevitably went on to Palestine and went something like 'Oh, our local MP is terrible. It is pointless writing to him - he is Jewish ...' - with the clear implication that because he is Jewish he is a terrible individual, not only supporting the right of the state of Israel to exist, but its oppression of the Palestinians.

Now it is true the MP in question is a dreadful, appalling individual and probably has a terrible stance on Israel (I don't actually know, but assume this is the case). But that is not because he is Jewish! He is appalling because he is an arrogant, contemptible, offensive, nasty piece of work, with reactionary politics and is a bootlicker of the worst order. If I was a Jewish person (I am not) at that meeting, I would have the right to have felt offended by that remark and discussion, and the fact no-one corrected the language; to be *de facto* associated with the dreadful events happening in Gaza and the West Bank, simply because of my ethnic grouping and/or my religion.

The rightwing anti-Semitism campaign is cleverer and more effective than we think. It is pounding away at a key weakness within the progressive left to adequately distinguish between Jewishness and Zionism.

We need to be far more rigorous and disciplined in separating anti-Semitism from anti-Zionism, from anti-Nazism. These are all separate categories.

**Andrew Northall**  
Kettering

## 68 and the left

I agree with much of what Mike Macnair has to say in his interesting analysis of May 68 and the orientation of the left ('May 68 to colour revolutions', May 31).

The launch of the Tet offensive was for us the single spark that lit a worldwide prairie fire (that doesn't mean the embers and combustible materials had not been accumulating for some time before, of course). Che called for "two, three, many Vietnams". 1968 and Tet brought the woolly left down from a decade of pacifism and notions that the struggle against war was a struggle against violence *per se*. Vietnam rammed home the message that there was a difference between the violence of the oppressed and the violence of the oppressor. As young revolutionary miners, we saw the world struggle across its diversities - different wings as detachments of the same struggle against the same oppressor we faced. We

thought the Black Panther party was *our* party in the context of the black liberation struggle in the USA. Predominantly white, we understood the slogan for 'black power' to mean black working people's power - we had no argument with that.

But I want to take issue with some of your conclusions about left groups. There certainly were Cuban-inspired ideas on the left - there was Third World First and the highly influential Tricontinental, and the Organisation for Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America: a non-sectarian perspective of uniting the tricontinental struggles, which brought together all the leftist guerrilla groups from different political traditions, all of whom were within Cuba's sphere of influence and armed support.

But these did not stand in contradiction to the struggles of the world 'traditional' proletariat, especially in Europe and North America. The International Marxist Group was one of the best, least doctrinaire and sectarian of the groups. Their determination to support the armed struggle in Ireland, as the bombs started go off in Britain, marked them out. A number of their comrades died in that struggle - murdered by loyalist militaries and criminals (if you could tell the difference) - while others like 'The Militant' adopted a shameful, social-imperialist position and condemned 'the gunmen' on all sides.

The IMG, although largely middle class and student-composed, did orientate strongly to traditional working class struggles too. Their support for the miners in the 72 and 74 battles saw them *en masse* on our demonstrations. They were fundraising and organising mass meetings on campuses and linked the miners' strike with the Irish struggle ('Troops out of Ireland, miners out of jail'). They took half of the massive demonstration of students in Hyde Park (after a fierce fist fight between them and International Students) past the National Coal Board offices, where I spoke. They also stood on our picket lines.

The main reason I take issue with Mike is his description of the position of the Posadist United Secretariat of the Fourth International and the perspective they held. I had during this period taken a right swerve diversion from anarchism to Trotskyism and its Posadist variant. Indeed I was a member of the central committee of the Revolutionary Workers Party - not to be confused with the later Workers Revolutionary Party (splitters!).

The Posadists occupied a unique perspective (outside the Sam Marcy tendency, Workers World, and the Revolutionary Communist League, which had broken from them). They held that the global class war was manifested through the distorted, but genuine, life-and-death struggle between 'the workers' states' (the Posadists rarely ever used the prefix 'degenerated' - in fact they believed there had been a partial regeneration, especially within the Red Army's top echelons, who they claimed were secretly reading Trotsky, especially on military tactics). Uniquely the Posadists believed that nuclear war was inevitable - the 'workers' states' would win it, the states on both sides would collapse, but humanity would triumph and reclaim the earth. More than that, at crucial points of conflict the Soviet Union should launch the pre-emptive nuclear strike against the USA. (This had been the position of the old united Fourth International for the period immediately following World War II, when the USA and Nato - Britain in particular - were preparing a pre-emptive strike against the USSR. But they quickly moved away from this and only the Posadists and some left Maoist groups believed this was a credible position.)

That said, they had some influence in the workers' struggles across Europe and Latin America. In Britain they built workplace cells and united fronts with shop stewards and unofficial workers' groups, establishing revolutionary papers like *United Car Worker* and our *The Mineworker*, as well as *Car Workers' Red*

*Flag* and *Miners' Red Flag*. They worked too with some influence in the Labour Party Young Socialists, so their orientation was not essentially 'third worldist'.

The politics of Posadism is somewhat of a specialist field of study and causes some amusement on the far left - some of it justified, some not. The Posadists bore an incredible resemblance to some of the religious cults in many ways. You can read our experiences of them in my *The wheel's still in spin* (still available from me for £8 post paid).

**David Douglass**  
Sheffield

## CPGB chauvinism

The split in Labour Against the Witchhunt, losing the comrades from Grassroots Black Left, is not at all surprising and it is the fault of those who sought to, and did, sabotage LAW's potential - which existed at its inception, but was destroyed on January 6 - to become a genuinely inclusive united front of the entire left in and around Labour to defend all leftwing victims of the witch-hunt. That is, all those targeted for their different strands of socialist and leftwing, thought irrespective of their distinctive views.

It is something of a tragedy that this split has happened in the context of the outrageous expulsion of Marc Wadsworth, and the disgusting victimisation of Stan Keable both from the Labour Party and his employment - betrayed both by the left bureaucracy in the Labour Party and the bureaucracy of Unison, which is now also threatening Tony Greenstein with disciplinary action for his sterling defence of Stan Keable. Jackie Walker is next in the firing line, and Ken Livingstone capitulated for Corbyn's illusory benefit. What is needed here above all is a genuine, non-sectarian united front of the whole left, which Grassroots Black Left, to their credit, appear to be also calling for. In this context it is necessary to speak plainly about what was done wrong previously and who by, in political terms.

In January, instead of building a collaborative, non-sectarian united front defence of the left, the CPGB and others voted to impose ideological proscriptions on LAW against ourselves and against supporters of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. Ourselves for our supposed 'leftwing anti-Semitism' - a piece of capitulatory, anti-Marxist nonsense that boils down to the view that Marxists are not allowed to analyse the Jewish question or use the tools of Marxist class analysis to deal with the concrete material roots and practice that stand behind the persecution and dispossession of the Arabs and the very strong influence of political Zionism in the world today (including the Labour Party).

This was fundamentally an act of Zionist-influenced social chauvinism by the CPGB, or, if you like, a vicarious piece of solidarity with Jewish chauvinism - something which has plagued the left particularly during this period. Notably when people around the CPGB complain about the refusal of some supposed leftwing people to defend Ken Livingstone, for example. While having no truck with actual anti-Jewish racism - if you can find any (occasionally the odd Nazi raises his head and daubs a swastika somewhere) - there should be no conciliation of any form of Jewish chauvinism or claim to special Jewish authority over supposed anti-Semitism, particularly in this period when false anti-Semitism smears and the abusive exploitation of the Nazi holocaust are among the chief political and ideological weapons of supporters of the Jewish state in justifying their incremental genocide against the Palestinians. The proscription of the AWL's views was actually superfluous and absurd, as the AWL were not there in any case due to their refusal, like the CPGB, to defend those they consider to be 'leftwing anti-Semites'. But there can be no such thing, since real, racist anti-Semitism, like any other form of racism, insofar as it occurs

in the workers' movement, is a rightist capitulation to some kind of bourgeois chauvinism.

The AWL's position of refusing to defend anti-Zionists to their left, like that of the CPGB with regard to ourselves, involved the crossing of the class line - it was scabbing. But if the AWL had been able to transcend this practical and unpopular scab conclusion of their ideology and, however reluctantly, join a principled bloc defending the entire left, including militant anti-Zionists, then that would be their contradiction. It would be an act of sectarianism to exclude them in that situation. The only stipulation should be that they defend the whole left. But in fact the CPGB's exclusion of a largely phantom AWL presence was just a cynical 'balancing' excuse for their reactionary exclusion of ourselves, which was an act of Jewish chauvinism - vicarious from the CPGB's non-Jewish leadership; not so from some of the semi-Bundist types they were allied with.

Any kind of Jewish chauvinism in this period goes hand in hand with elements of white chauvinism, since Jews in the imperialist countries, as Jackie Walker seems to be beginning to address, have climbed the racial hierarchy and occupy joint top spot with white nativists, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon countries. Jewish chauvinism therefore has a mutual affinity with white chauvinism, and more bluntly white racism. The CPGB's softness on white racism is expressed in its nonsensical position that the ruling class, and the British and US imperialist states, are not racist, but 'official anti-racist', and that the main problem today is not state racism, but bourgeois anti-racist national chauvinism.

This is nonsense. Jews have escaped from oppression today. You do not find Jews being beaten or killed in police custody, suffering grossly disproportionate poverty, joblessness, rates of imprisonment, discrimination in employment, being targeted by racist gangs, or anything like that. When anti-Semitism - *real* anti-Semitism - was a real force, as before World War II, these things did happen, but not any more. Jews are a privileged minority today, not an oppressed minority. Simply for stating this obvious truth, which is behind much of the witch-hunt in the Labour Party, we were purged by chauvinists on January 6.

This mutual affinity with white chauvinism obviously played an 'elephant in the room' role in splitting LAW. If I were in Deborah Hobson's shoes, or even more those of Marc Wadsworth (as one of the key figures in the Stephen Lawrence campaign going back decades), I would no doubt be very discomforted at people who in the past said that the Lawrence affair was an expression not of institutional state racism, but 'institutional anti-racism'. What nonsense! This stuff recently resurfaced in the CPGB's press over the Powell BBC 'tribute' and then even more the Windrush scandal.

Given the requirement to work with the CPGB and their allies over a period of several months, where the CPGB have already demonstrated their willingness to impose their own chauvinist agenda on LAW, I am not surprised that the black activists involved ended up feeling very uncomfortable and splitting away. This could have been avoided if LAW had been run on a genuinely non-exclusionist, collaborative basis, but the CPGB's sectarian chauvinism and cynical political cowardice sabotaged that. Thus all your opportunist and sectarian political derelictions catch up with you in the end.

The question to be discussed now is: what can be done to remedy this and where do the left go from here? We will work with anyone who is interested in seriously addressing that, irrespective of past differences and battles.

**Ian Donovan**  
Socialist Fight

**LAW**

# Sacked for daring to tell the truth

Contribute to the fight to reinstate Stan Keable, urges **David Shearer** of Labour Party Marxists



**They are coming for us all**

The implications of Stan Keable's victimisation by Hammersmith and Fulham council is a matter of grave concern for all democrats, defenders of free speech and, indeed, those of us who simply believe it is legitimate to reference historical facts to make points about contemporary politics.

Comrade Keable is the secretary of Labour Against the Witchhunt, a leading supporter of Labour Party Marxists and was a housing enforcer for the west London council for 17 unblemished years. He attended a counter-demonstration organised by Jewish Voice for Labour to challenge the March 26 'Enough is enough' anti-Corbyn provocation staged in Parliament Square by a coalition of rightwing Zionist organisations and a bevy of rightwing parliamentarians (including the Democratic Unionist Party, Norman Tebbit, John Mann and Lucia Berger). The comrade mingled with the anti-Corbyn crowd, distributing leaflets and engaging individuals in conversation.

One of our comrade's encounters was secretly recorded by the BBC *Newsnight* editor, David Grossman. In this, comrade Keable can be seen alluding to the well-documented collaboration between the early Nazi regime and the Zionist movement (the same episode that Ken Livingstone has been crucified for citing).

This snippet of a conversation was spread on social media, and local Tory MP Greg Hands demanded action be taken against Stan, appealing to Stephen Cowan, Hammersmith and Fulham's Labour leader. The next day the council suspended our comrade from work for the nebulous crime of having "brought the council into disrepute" - a charge that was upheld when comrade Keable was dismissed on April 21 after a disciplinary hearing.. "Disrepute"

in whose eyes? *How* does this verifiable 1930s episode bring shame on Hammersmith and Fulham council?

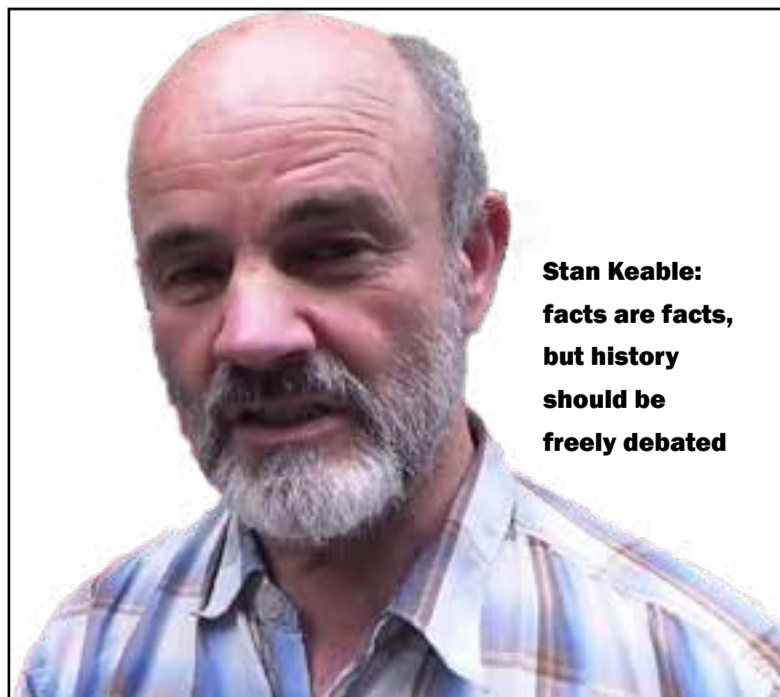
To make matters worse, he was also let down by Unison, which advised him to apologise instead of fighting the charges. When he refused that advice, the union informed him that it would not represent him.

The council's justifications for its actions state that comrade Keable "failed to avoid" the situation, not only by "making the comments", but also by "attending [the] counter-demonstration"! This is made explicit later in a letter where - incredibly - we are told that "in attending a counter-demonstration outside the Houses of Parliament on March 26 2018, Stan Keable knowingly increased the possibility of being challenged about his views and subsequently proceeded to express views that were in breach of

the council's equality, diversity and inclusion policy and the council's code of conduct."

There is some slippery use of language here. Comrade Keable certainly aired his views on March 26, but the issue of Nazi-Zionist collaboration, no matter how sensitive it now is, remains an historical fact that people can have different interpretations of - but it did happen. Apparently, however, referring to any of this equates to "offensive comments", according to Hammersmith and Fulham council. And anything deemed to be "offensive" is - literally - unsayable.

Comrade Keable is campaigning for reinstatement and intends to challenge this political victimisation at an employment tribunal. He needs £20,000 to mount a legal defence and to cover potential costs. Please contribute here: [www.gofundme.com/ReinstateStanKeable](http://www.gofundme.com/ReinstateStanKeable) ●



**Stan Keable:**  
**facts are facts,**  
**but history**  
**should be**  
**freely debated**

## ACTION

### London Communist Forum

**Sunday June 10:** No forum.

**Sunday June 17:** Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group: study of August Nimitz'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' (continued). Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1.

Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk);

and Labour Party Marxists: [www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](http://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk).

### Radical Anthropology Group

**Tuesday June 12, 6.30pm:** Series of talks on human origins, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1. This meeting: 'Did gender egalitarianism make us human?'. Speaker: Camilla Power.

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group:

<http://radicalanthropologygroup.org/>

### Equality for all

**Saturday June 9, 9.30am to 4.30pm:** TUC regional equalities conference, Civic Centre, Gateshead NE8. For trade unions members, reps and full-time officers.

Organised by TUC:

[www.tuc.org.uk/northern/events/rearranged-tuc-northern-equalities-conference](http://www.tuc.org.uk/northern/events/rearranged-tuc-northern-equalities-conference).

### No to the EDL

**Saturday June 9, 2pm:** Counter-protest, Downing Street, London SW1. Oppose the English Defence League and Tommy Robinson.

Organised by Stand Up To Racism and Unite Against Fascism:

[www.standuptoracism.org.uk/](http://www.standuptoracism.org.uk/)

[oppose-the-racist-fascist-march-for-tommy-robinson-saturday-9-june](http://oppose-the-racist-fascist-march-for-tommy-robinson-saturday-9-june).

### Labour Against the Witchhunt

**Friday June 15, 7.30pm:** Launch of local LAW group, Whitstable Labour Club, 12 Belmont Road, Whitstable CT5. With Jackie Walker

**Saturday June 16, 1pm:** National membership meeting, Union Tavern, 52 Lloyd Baker Street, Clerkenwell, London WC1.

Organised by Labour Against the Witchhunt:

[www.labouragainsthewitchhunt.org/events](http://www.labouragainsthewitchhunt.org/events).

### The politics of new Sinn Féin

**Tuesday June 19, 7pm:** Meeting, the Wellington, 37 Bennetts Hill, Birmingham B2. Speaker: Kevin Bean.

Organised by Birmingham Socialist Discussion Group:

[SER14@btinternet.com](mailto:SER14@btinternet.com)

### Apartheid then and now

**Thursday June 21, 7pm:** Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2. Comparing apartheid in South Africa to that in Israel and supporting the ongoing struggle.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign:

[www.palestinecampaign.org/events/apartheid-struggle-for-freedom](http://www.palestinecampaign.org/events/apartheid-struggle-for-freedom).

### Windrush 70

**Saturday June 23, 2.30pm:** Public meeting, Mander Hall, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. Resisting the hostile environment.

Organised by National Education Union: <https://neu.org.uk>.

### Democracy in the Labour Party

**Wednesday June 27, 7pm:** Public meeting and discussion, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. At the time of the centenary of the 1918 constitution, what does Labour democracy look like? Speaker: Claudia Webbe, Islington councillor and member of NEC. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: [www.marx-memorial-library.org](http://www.marx-memorial-library.org).

### Our NHS is 70

**Saturday June 30, 12 noon:** Demonstration. Assemble Portland Place, London W1 for march to Downing Street, London SW1. Celebrate the 70th anniversary of the NHS.

Organised by People's Assembly: [www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk](http://www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk).

### National Shop Stewards Network

**Saturday July 7, 11am to 4.30pm:** Annual conference, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Entry: £6 - open to all trade union and anti-cuts campaigners.

Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: <http://shopstewards.net>.

### People, Pits and Politics

**Thursday July 12, 12 noon to Friday July 13, 10pm:** Festival, Town Hall, Market Place, Durham DH1. Film, comedy and music, plus training sessions and workshops. Speakers include: John McDonnell, Paul Mason, Billy Bragg, Mark Steel, Ken Loach.

Organised by People, Pits and Politics: <https://pppfestival.com>.

### The Big Meeting

**Saturday July 14, 8.30am to evening:** Durham Miners Gala, various venues, Durham.

Organised by Durham Miners Gala: [www.durhamminers.org/gala](http://www.durhamminers.org/gala).

### Momentum Big Summer Gathering

**Sunday July 15, 10am to 4pm:** National membership conference, Town Hall, Market Place, Durham DH1.

Tickets from [www.tickettailor.com/events/pppfestival/168995](http://www.tickettailor.com/events/pppfestival/168995). To join Organised by Momentum: <https://peoplesmomentum.com>.

### Against the witch-hunt

**Tuesday July 17, 11am:** Lobby and protest at Labour's NEC, Southside, 105 Victoria Street, London SW1.

Organised by Labour Against the Witchhunt:

[www.labouragainsthewitchhunt.org](http://www.labouragainsthewitchhunt.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.

**LABOUR**

# And then they came for LRC

John McDonnell has a political history, writes **Carla Roberts** of Labour Party Marxists. But, unfortunately, not much in the way of a backbone

**T**he *Sunday Telegraph* has a scoop: It has “emerged”, the paper writes, that shadow chancellor John McDonnell is the president of the Labour Representation Committee.<sup>1</sup> And *The Jewish Chronicle* is so impressed that it copied the article almost word for word.<sup>2</sup>

Having made such a major discovery, the *Torygraph* thinks that McDonnell’s position is simply untenable. It quotes usual suspect John Mann MP, who calls on McDonnell to resign from the LRC (we will get to Mann later).

Why? Because, on the one hand, McDonnell said he would follow Jeremy Corbyn in rooting out anti-Semitism from the Labour Party. After all, has he not just promised former Labour councillor and campaigns officer of the rightwing Jewish Labour Movement, Adam Langleben (who inexplicably lost his seat in Barnet after ranting and raving for months against the terrible level of anti-Semitism in the party), that he would “call out hard-left news websites if they promote conspiratorial and anti-Semitic stories”?<sup>3</sup> (As an aside, Jewish Voice for Labour, on the other hand, has been trying unsuccessfully for almost a year now to secure a meeting with either McDonnell or Corbyn.)

But McDonnell cannot fool the eagle-eyed investigative journalists of the *Telegraph* so easily, who diligently managed to dig out McDonnell’s association with the LRC (which only goes back to the refounding of the organisation in, oh, 2004 - a mere 14 years). The problem, as far as the *Telegraph* is concerned, is that the LRC dares to come out in *defence* of Labour Party members who have been unjustly suspended and expelled over the last two years: to the LRC’s credit, there are numerous articles and statements on its website defending Ken Livingstone, Jackie Walker, Marc Wadsworth and Stan Keable<sup>4</sup>.

In the words of the *Telegraph*, the LRC is “campaigning for Labour figures accused of anti-Semitism”. It quotes an unnamed Labour MP: “Jeremy Corbyn says one thing on anti-Semitism, but his cheerleaders say quite another. This isn’t a good look for Jeremy or John McDonnell, as it makes what they’re saying on anti-Semitism look quite insincere.”

Needless to say, our fearless investigators fail to mention the fact that *none* of those “accused of anti-Semitism” and defended by the LRC have actually been subject to discipline for that offence. Had Ken Livingstone not resigned, he would undoubtedly have been expelled under the charge of “bringing the party into disrepute”. The same catch-all phrase has been used to get rid of Marc Wadsworth and Tony Greenstein. Stan Keable, secretary of Labour Against the Witchhunt, has been expelled from the party for his association with Labour Party Marxists - and sacked from his job for - you guessed it - “bringing the council into disrepute”. Jackie Walker, when her case is finally heard, will in all likelihood also be charged under the same clause.

Of course, it is true that all those comrades have *been accused of* anti-Semitism - by the right in the party, the pro-Israel lobby and the mainstream media. *Falsely* accused, that is. But never charged with it. Because the charge would never hold up - not even in front of Labour’s highly politicised kangaroo court, the national constitutional committee, which is still dominated by the right and



**John McDonnell: should make a stand**

chaired by Maggie Cosin, “a leading force in Labour First”<sup>5</sup>, according to investigative journalist Asa Winstanley of the award-winning *Electronic Intifada*.

None of the comrades have said anything even remotely anti-Semitic. Marc Wadsworth criticised Ruth Smeeth MP, who happens to be Jewish. Stan Keable and Ken Livingstone pointed out the historically verifiable fact that the early Nazi government and the Zionist Federation of Germany signed the infamous Ha’avaara transfer agreement in 1933. Even Tony Greenstein, who has used the word ‘Zio’ - which Jeremy Corbyn and Jon Lansman now want to ban as representing an expression of the rather mythical “new anti-Semitism” - was booted out not for anti-Semitism, but basically for being rude<sup>6</sup>.

As if it were out to highlight the deeply irrational nature of the ongoing witch-hunt, the *Telegraph* in its article quotes at length John Mann MP. He pretends to be simply outraged by this particular paragraph in the LRC’s statement on Ken Livingstone:

When we consider political pygmies like John Mann and Wes Streeting accusing Ken of anti-Semitism, it is worth asking oneself, ‘What have these people ever done in their lives to advance the cause of Labour?’ Livingstone has done quite a lot.

Mann complains not about the correct observation that rightwingers like himself seem chiefly interested in *damaging* the Corbyn-led Labour Party rather than

building it. Instead, he now considers “filing a formal complaint” against the LRC over its “appalling racist language”. You see he is apparently also the “chairman of the parliamentary group on the Great Lakes of Africa”. In this very important role, he has managed to meet real pygmies and knows what they go through. Anybody using “this racist insult should hang their heads in shame, and be expelled from the Labour Party. I am sure John McDonnell will want to resign immediately”.

I must confess, I did laugh out loud when I first read this. This is such a monumentally stupid charge, it almost beggars belief the *Telegraph* would print such nonsense. However, the LRC steering committee has now changed the phrase “political pygmies” to “self-publicists”<sup>7</sup>. It has done this without any explanation, as far as I know - a missed opportunity in our view to criticise the outrageous hypocrisy of John Mann, who, as everybody knows, could not give a hoot about really fighting racism.

Clearly, this is part and parcel of painting Jeremy Corbyn and his allies as a bunch of cranks and anti-Semites that can never be trusted to reliably run capitalism. In this case, they are trying the old trick of guilt by association.

## Grow a backbone

In other words, this latest attack by the *Telegraph* was a splendid opportunity for John McDonnell to come out and defend his party against the lazy and politically motivated charge of anti-Semitism. A chance to proudly stand up for his comrades in the LRC.

A chance to speak out against the ever-increasing witch-hunt in the party and wider society. And perhaps even a chance to grow a backbone.

But, of course, we knew he would do no such thing. His response has been as disappointing as is now expected of him and the rest of the Labour leadership (actually, it could be worse: he might still resign his long-held post in the LRC, but we doubt he will). His spokesman half-heartedly tried to dismiss the story, stating that McDonnell was “just an honorary president of the LRC, and played no role in the content or decision-making process of the organisation”.

Well, he actually helped set up the LRC. And he used to be *chair*, that is until Jeremy Corbyn made him shadow chancellor in 2015, when he was replaced by Matt Wrack, leader of the Fire Brigades Union.

But unfortunately, rather than stand with their LRC comrades in openly opposing the witch-hunt against the Labour left, McDonnell and the Labour leadership continue to give credence to the lie that the party has a huge problem with anti-Semitism. Yes, there are a few crackpot anti-Semites in the party. Just as there are sexists, racists and there may also be a few paedophiles. Statistically speaking, it would be virtually impossible for a party of almost 600,000 *not* to have members whose views are unacceptable. Such a huge membership simply cannot but reflect some of the prejudices that exist in today’s society.

That is why Jeremy Corbyn’s

promise of enforcing a “zero tolerance” policy towards anti-Semitism is so wrong-headed<sup>8</sup>. Firstly, taken to its logical conclusion it means a system of intimidation and thought control. Secondly, it is just politically wrong. The way to fight backward ideas is not to throw out anybody who makes a stupid, racist, sexist or nationalistic comment. But by education, by open debate and thorough discussion. The opposite of what is happening in the party today, in other words. Many comrades are now scared of discussing *anything* contentious, out of fear of coming onto the radar of the witchfinders and having their reputation and livelihood ruined in the process.

Unfortunately, Jeremy Corbyn has to take a fair share of the blame for this McCarthyite atmosphere. After all, it is only the continued policy of trying to appease the right and the pro-Israel lobby emanating from the Labour leader’s office that has given the ‘anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism’ narrative the traction it now has. Once the media found that Corbyn was willing to give ground, it kept piling on the pressure with one ridiculous accusation after the other.

For over two years, the Labour leadership has been sitting on the report into anti-Semitism produced by Shami Chakrabarti. Despite the despicable role the lawyer has played in forcing Ken Livingstone out of the Labour Party, her recommendations, at least when it comes to due process and natural justice, would have led to the exoneration of pretty much all those recently expelled.<sup>9</sup> The cases of Marc Wadsworth, Tony Greenstein and Jackie Walker come to mind.

But Corbyn seems to have been advised that it is best to get rid of those ‘problematic’ cases first, before he green-lights the long overdue reform of Labour’s disciplinary process. This is both cowardly and foolish. The right will not give up, but will continue to throw everything they have at him.

For the right and the pro-Israel lobby, the treatment meted out to Jackie Walker, Marc Wadsworth, Tony Greenstein, Stan Keable and all the other victims of the witch-hunt is not primarily about those individuals. They will fight tooth and nail to stop the transformation of the Labour Party into a democratic, anti-imperialist, working class party that will resist the drive for yet another devastating war in the Middle East.

For us on the left, these victimised comrades need to be publicly and vigorously defended with every available weapon at our disposal. We will defend them alongside comrades from the LRC, Labour Against the Witchhunt, Jewish Voice for Labour and all other groups that fight against unjust suspensions and expulsions from the Labour Party.

But which side are John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn on? ●

## Notes

1. *The Sunday Telegraph* June 3.
2. *The Jewish Chronicle* has copied the story, almost word for word.
3. [www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/john-mcdonnell-pledges-to-call-out-antisemitism-on-hard-left-websites-1.463801?highlight=call+out+hard-left+news+websites](http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/john-mcdonnell-pledges-to-call-out-antisemitism-on-hard-left-websites-1.463801?highlight=call+out+hard-left+news+websites).
4. <https://labourrep.com>.
5. <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/asa-winstanley/who-labour-partys-witchfinder-general>.
6. <https://labourlist.org/2018/03/i-will-always-be-your-ally-in-the-fight-against-antisemitism-corbys-letter-to-jewish-leaders>.
7. <https://labourrep.com/blog/2018/5/23/ken-livingstone-lrc-statement>.
8. [www.ft.com/content/207543f0-310e-11e8-ac48-10c6fd22f03](http://www.ft.com/content/207543f0-310e-11e8-ac48-10c6fd22f03).
9. <http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk/a-toxic-climate-of-fear>.

## ESTABLISHMENT

# A very British cover-up

Conspiracies *do* happen, as the Jeremy Thorpe scandal proves. And Eddie Ford reckons the establishment might also conspire against Jeremy Corbyn in the event of a Labour victory

The world does not operate according to diabolical plots hatched by small, sinister cabals. Having said that, conspiracies *do* happen - attempts are made to make something happen that serves the interests of this or that person, group, lobby or body. After all, someone tried to kill the Skripals in Salisbury, whether it was the Russian or Ukrainian 'security services', SBU<sup>1</sup>, MI5 or some other actor. Somebody, somewhere *conspired* to bring that event about. Then there is the 'murdered' Russian journalist, Arkady Babchenko, turning up very alive at a press conference in Kiev - again, someone conspired to pull that particular hare-brained stunt. Things are not always what they seem, and the fact that some crackpots believe that too does not necessarily make it untrue.

Which brings us neatly to the recent three-part BBC mini-series premiered on May 20, *A very English scandal*, starring Hugh Grant as Jeremy Thorpe and Ben Whishaw as Norman Scott. The title of the drama, written by Russell T Davies, was perhaps a nod in the direction of Chris Mullin's influential *A very British coup*. The last episode, aired on June 3, was directly followed on BBC4 by a documentary made by BBC veteran journalist Tom Mangold, entitled *The Jeremy Thorpe scandal*. In 1979, Mangold was the *Panorama* reporter who led an investigation into the trial of Jeremy Thorpe and others for the conspiracy to kill Thorpe's former lover from the early 1960s, Norman Scott - that was when homosexual acts were illegal, of course. Therefore any disclosure about his relationship with "Bunnies", his pet name for Scott, would have ended Thorpe's seemingly glittering political career.

Convinced that the former Liberal Party leader would be found guilty, as was everybody else, a special *Panorama* post-trial programme was prepared - but had to be hastily scrapped when the jury returned a verdict of not guilty on Thorpe and the other defendants, with the BBC's director-general of the time ordering that all copies be destroyed. Wisely, Mangold kept a copy. Edited and updated with new information about a fresh 2015 inquiry by Gwent police, which was dropped two years later under slightly mysterious circumstances, Mangold clearly shows how powerful political forces right at the top of the British establishment tried to protect Jeremy Thorpe, who was considered one of their own, being Eton and Oxford-educated and all the rest of it.

The programme featured fascinating interviews from 1979 with Norman Scott, chief prosecution witness and former Liberal Party MP for Bodmin Peter Bessell, and Andrew 'Gino' Newton, the hit man. Newton, as shown grippingly in the drama, shot dead Scott's Great Dane dog on Bodmin Moor in 1975 and then tried to kill Scott too, but fortunately for the latter the gun jammed and he is still alive today to tell the tale - unlike Jeremy Thorpe who died in 2014 after suffering for decades with Parkinson's disease.

In my view *A very English scandal* was superb - all *Weekly Worker* readers should watch it. Hugh Grant's performance as Thorpe was almost uncanny in the way it perfectly captured the Liberal leader's physical mannerisms and personality - what an actor: it could have been Thorpe himself staring languidly at you from the TV screen. Ben Whishaw was also excellent - even if Scott, now 78, apparently "hates" the way he was portrayed as a "mincing weakling" (not how it came across to



Chief prosecution witness: Ben Whishaw as Norman Scott

me when I watched the show: rather he seemed quite a resilient character).

For readers of an older generation - or perhaps students of comedy - one of the main memories of this affair is Peter Cook's brilliant 1979 sketch, 'Entirely a matter for you', ruthlessly satirising judge Joseph Cantley's notoriously biased closing remarks to the jury.<sup>2</sup> Needless to say, those remarks were a near pristine example of the 'old boy network' at work, not to mention general class prejudice and bigotry. According to Cantley, Scott had a "warped personality" and was an "accomplished sponger", "crook", "fraud", "proven liar", "whiner", "parasite" and, of all things, a "male model". Enough said.

The judge did not think much of Peter Bessell either: he was a "humbag" whose entire evidence was a "a tissue of lies" because he had signed a "deplorable" contract with *The Sunday Telegraph* for the serialisation rights of his memoirs and his fee of £25,000 would double were Thorpe to be convicted. But Thorpe, on the other hand, in the judge's opinion, was a fine man of "hitherto unblemished reputation" and a "national figure with a very distinguished public record" - why would he consort with low-life such as Scott?

'Judge' Peter Cook's summing-up said it all, when he instructed the jury "now to retire ... to carefully consider your verdict of not guilty". In denial almost right to the very end, it seems, Thorpe told *The Guardian* in January 2008 that if his affair with "Bunnies" happened now, "I think the public would be kinder". In other words, he was no longer denying that the two had had a homosexual affair, but he did not even mention, let alone express any remorse about, conspiring to murder his ex-lover.<sup>3</sup> You would almost believe that he was the victim, not Scott.

### Context

Returning to the main point, the entire Jeremy Thorpe scandal clearly represents an extensive cover-up - or conspiracy, if you prefer. Obviously this did not just involve leading figures in the Liberal

Party, but also the Tory government at the time - especially the then home secretary, the infamous Reginald Maudling.

Scott told his story in May 1971 to Emlyn Hooson (chairman of the Liberal Party in Wales and MP for Montgomeryshire) and a certain David Steel, later to become the Liberal leader. An internal party inquiry was set up, chaired by Lord Byers, the leader of the Liberals in the House of Lords. However, at the inquiry Byers became immediately hostile to Scott - who felt "like a boy at school up before the headmaster" (Byers remarked, judge Cantley-style, that Scott was a "common blackmailer" who needed "psychiatric help"). The inquiry then questioned police officers about the extremely intimate "Bunnies" letters sent by Thorpe to Scott early in their friendship. The police claimed in 1962 that they were "inconclusive" - even though they were nothing of the sort. Thorpe persuaded Maudling, and the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, John Waldron, to inform Byers that there was "no police interest" in Thorpe's activities and no evidence of wrongdoing on his part. As a result, very conveniently, the inquiry dismissed Scott's allegations.

In order to fully understand the Jeremy Thorpe story, it is vital to remember the wider political context. Thorpe's personal standing was greatly enhanced in March 1973 when he married Marion, countess of Harewood, whose former husband was a first cousin to the queen. More importantly still, the general election of February 1974 saw the party winning six million votes and 14 seats, putting them in a strong position because the election had resulted in a hung parliament. In subsequent negotiations, Thorpe was to be offered a cabinet post by Conservative prime minister Edward Heath, if he would bring the party into a coalition - junior ministries would be allocated to other senior Liberals. Many people at the time thought that Thorpe was an absolute shoo-in for deputy prime minister - an early Nick Clegg, but with more gravitas.

Meaning that in this period Jeremy Thorpe was very well connected and potentially a very important mover and shaker - maybe even a kingmaker. No way could a "parasite" like Norman Scott be allowed to upset the establishment's plans to ensure political stability. Hence they rallied to defend Thorpe and that carried on into the 1979 court case, and beyond. Always stick together, old boy.

The Gwent police's re-investigation of the case in 2015 was eventually dropped because Andrew Newton was apparently dead. But where was the death certificate? With the BBC drama, plus a *Mail on Sunday* 'exclusive' on June 3, revealing that Newton - just like Arkady Babchenko - was actually alive and well, the police reopened their investigation.<sup>4</sup> Strangely, the police did not appear to know how to do a simple Google search, unlike *Mail* journalists, given that his name appears in a 1994 article. This reported on an inquest, where a man called Hann Redwin was accused of foul play over the death of a woman, but it emerged that Redwin was, in fact, Andrew Newton, who was then living in London (he was cleared of foul play at the inquest).<sup>5</sup>

We also discover, quite incredibly in some ways, that four years ago another potential hit man, Dennis Meighan, told the *Mail* that in 1975 he was offered £13,500 - the equivalent of £140,000 today - by a 'representative' of Thorpe to *silence* Scott for good, because it was feared that he was about to go public with all the details of his past relationship with Thorpe. Meighan initially agreed to kill Scott, but got cold feet and went on to confess to the police - making explicit Thorpe's involvement in the plot. But curiously his original statement disappeared - to be replaced by one that removed all incriminating references to Thorpe and the Liberal Party, surely at the behest of elements within the British establishment.

If it looks like a conspiracy and quacks like a conspiracy, then it probably is a conspiracy. Yet, as is nearly always the case with the British establishment, these things start to

come out so long after the event that most of the people involved are either dead or too old to be held to account. Gwent police now claim to be "satisfied that there is no basis to re-refer the matter to the CPS and the investigation remains closed".<sup>6</sup>

### Implications

In view of what the Thorpe affair demonstrates, it does seem appropriate to finish with a few thoughts about that other Jeremy - current leader of the Labour Party. If Corbyn does lead Labour into the next general election, and it ends up with a majority or as the biggest party, it is highly questionable whether he would actually become prime minister. This is much to the bafflement of most on the left, who seem to believe that the British ruling class would never do anything that is not in strict accordance with Queensberry rules.

Communists say look at the Jeremy Thorpe case and tell us seriously that the establishment would not take steps to ensure such a government never happens. For all those on the left who refuse to believe this, look at your TV screen and *learn* - the BBC has provided the working class movement with valuable information about the workings of the establishment, knowingly or not. If you want to talk about dangers to the stability of the capitalist system, then we in the CPGB can reassure you that Corbyn is a far bigger danger than poor old Norman Scott - he was a *victim* of the establishment, not a radical opponent, as the Labour leader is still deemed to be. If you take the ongoing campaign to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism, this is fundamentally about preventing a Corbyn government. Thus, for example, if Corbyn did lead Labour to victory, is it not possible that the queen would decline to invite this 'anti-Semite' to form a government? Would she not follow the advice of her privy council and look for someone else in the Labour Party who is not tainted by accusations of anti-Semitism, such as that nice Sir Keir Starmer?

Such accusations are a load of bull, of course - which is what Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell *should* be saying, not coming out with claptrap about how there is an 'anti-Semitism' problem within the party, and so on. The left also tells us that if the queen moved against Corbyn in such a manner there would be a revolution - what utter nonsense. How can there be a revolution if you have not split the army, or failed to win the working class to the idea of actually taking power?

As for Corbyn and McDonnell, they need to develop a backbone quickly and remember their republicanism, which has become increasingly platonic. We need to open the fight for a genuinely democratic constitution, which by definition means a federal republic - the incorporation of self-determination for Scotland and Wales, together with the abolition of the House of Lords, the standing army, the privy council and the whole monarchical set-up ●

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### Notes

1. Security Service of Ukraine.
2. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kyos-M48B8U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kyos-M48B8U).
3. [www.theguardian.com/politics/2008/jan/28/liberal-democrats.uk](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2008/jan/28/liberal-democrats.uk).
4. [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5798965/Mail-Sunday-tracks-Norman-Scotts-killer.html](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5798965/Mail-Sunday-tracks-Norman-Scotts-killer.html).
5. [www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/no-foul-play-in-eiger-death-1403009.html](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/no-foul-play-in-eiger-death-1403009.html).
6. [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/jun/04/police-investigation-jeremy-thorpe-scan-dal-gwent](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/jun/04/police-investigation-jeremy-thorpe-scan-dal-gwent).

**COMMENT**

The logic is political gravel

# Intersectionality is a dead end

Sections of the left are beginning to cotton on to the extent to which 'identity politics' and 'intersectionality' are neoliberal projects, argues **Mike Macnair**. But they do not yet offer a clear alternative

**S**cience and Society, the theoretical journal associated with the Communist Party USA, in its latest issue (April 2018) carries a symposium on 'intersectionality' from "Marxist-feminist" points of view, with short pieces by Hester Eisenstein, Martha E Gimenez, Barbara Foley, Lise Vogel and Shana A Russell.<sup>1</sup>

S&S is not alone in interrogating the issue. The website 'nonsite.org' titles its issue No23 (February 2018) "Naturalizing class relations".<sup>2</sup> The introduction by Kenneth Warren sees the issue as seeking

to lay out, as clearly and as programmatically as we could, the reasons why, despite protestations to the contrary, anti-racism - understood as insisting on the symmetry of fighting discrimination and fighting exploitation - suppresses the development of a working class politics rather than offering a road to it.

Adolph Reed junior's 'Black politics after 2016' is a particularly trenchant account of the history and the way in which 'anti-racism' is deployed as a form of red-baiting against attempts to raise class politics.

Meanwhile, Verso in May this year published Asad Haider's *Mistaken identity: race and class in the age of*

*Trump*. I have not yet got a copy of this book, but it has been favourably reviewed in *The Guardian*, and Haider has been interviewed on *The Intercept*,<sup>3</sup> as well as writing in *Viewpoint Magazine* (of which he is executive editor) on related issues.<sup>4</sup> Though this paper should review the book, there is probably enough coverage available to get a sense of the argument for present purposes.

There are certainly other critiques. Googling "intersectionality critiques" produces 136,000 hits; limiting the search to the last year still produces 230. "Identity politics Marxist critique" produces 138,000, with 220 in the last year.<sup>5</sup>

However, the interventions of S&S, nonsite.org and Haider are interesting because they seem to reflect a dawning awareness that 'intersectionality' and 'identity politics' might in fact be neoliberal political traps, in the wake of Trump's election victory and that of the Republicans in 2016, and of the Clintonistas' deployment of identity politics against the Sanders movement. "White identity politics" produces 465,000 hits, with 280 in the last year, while "Christian identity politics" brings up 765,000, 230 in the last year ...

This *partial* recognition is thus perhaps a limited step forward for at least the US left (the British

left is still catching up with the process of stupefying itself with US intersectionality arguments from two decades ago, even while the 'anti-Semitism' witch-hunt displays their real meaning).

But in fact the S&S, nonsite and Haider critiques of intersectionality all in one way or another remain stuck with aspects of the common problems of the ideas of the left: either misunderstandings of what the idea of class politics is about or clinging to practices of undue politeness - a kind of 'united front' self-censorship derived ultimately from Gyorgi Dimitrov's arguments at the 7th Congress of Comintern; or assumptions of single-issue campaigning and 'movements', which leave out of account the question of *party*, and hence would in practice be actually trapped in the intersectionalists' inability to take decisions about priorities.

In order to do justice to these issues, this article will be divided into two parts. This one will focus on the origins of the 'intersectionality' concept and the *Science and Society* symposium. The second will look more at the nonsite.org and Haider critiques, and go a bit further into general issues.

## Intersectionality

The term 'intersectionality' was coined

by black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw. Born in 1959, Crenshaw is just a little too young to have been an active participant in the leftwing feminist and/or black movements of the early to mid-1970s. She is in her higher education a child of the opening up of the elite universities in the 1960s-70s: she got her BA in 'Africana and government' at Cornell in 1981, her JD (law degree) at Harvard in 1984, and LLM (postgraduate law degree) at Wisconsin in 1985; she then clerked for a senior Wisconsin judge, before getting her first teaching job at the University of California in 1986.

She may have used 'intersectionality' earlier, but a standard reference is her 1989 law review article, 'Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics'.<sup>6</sup> The first part of this article is an analysis of court decisions on US anti-discrimination law, which allowed employers to argue that they were not discriminating against black women either because they treated white women better or because they treated black men better.

The term 'intersectionality' reflects this specific context: it is taken, not from the relationship between different oppressed sections of society (as it is now commonly understood), but from

the 'intersection', the road junction, reflecting the position of black women as injured by both the racist and the sexist streams of traffic, travelling in different directions and colliding.

It is perhaps a result of a British academic lawyer's assumptions that I found it surprising that Crenshaw explained these decisions by an 'intersectional' gap in the legislation, rather than as fairly obvious examples of artificial reasoning animated by judicial bias in favour of employers.<sup>7</sup>

The second part of her article is addressed to feminist theory. Crenshaw comments:

When feminist theory attempts to describe women's experiences through analysing patriarchy, sexuality or separate-spheres ideology, it often overlooks the role of race. Feminists thus ignore how their own race functions to mitigate some aspects of sexism and, moreover, how it often privileges them over and contributes to the domination of other women. Consequently, feminist theory remains white, and its potential to broaden and deepen its analysis by addressing non-privileged women remains unrealised (p154).

The citations are, understandably, to academically 'reputable' literature.

The less respectable antecedents of this argument, growing out of the 'western Maoist' version of labour aristocracy theory, and its role in the processes of self-destruction of the 'liberation movements' through sectarianism in the 1970s, disappear. It is possible that Crenshaw, given her age and geographical background, was only indirectly aware of the leftwing antecedents, and of the splits, which will have appeared only in small-press ephemera.

More widely cited is Crenshaw's 1991 article, 'Mapping the margins: intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color,'<sup>8</sup> probably because the issue of violence against women had become so central to radical feminism in the 1980s (as contrasted with the 'economic' concerns of the 1970s left). The core of this article is a complex and careful study of the double-oppression aspects of race and gender in the contexts of rape and domestic violence, analysed in terms of structural intersectionality, political intersectionality (conflicts of organised feminism and organised anti-racism) and representational intersectionality (cultural figures of violence).

While this article does not show the same plain blindness to the judicial pursuit of capitalist class interests that appears in the 1989 piece, there are aspects of the 1991 account in which race fairly clearly serves as a proxy for poverty and all its consequences. By doing so, again class inequality as a category tends to disappear.

The conclusion includes the comment:

... intersectionality might be more broadly useful as a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics. It is helpful in this regard to distinguish intersectionality from the closely related perspective of anti-essentialism, from which women of colour have critically engaged white feminism - for the absence of women of colour, on the one hand, and for speaking for women of colour, on the other. One rendition of this anti-essentialist critique - that feminism essentialises the category 'woman' - owes a great deal to the postmodernist idea that categories we consider natural or merely representational are actually socially constructed in a linguistic economy of difference. While the descriptive project of postmodernism of questioning the ways in which meaning is socially constructed is generally sound, this critique sometimes misreads the meaning of social construction and distorts its political relevance ... (p1296).

This nod to postmodernism - followed by a defence of identity politics against "vulgar constructionism" - helped to make the 1991 version "take off" among 'postmodern' lefts and feminists (along with the use of violence against women as the core exemplar). It fits, again, with the disappearance of class as an explanatory category.

In Crenshaw's account in these articles, intersectionality is primarily the condition of being affected by double forms of oppression, which standard single-issue politics fails to engage: "The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite - that it frequently conflates or ignores intra-group differences" (p1242).

The problem with this approach is that - as with the US left use of double oppression in the 1970s, which tended to reduce the movement to gravel - it precludes the possibility of solidarity. This matters little for a law review article, because radical lawyers are precisely seeking 'saviours from on high' (the judges) to deliver their clients from oppression - not collective action, and hence do not require solidarity.

What 'intersectionality' has become in general is something broader than Crenshaw's use, but still with the same vices. It is a combination of the claim to pre-emptively and exclusively 'speak to' one's own oppression on the basis of personal experience; and hence to a veto of any collective statement by the larger group, which might be taken as adverse to the particular group.

Conversely, it implies that every resolution or public statement *must* engage all sections. And, though class may be admitted to the 'sections', in the sense of admitting that the working class forms an oppressed section, *the ruling class is still 'disappeared'*.

## Science and Society

The S&S symposium is introduced by Hester Eisenstein, author of *Feminism seduced: how global elites use women's labor and ideas to exploit the world* (2009). "I do not want to crush intersectionality, but rather pay tribute to it," she says (p256). Since liberal-imperialist/globalist versions of feminism are Eisenstein's primary target, it is perhaps understandable that she should be relatively sympathetic to 'black feminism', as countering 'white feminism'. But in fact Eisenstein's piece also genuflects in the direction of the 'white feminism' of famous early 1970s feminist authors: "the habit of referring to 'all women' was a dominant part of the classic writings ... And indeed such a trope was, one can argue, a necessary part of the struggle to differentiate gender as a category of analysis ..." (p249).

And the resulting discussion is distinctly 'on the one hand, on the other hand'. Eisenstein has "hesitations about intersectionality", which include that it "undermines the primacy of class" (p255); but, on the other hand, likes some current academic research being done in an 'intersectionality' framework (pp257-58).

Martha E Gimenez is considerably more robust: "From the standpoint of Marxist theory, intersectionality is a powerful ideology that obscures the meaning and significance of class relations, even among those who should know better" (p263). But even here, too, there is a degree of undue deference. Gimenez argues (pp263-64) that:

when examining class at the *level of analysis of the capitalist mode of production*, it would make no sense to take into account gender, race or other forms of oppression. Class is identity-blind. Far from being an error, or a problem in need of correction, this 'blindness' indicates that the logic of class relations, exploitation and capital accumulation is indifferent to the individual characteristics of capitalists and workers.

And: "To make the point more concretely, female, black and 'Hispanic' capitalists cannot be expected to behave differently from their white male counterparts."

However, she goes on to argue:

*At the level of analysis of the social formation* (eg, the United States), the aggregates of individuals sharing the same class location are divided in terms of a variety of criteria, such as gender, race, national origin, citizenship status, sexual orientation, marital status, ethnicity, religion, etc. To each of these divisions there corresponds an ideology that reifies these divisions ...

This particular version of the Althusserian division of analysis into levels of mode of production and 'social formation' has the effect of removing the analytic role of class to the abstract, since it is with the level of the social formation that operative politics will have to engage. Gimenez critiques what lies behind intersectionality: the earlier idea of the 'trilogy' of gender, race and class. But on this basis it is not clear *why* one

should do so.

Gimenez *in fact* ends with reference to Mark Lilla's identification of the racist right as an "identity movement" and with the entirely correct point that "The rise of nationalisms and extreme rightwing politics in Europe should alert us to the need to move beyond intersectionality, beyond identity politics; to end, once and for all, [what Ellen Meiksins Wood in 1986 called] the 'retreat from class'" (p268).<sup>9</sup> The problem is that the concession in the theory of 'social formations' undermines the theoretical force of these points.

Barbara Foley also starts with a hat tip: "Intersectionality addresses questions of vital importance to anyone - scholar or layperson - who is concerned with matters of injustice and committed to understanding the kinds of causality that give rise to the egregious inequalities pervading present-day society" (p269). Like Gimenez, she points to the idea of the 'trilogy' of gender, race and class as lying behind 'intersectionality'. But she argues that, "while gender, race and class can be viewed as comparable subject positions, they in fact require very different analytical approaches" (p272).

She concludes that for "a comprehension of the *causes* of the social inequalities that grow more intense every day" (emphasis added) radical students "would do much better to seek analysis and remedy in an anti-racist, anti-sexist and internationalist revolutionary Marxism" (p274). True enough, but not terribly explanatory.

Lise Vogel's 1983 *Marxism and the oppression of women: towards a unitary theory* was in 2013 reissued with *Historical Materialism* with a new introduction. It is one of the founding texts of 'social reproduction theory' as a way of approaching the oppression of women under capitalism.

Vogel's piece in the symposium is addressed primarily to the standard historical narrative, under which the 'second-wave feminism' emerging in the late 1960s was monolithically white and middle class, and 'intersectionality' in the 1980s provided a challenge to this. She argues forcefully that this is a falsification of history; the race/class/gender 'trilogy' was already present in the 1960s, and probably part of CPUSA thinking, going back to 'triple burden' ideas in the 1930s-40s. She suggests that 'intersectionality' may have seemed more flexible - but it may also have been "much better to obscure the meaning in those conservative decades" (1980s-2000s).

She argues, as the other authors do, that 'intersectionality' is descriptively useful, but lacks analytical value. Rather, "it is becoming possible, even acceptable, to recognise class as key, while at the same time incorporating analyses of other factors" (p283). As an example, she refers briefly to "social reproduction theory".

Most of these authors are veterans: Hester Eisenstein, born 1940; Lise Vogel active in the civil rights movement in 1964-65; Martha Gimenez, MA 1969; Barbara Foley, born 1948. The last contribution is 'A young scholar responds' by Shana A Russell. Russell obtained her PhD (supervised by Foley) in 2015 on the highly 'intersectional' topic of 'Domestic workers, sex workers and the movement: reimagining black working class resistance in the work of William Attaway, Richard Wright and Alice Childress, 1935-1960'.

She starts with the comment on 'intersectionality' that, when she first encountered it (as an MA student), she thought it "was simply another term for inclusivity" (p287). Like the other authors, she argues that the term may have descriptive, but not analytic, value. But she has rather more concrete objections to it: first, that in the movement it serves as "a sort of ideological gatekeeping". What

is being protected by this gatekeeping is also protected by a false origin story; and "This origin story assumes that each scholar would arrive at the same conclusion: that race, class and gender are intersectional and weighted equally."

This story flattened out "productive intellectual tensions among black women scholars" (p288). Her archival work led her to a different story: of women workers for whom "what mattered ... in this moment was their status as workers" (p290). And identity politics itself, in the civil rights movement and in the Black Panther Party, was influenced by versions of Marxism (p290).

Nonetheless, like the other authors, Russell cannot *quite* give up on the identity-politics method of approach:

... contemporary Marxist scholarship suffers from the problem of representation. While the majority of the world's workers are people of colour, the most visible and celebrated theorists, past and present, are, with a few exceptions, white men ... Marxism's answer to intersectionality should be to consider the ways that gender and race, as social dimensions of difference, broaden our understanding of capitalism and class exploitation" (p291).

## Unduly polite

As I said earlier, it is a problem of these critiques that they are too polite. I already indicated that Crenshaw's original articles tended not merely to deprioritise class, but to *erase* class in contexts where it is profoundly important - judicial bias in favour of the ruling class; and issues of vulnerability, constrained by resources. In fact, the use of 'intersectionality' arguments as a defence of Zionism - arguing that anti-Zionism is anti-Semitic and thus 'hate speech' - began on US campuses well before its recent appearance in the UK as a stick with which to beat the Labour left.

I am not arguing here for the use of abusive language or a sort of leftwing version of Trumpism. If anything, we already have too much trolling and trashing (usually anonymous or pseudonymous) on online fora of one sort and another. But there is a difference between vulgar abuse and fake news production, on the one hand, and, on the other, a clear expression of political differences in a way which brings out what the real choices are.

Here, the S&S symposium participants are hesitant to state clearly and upfront that the political path we have travelled with 'identity politics' over the last 40 years, and more recently with 'intersectionality', has turned out to be a political dead end, which leads to *rightwing* identitarianism (Trumpism, and so on), to the use of 'intersectional' gatekeeping in the interests of US foreign policy (the Zionism issue) and to control of workers' organisations by the labour bureaucracy (eg, the 2009 Unison 'monkey trial'<sup>10</sup>).

The background to this is that it has become a cultural norm of the broad left to be ever so courteous to people you disagree with, to the point of obscuring differences. This is not, in fact, particularly new. Uncritical support for this or that 'official left' (most recently uncritical Corbyn fan clubs) go back a long way. The idea that the suppression of communist criticism was essential to the creation of fighting unity was already argued by the social democrats in the inter-war period. The early Comintern insisted on freedom of criticism alongside unity in action. But Gyorgi Dimitrov at the 1935 7th Congress argued:

"The communists attack us," say others. But listen, we have repeatedly declared: we shall not attack anyone, whether persons, organisations or parties, standing for the united front of the working class against the

class enemy. But at the same time it is our duty, in the interests of the proletariat and its cause, to criticise *those persons, organisations and parties that hinder unity of action by the workers* (emphasis added).<sup>11</sup>

Since then, the acceptance that unity requires suppressing or at least toning down disagreements has been extremely widespread on the left. Even the Trotskyists, who claimed to be the defenders of the first four congresses of Comintern, which explicitly rejected unity on the basis of suppression of criticism, have in modern times come over to the Dimitrov version. The history is now largely forgotten; all that is left is a cultural tic of writing confused arguments by toning down polemic for the sake of unity.

## Class analysis

The second fundamental weakness of the S&S symposium is that, by and large, reference to class analysis remains stubbornly abstract and at the causal level, rather than at the level of immediate politics. Martha Gimenez's comment that "To make the point more concretely, female, black and 'Hispanic' capitalists cannot be expected to behave differently from their white male counterparts" is not really followed up, and the other authors tend strongly to see class in terms of a proletarian class position, rather than of capitalist and middle-class class positions.

Gimenez's point is fundamental. The same is true of female, black and 'Hispanic' *imperialist politicians*. In 2016, this was posed with extreme concreteness. Hillary Clinton is a woman (and, indeed, a '1968er') - neoliberal warmonger. Trump, of course, was and is a liar, and presented himself as an open sexist and racist (which he may be, for all we know; he is so much a liar that it is impossible to tell) in the hope of winning votes. But Clinton could not be posed (as her supporters tried to pose her) as the candidate of a race-gender-class coalition (perhaps a 'broad democratic front') or anything at all other than a lesser evil, compared to Trump (and at that a very doubtful one, given her open warmongering).

In short, the result of the policy of broad-front coalitions, treating gender, race and class - and sexuality, and so on - as issues of equal standing was to prevent any actual political alternative to the policy of neoliberalism being offered - *and hence to lose on the issues of gender, race and so on*.

The question of class is not merely an analytical issue underlying strategic dynamics. It is a *present political issue*. A workers' class movement which aims for class political independence from the capitalists can offer the approach of the 1880 *Programme of the Parti Ouvrier* that "The emancipation of the productive class is that of all human beings without distinction of sex or race." The policy of the broad front and intersectionality, by sacrificing the politics of class to those of gender, race and all the others, fails in its own aims ●

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## Notes

1. <https://guilfordjournals.com/toc/siso/82/2> (subscription required).
2. <https://nonsite.org/current-issue>.
3. Review by B Tarnoff *The Guardian* May 31; interview by R Kumar, May 27: <https://theintercept.com/2018/05/27/identity-politics-book-asad-haider>.
4. [www.viewpointmag.com](http://www.viewpointmag.com).
5. Quite a lot of these are irrelevant to my present concerns: eg, rightwing critiques of identity politics as Marxist, or identity-political critiques of Marxism. The point is merely that, even without looking carefully, there is a lot of material.
6. *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989 pp139-67.
7. Compare D Renton, 'Tribunals and tribunations' *ISJ* No124 (2009).
8. *Stanford Law Review* Vol 43 (1991), pp1241-99.
9. E Meiksins Wood *The retreat from class* London 1986.
10. See 'The Unison monkey trial' *Weekly Worker* September 10 2009; or '£49,000 for union activists branded racist over "wise monkeys" pamphlet' *Evening Standard* September 11 2013.
11. [www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1935/08\\_02.htm#7](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1935/08_02.htm#7).

## ITALY

# Steve Bannon's dream government

Whatever position it takes in relation to the EU, the new right-populist administration will be viciously anti-worker and anti-migrant, warns Toby Abse

The three-month-long Italian political crisis finally reached a conclusion without either a second general election or the imposition of a technocratic interim cabinet led by former International Monetary Fund official Carlo Cottarelli - the two outcomes that seemed the most probable.<sup>1</sup>

Eighty-eight days after the March 4 election, Giuseppe Conte, the little-known law professor who had become world-famous for his self-inflated CV, was appointed prime minister designate for the second time. Although more casual foreign observers of the Italian scene might have felt that this was Groundhog Day, since the very same event had already occurred eight days earlier, on the second occasion Conte was indeed sworn in, along with his cabinet, on the afternoon of June 1.

The new government, like the one that nearly came into being on the previous Sunday (May 27), is a right-populist coalition between the Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S - Five Star Movement) and the Lega. The Lega's attempt to broaden the coalition to include the neo-fascist Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) led by Giorgia Meloni was rejected by M5S leader Luigi Di Maio. Whether the rejection was based on 'principle' (ie, Di Maio knew that it would be unacceptable to many in M5S who did not share his own neo-fascist family background) or was the result of Meloni asking for more than the single cabinet post for the FdI that Salvini was offering her party, is a matter of dispute.

Di Maio and Lega leader Matteo Salvini have both been given the title of deputy prime minister, and many commentators regard them as having more real power in the government than Conte, who is viewed as a nominal prime minister. Salvini has the absolutely central post of minister of the interior, whilst Di Maio is both minister of labour and minister for economic development - posts which are normally held by two individuals, each in charge of a separate set of civil servants.

Paolo Savona, the 81-year-old economist and controversial opponent of the euro, whom president Sergio Mattarella had vetoed as economics minister in Conte's first attempt to form a government on May 27, is still in the cabinet but is now minister for European affairs.<sup>2</sup> While this is a somewhat lower-ranking post, it is still one that gives him a major say in the coalition's policies in relation to the European Union, and implicitly about Italy's continued participation in the euro.<sup>3</sup>

The new economics minister is Giovanni Tria, who is less hostile to the euro than Savona, but by no means enthusiastic. He believes it would harm rather than benefit Italy to exit on its own, but does not regard the single currency project as "irreversible" - implying there might be a collective decision by all, or perhaps several, participating states to abandon it.<sup>4</sup> Tria, although selected by the Lega, is not a member and has in the past been an advisor on economic policy to Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia.

The new foreign minister is Enzo Moavero Milanesi, who had already been minister for European Affairs in the governments of the technocratic premier, Mario Monti, and Partito Democratico (PD) prime minister Enrico Letta. Moreover, Milanesi has been a judge on the bench of the European Court of Justice and is well-known within all the ruling circles of the EU - clearly his appointment is designed to reassure Italy's European



Luigi Di Maio and Matteo Salvini: mass deportations promised

partners, and probably reflects pressure from Mattarella, since it is very hard to believe that the Europhobic Lega, with its close links to Marine Le Pen, would have spontaneously chosen so Europhile a figure, and he certainly does not fit in with M5S rhetoric about Conte's administration being "a government of change".<sup>5</sup>

The new defence minister is Elisabetta Trenta. This appointment - barely noticed in the international media - must have given Vladimir Putin more pleasure than the Ukrainian fake murder episode the same week. At first glance, Trenta seems suitable for the post - her husband is an army officer, and she herself is a captain in the army reserve, who has seen active service in Iraq, Lebanon and Libya. Moreover, she only joined M5S in 2013, after its electoral breakthrough, and therefore looks like a reliable opportunist, and not one of the pesky, potentially subversive elements involved in environmental activism and the like, who joined M5S at the start. However, she has some odd Russian connections, easily uncovered by an investigative journalist in *La Repubblica* (June 3), which suggests that Italy's high command and secret services were either incompetent or corrupt in failing to tip off Mattarella, and getting her appointment vetoed on national security grounds.<sup>6</sup>

She taught at the private Link Campus University on an MA course linked to Moscow's Lomonosov State University, alongside Ivan Timofeev, a key figure in the Russiagate scandal, whom the FBI claims was the first to bring Hillary Clinton's leaked emails to the attention of the Trump campaign. Trenta's biography for the online MA prospectus explains she "has worked for some months in Russia", but her CV for the ministry of defence only mentions her good knowledge of the Russian language, which would suggest she has something to hide.

## Racism

Apart from Trenta, the most prominent female ministers are M5S health minister Giulia Grillo - a Sicilian doctor, and no relation of M5S founder Beppe Grillo - and the Lega minister for public administration, Giulia Bongiorno. Giulia Grillo, whilst not as extreme as some M5S 'no vax' fanatics, has doubts about the

necessity of compulsory vaccination, and therefore probably poses a great danger to the health of Italy's young children. Bongiorno, a very recent convert to the Lega, started her political career with the 'post-fascist' Alleanza Nazionale, and made her reputation as a defence lawyer for former Christian Democrat premier Giulio Andreotti, in his trial for Mafia involvement, and for Raffaele Sollecito, whose unexpected acquittal of the murder of Meredith Kercher she secured on appeal.

Bongiorno makes a great show of her feminism as co-founder of Doppia Difesa, an association to protect battered women, but is notorious for her racist remarks, and readers familiar with the Kercher case will draw their own conclusions about the extent of her sympathy for women of colour. In the light of Bongiorno's role in the Andreotti Mafia trial, the establishment is probably relieved that Alfonso Bonafede of M5S has been given the justice portfolio that Bongiorno originally sought - even if M5S's traditional fervour about pursuing corrupt and criminal politicians through the courts has largely evaporated.<sup>7</sup>

Salvini has emphasised that his first priority as minister of the interior will be an anti-migrant crackdown, and control of this key ministry will certainly give the Lega every opportunity to implement its sinister plans for massive detention centres in every region, and large-scale deportations of up to 500,000 'illegal immigrants'. On June 2, Salvini told reporters: "I am going to Sicily to see where the latest landings took place. The good times for illegal migrants are over. They should get ready to pack their bags." He told a crowd of supporters in the Sicilian city of Catania:

Enough of Sicily being the refugee camp of Europe. I will not stand by and do nothing while there are landings after landings. We need deportation centres. There is not enough housing and work for Italians, let alone half the continent of Africa.<sup>8</sup>

In short, Salvini in office is as eager to incite racial hatred as he was as an opposition politician during the general election campaign. However, it looks as if his long-cherished scheme to raze all gypsy camps to the ground - which led to his numerous symbolic media stunts

driving tractors - is getting closer to implementation. The first target - probably in the next few weeks - will be the 9,600 Roma and Sinti living in unauthorised camps, with another 16,400, who are actually in authorised camps, being next in line. A quarter of these 26,000 live in Rome or its immediate hinterland, and this looks like being the place where the offensive will start, for the benefit of national television cameras.

Salvini has already said that he will ban ships belonging to NGOs engaged in rescuing drowning migrants from the Mediterranean from entering Italian ports. Some have argued that this is in breach of international law, but Salvini is unlikely to pay much attention, unless foreign governments or international bodies take some form of legal action.<sup>9</sup>

Di Maio will probably have far less success with his plans for a 'citizens' income', which Tria is very doubtful about. The economics minister is not only enthusiastic about the regressive flat tax, which would diminish government revenue for health, education, pensions and public services, but also thinks that the best way to pay for such potential loss of revenue would be an equally regressive increase in VAT, which PD premiers Matteo Renzi and Paolo Gentiloni were careful to avoid. In short, Tria is seeking to inflict a double blow on the poorer sections of the population.

Given Tria's role earlier in his career as the Italian government's delegate on the board of the International Labour Organisation, there can be no question that he is merely stumbling into viciously anti-working class policies - he is clearly a conscious class warrior. If Tria actually has to implement any of the costly promises made by the populist demagogue in search of proletarian votes, it will be the partial abolition of the Fornero law on pensions, which is more relevant to the Lega's northern electorate, who by and large have paid in more years of pension contributions over a working lifetime than the unemployed or precariously employed southerners, whose votes M5S won by promoting the 'citizens' income'.

Lorenzo Fontana, the new Lega minister for the family and disability<sup>10</sup> - a long-standing opponent of abortion and gay marriage (or even civil partnerships) who is obsessed by Italy's falling birth rate - has been mildly reprimanded

by Salvini for expressing his habitual homophobic views in his new official capacity. This has led to the one attempt at product differentiation from the Lega by an M5S representative - M5S mayor of Livorno Filippo Nogarin - who attacked Fontana on Facebook. We note, however, that Nogarin - who only a year or two ago was only too happy to spout anti-racist rhetoric on ceremonial occasions - has not said a single word in defence of 'illegal migrants' or gypsies, both of whom are visibly present in his city. It is to be hoped that, when the next municipal elections come, Rifondazione Comunista and far-left anti-racist activists put their strong prejudices against the local PD to one side, and throw this posturing hypocrite out of the town hall for good.

It seems fitting to conclude with the words of the far-right ideologue Steve Bannon, who returned to Rome to welcome in the M5S/Lega government he has consistently advocated:

Rome is now the centre of world politics. What is happening here is extraordinary. There has never been a real populist government in modern times. Now there is one. Therefore I want to be here, I want to be part of it ●

## Notes

1. This was the longest gap between a general election and the installation of a new prime minister in the 72-year history of the Italian republic. Lazy clichés about 'Italian political instability' in the mainstream Anglophone media has failed to recognise that we have seen a political earthquake, analogous to that of 1992-94 which destroyed Italy's cold war political system.
2. Regardless of whether he was really set on Italy's rapid exit from the euro - something which he denied in interviews - a couple of years ago he had certainly drawn up a detailed plan for such an exit. He called for this to be announced after the close of trading on a Friday and carried out before the markets reopened the following Monday.
3. Presumably Mattarella's main concern was to keep such a combative figure away from the regular meetings of the *Ecofin* (the EU's Council of Economic and Finance Ministers) and meetings of G7 finance ministers, such as the recent one in Canada.
4. It should be noted that on May 30 the 13 M5S and 6 Lega MEPs present in the European parliament voted for an amendment to the EU draft budget for 2021-27, asking for "the institution of programmes destined for member-states who intend to negotiate their exit from the euro, because to remain in it has become unsustainable and intolerable".
5. This is obviously part of some - rather feeble - attempt by Mattarella and the Italian establishment to restrain the rightwing populists. I feel compelled to make this point in response to the claim by Tobias Jones in *The Observer* (June 3) that "the key posts in the new administration have been given to well-educated technocrats. It seems astonishing to a British observer that the prime minister, the finance, foreign and European ministers are all unelected university professors. If this is a populist revolution, the revolutionaries look suspiciously establishment." The superficial nature of Jones's political analysis should be evident from his inclusion of the finance minister (ie, the Europhobe Savona) in his list, as well as his complete failure to understand that both the interior ministry and the defence ministry are "key posts" in terms of control over the police, Carabinieri and armed forces.
6. As is so often the case in Italy, corruption and its covering up by those complicit in it seems the more probable explanation.
7. This change began before M5S took national office, and seems to have some chronological correlation with the avalanche of allegations of wrongdoing that almost buried the M5S Roman mayor, Virginia Raggi, and her close associates.
8. *The Guardian* June 4.
9. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has recently attacked the Hungarian government's anti-migrant legislation, saying it would "deprive people who are forced to flee their homes of critical aid and services, and further inflame tense public discourse and rising xenophobic attitudes" (*The Guardian* June 4). Perhaps it may take a similar view of the new Italian government's stance, which, as Salvini has proclaimed, is modelled on that of Viktor Orbán. It would, however, be naive to assume that German concern about Italy's monetary and economic policy would extend to anti-migrant policies: the appalling racist policies of Hungary and other Visegrád countries have been indulged for years because of Germany's success in turning them into economic semi-colonies over the three decades since the capitalist restoration of 1989.
10. Unsurprisingly, the post of minister for equal opportunities seems to have been abolished.
11. Interview with *La Repubblica* (June 3).



**MEDIA**

# Things to do when you're dead

It is not only the Russian government which is putting around fake news, notes **Paul Demarty**



**Arkady Babchenko: total farce**

**W**hat on earth are we to make of the peculiar case of Arkady Babchenko?

The journalist was shot dead on May 30 - three times in the back of head, as he left his apartment. Fingers pointed immediately towards the Kremlin; Babchenko's murder followed his flight last year from Russia, apparently worried for his safety. Loudmouth cold war nostalgists across the west sharpened their sanctions.

Except that none of it actually happened. What did happen was ... well, something else. Babchenko was not shot. At a press conference the next day, at which he turned up (confusingly alive), he described a complicated operation of the Ukrainian security services (SBU) to fake his death. Still to be adequately explained is why he reappeared so soon - even Jesus waited three days.

The official line from the Ukrainian security services is that the point was to protect Babchenko from a Russian plot and, now that the job is done, he can return to life. This is scarcely credible. The stated objective of the operation - protecting this man's life - can hardly have been aided by its actual execution. We tend to overestimate the competence of spies, but nobody who gave the say-so for the plan as described is competent to run a corner shop in Kryvyi Rih. Surely now any halfway-competent attempts on his life will be shrouded in plausible denial for anyone who wants to go after him - from the FSB to random lone-wolf psychopaths. If Putin is half as good at psyops as press hysteria would have us believe, he will have Babchenko bumped off in the next few weeks.

We are left in the world of speculation - perhaps Babchenko got cold feet about a plan to fake his death and spirit him away. The SBU would then be faced with the alternative

of murdering him for real, or trying to brass it out as all part of the plan. Babchenko's wife was in on the plot, however, so to take the first option would mean 'tidying up' that little problem ... and we all know how this movie ends. So they took the second option. Whatever the case may be, I look forward to finding out which of the many things that are not the SBU's official story actually happened here.

We must voice also a little scepticism as to the purity of the Ukrainian state's motives in carrying out this preposterous drama. Touching as their concern for Babchenko is, we cannot omit the context of Ukraine's low-level civil war, which pits pro-Russian and ethnic-Russian nationalists in the east against the Ukrainian nationalists propelled to power by the Maidan Square protests. Ukrainian forces are plainly unable to confront the Russian army unaided, although skirmishes between the two sides and their respective far-right paramilitary allies continue.

Ukraine is a sore spot in this new and not especially competitive cold war; the aforementioned protests aimed at replacing a relatively pro-Russian government in Kiev with a relatively pro-western one, and succeeded in doing that, at least. The western powers were hopeful that they might walk their sphere of influence up to the Russian border. This has been done, after a fashion, although not without cost, and though it appeared that the Obama administration was prepared to gear America's allies in the direction of proxy war in the Ukrainian east, the Europeans were not prepared to risk it.

The result is a stalemate. Despite the usual foaming in the imperialist press, from the *Telegraph* to *Solidarity*, the Putin regime's operations in eastern Ukraine, as was the case in south Ossetia and Abkhazia 10 years ago, are clearly *defensive*, targeted at

maintaining some modest buffer between Nato and the Motherland. There is zero interest, except among the most fanatical Great Russian chauvinists, in rolling the T80s from Donetsk to Lviv. The Ukrainians, for their part, cannot take on Russia's military without much more extensive support from the west. Nobody can win.

In this context, then, this bungled non-assassination looks like an anti-Russian provocation on the part of Ukraine's security apparatus - one that has radically backfired. If it had worked, it would have exploited the deteriorating relationships between Moscow and western European capitals, as well as heightened sensitivity to the Russian secret services in the wake of the attack on Sergei and Yulia Skripal. A cunning plan, but - like all conspiracies - preposterously unlikely to stay secret for long. (If there is a silver lining for anti-Russian types, this surely demonstrates that the main alternative theory of the Skripal attack - that it was a Ukrainian provocation - is false. Who would trust the SBU to assassinate anybody?)

In this context also, we must place the increasingly desperate insistence on the part of the same genius spooks that there really was - honest - a life-threatening plot against Babchenko: there are many reasons to try to save face in the wake of this fiasco, of which getting as much leverage against the Kremlin as possible must number among the highest.

## Media take

There is one other embarrassed party to which we must dedicate some attention, of course, which is the mainstream media. When the news broke of Babchenko's 'death', it was immediately reported as straightforward fact by the international media. Everything went impeccably to the SBU script, with the Russian secret

services all but tried and convicted of another monstrous crime. *Whoops!*

We should not be too hard on the press for failing to spot holes in the initial story, however: only a truly diligent western media organisation with an improbably large and well-connected Kiev bureau could have seen through it at the moment Babchenko was purportedly expiring in the ambulance. The real peculiarity is what followed: it seems that the official line of the bourgeois media is a sort of strained attempt to be patient with the Ukrainians, like a parent faced with

a bawling toddler who has pissed all over a rug. Yes, it is good that his life was saved, if it was, but this stunt undermines the trust of the press.

I highlight, for the sake of an example, a think-piece by *The Guardian's* eastern European correspondent, Shaun Walker. His piece is headlined: "The Babchenko stunt may end up feeding the Kremlin spin machine". This is a true statement, as far as it goes, but also stupid. Sure, we already suggested that the SBU can have achieved nothing more than undermining the credibility of allegations against its Russian adversaries. Yet, even from that point of view, talking about this as a well-intentioned action that may have counterproductive results is bizarre. These people attempted to pull off a spectacular fraud that could have moved the ratchet further in the direction of great-power war. Our friends in the press are, in all likelihood, the intended victims of this fraud. It is as if Jeremy Corbyn was caught in the act of murdering an infant, and someone on the Corbynite left were to grumble that Jeremy's actions were most unhelpful and could feed the Tory spin machine.

In truth, such an event would provide *good reason to believe* the Tory spin machine, even if other, better reasons remained to disbelieve it. So it is here. Russia Today and friends complain frequently that Russia is scapegoated and blamed for things that it did not do. Here is an example of it happening in plain view - a data point that people will remember and that Putin-obsessed hawks ought to take with an appropriate degree of humility.

So the next time you hear that Russian bombs in Syria kill only children, while American bombs dance nimbly around them to Assad's gas factories; that Russian spooks assassinate heroic dissidents, where Mossad agents kill only wicked terrorists; that Russia interferes in American elections and not the other way around; when, above all, Russia is blamed for all the world's 'fake news' - remember the curious tale of Arkady Babchenko's death and resurrection ●

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## Fighting fund

### Cash-strapped

**T**he last day of May's fighting fund only saw one extra donation come in - thank you, VP, for your monthly £10. However, I must add the £60 already paid via PayPal by TB for his annual subscription - he doesn't actually want the print version of the *Weekly Worker*, as he reads it online, so that counts as a £60 donation. And it took the grand total for May up to £1,849 - an extra £99 over and above our £1,750 target.

And June's fund has got off to a good start, with the usual batch of standing orders near the beginning of each month. There were 18 of them, ranging from £5 from DC and PBS to £40 from MS and EW. Thanks also to AN, DI, DL, ST, MT, MM, YM, BG, TM, TG, BL, SW, AC and CG for their various sums in between. All those standing orders totalled £347. Let me mention too the £50 in

cash donated by PB at last Sunday's London Communist Forum. A keen supporter of the *Weekly Worker*, she distributes it widely among her comrades and contacts. There was also the regular PayPal donation from US comrade PM, plus two cheques - thanks to RL for the £20 added to his annual sub, and to MS for her £10. She writes: "Not much, I know, but I'm a bit cash-strapped. But this is to show I really appreciate your coverage of Ireland" - meaning the two articles in last week's paper.

So we start our June fighting fund with £442 towards that £1,750 target - a sum that just about covers our regular costs. Please chip in if you can. ●

**Robbie Rix**

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

## ART

# Understanding the dark side

The art market continues to go up, says Rex Dunn, and one day it will crash. But what is happening to art?

Marx's *Economic and philosophical manuscripts* (1844) are an integral part of his oeuvre. In a section called 'Need, production and division of labour', he refers to the "inverting power of money":

It is the "invisible divinity", able to transform "all human and natural qualities into their opposites". It is "the universal whore, the universal pimp of men and peoples", representing "the estranged and alienating species essence of man", which "alienates itself by selling itself". It is the "alienated capacity of mankind":

Money appears as an *inverting power* in relation to the individual and to those social and other bonds which claim to be essences in themselves. It transforms loyalty into treason, love into hate, virtue into vice, vice into virtue, servant into master, master into servant, nonsense into reason and reason into nonsense.<sup>1</sup>

And never more so than in the 21st century, the age of Trump, wherein the art market is a bellwether of this corrupting tendency at all levels of society.

In a recent article, entitled 'The lemming market', Atossa Araxia Abrahamian appears to concur with Marx.<sup>2</sup> She compares the art market to lemmings, who occasionally commit mass suicide when their numbers rise to a critical level. (Compare this to the astronomical increase in the price of art works over the previous few decades, which is unsustainable. The market has to crash one day.) Abrahamian's article is itself a review of two recent books about the art market. The first looks at the current situation and is appropriately called *Dark side of the boom: the excesses of the art market in the 21st century* by Georgina Adam.<sup>3</sup> The second is *A history of the western art market: a sourcebook of writings on artists, dealers and markets*, edited by Titia Hulst.<sup>4</sup> According to Abrahamian, whilst Hulst provides a historical overview, she is much less critical - complacent is a better word!

Abrahamian begins by telling us that on November 15 2017 Leonardo da Vinci's *Salvator Mundi* was sold at a Christie's (New York) auction for \$450 million - "the highest sum ever commanded by a painting". She then uses this example to explain how the art industry works:

A painting sold for half a billion dollars - everybody got rich, and a good time was had by all. The lawyers and accountants and shippers and storage managers got their crumbs. The media covered the event like the spectacle it was. Even the riffraff could indulge in a little *Schadenfreude* thanks to pervasive but largely debunked rumours that the painting was a fake. Some day the 65.7 x 45.7cm canvas will hang in a museum flanked by two enormous shopping malls on an island in the Persian Gulf. Harmless, right? Not entirely. [Citing Georgina Adam's *Dark side of the boom*, Abrahamian says that she] makes a convincing case that dizzying valuations have deleterious effects on our understanding and appreciation of art.<sup>5</sup>

The author shows how the art industry is linked to the role of the theoreticians of art: ie, the postmodernists, whose role is to provide an intellectual fig leaf for the market. Hence they have strong connections with the dealerships both great and small, starting with Christie's or Sotheby's, along with the great



Selling Leonardo's 'Salvator Mundi' for \$450 million

museums of art around the world - in a word, the art institution itself:

Adam refers to a chain of dealers, auctioneers, critics and economists. She also examines lawsuits and market data in order to show how pockets of the art world have become complicit with money-laundering and other financial crimes (although the evidence is hard to find). She then takes a close look at the art produced by, and for, the market. Therefore she asks: "Will [art's] non-commercial qualities - social, symbolic, intellectual and challenging - endure, or will art gradually become homogenised to the tastes of a global elite? ... *Should we recognise that the market has changed, that it has become corporatised, and that this has led to an evolution of the very notion of art itself?*"<sup>6</sup>

As I see things, the word *evolution* should be replaced by *degradation!* On the other hand, the market is *booming*: annual art sales doubled between 2005 and 2017 "to reach \$63.3 billion, after a brief slump to \$56.6 billion in 2017".<sup>7</sup> It comes as no great surprise to hear that, according to Adam, "the game is rigged". Instead of market forces, there is:

collusion between dealers, gallerists, auctions and sellers ... as a matter of course ... each puts tremendous effort into preventing prices from falling. The use of art as an asset class and the inevitable speculation that follows inflates prices further ...

Thus living artists are encouraged "both to overproduce and to create multiples - mechanisms that help sales, until they don't. Damien Hirst is the poster boy in both cases, now that he has taken to selling everything "from teacups to chairs, from tote bags printed with butterflies at under a fiver to a full set of Cathedral prints ... retailing at £204,000".<sup>8</sup> Abrahamian calls this "brand stretching" and adds: "I can't help wondering when we'll be graced with Koons kitchen appliances, or an Eau de Schnabel ..."<sup>8</sup>

According to Marx, the commodity has a two-fold character: a use-value and an exchange-value. Moreover, "The property of a commodity is independent of the amount of labour required to appropriate its useful qualities."<sup>9</sup> Under generalised commodity production, we enter into the "mysterious" world of commodity fetishism: ie, when a "definite relation between men assumes

in their eyes a fantastic relation between things". In his theory of value, Marx distinguishes between *productive* labour (to produce commodities) and *unproductive* labour (including to create works of art). He also explains how the two types of labour can become inverted: the artist may become a productive labourer, once he allows "his product from the outset to be subsumed under capital, [so it] comes into being only for the purposes of increasing that capital". (Cf Milton who wrote *Paradise lost* because it was "an activity of his nature", even though he later sold it for £5. Marx describes Milton as an unproductive labourer.)<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, the work of Hirst and co, supported by postmodern theory (derived from post-structuralism), falls into the former category. Postmodern art is increasingly characterised by the commissioning of mass-produced, 'ready-made' products, wherein the emphasis is on instrumental reason (in order to make money) rather than on artistic labour, which may be non-existent.

## Walter Benjamin

All this is contrary to the ideas and aspirations of Walter Benjamin, leftwing intellectual and supporter of the left avant-garde in the 1930s. Taking all this into account, he must be spinning in his (unknown) grave!

In his famous art essay (1936), he expounds his theory of 'aura'. This can be explained as follows: for Marx, the "nihilism" of the capitalist mode of production, based on the commodity form and the market mechanism, destroys the old "patriarchal, idyllic relations"; it dissolves personal worth into mere exchange value. "All that is holy is profaned", etc.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, we see the emergence of secular society. Therefore the sacred tradition in art is replaced by its secular equivalent - not just in terms of its subject matter (eg, everyday life); but also in terms of 'art for art's sake'. Now the form of the artwork is considered to be just as important as its content or subject matter: ie, *formalism*. But in the age of the mass reproduced images of things, including simulations of life itself, via the advent of photography, this produced an adverse reaction to "the increasing mechanisation of all forms of human activity".<sup>12</sup>

Hence, within the world of art, as Benjamin reminds us, a new emphasis was placed on the "authenticity" of the

artwork itself: "The presence of the original [becomes] the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity ... [which is] outside technical ... reproducibility ..."<sup>13</sup> As a result of this preoccupation with the uniqueness of the artwork, the latter acquired a "cult value". At the same time, "the cult of the beauty of form" is accompanied by the increasing commodification of art; hence we see the rise of the *fetishised* art object. This was supported by the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art* (art for art's sake), which according to Benjamin, constitutes "a negative theology in the form of the idea of 'pure art', which ... denied the social function of art ..."<sup>14</sup>

This brings us back to the rise of the art institution, wherein art theory, dealers and the art market, etc play an integral role.

But the world is always pregnant with its opposite: For Benjamin, in the 20th century the cultic value of art could now be challenged, thanks to two things: (i) The new technologies of mass reproducibility (photography and film) could also be used in a positive way; (ii) Starting with the Russian avant-garde, this led to new "theses about the art of the proletariat", which are able to "brush aside a number of outmoded concepts, such as creativity, genius, eternal value and mystery - concepts whose uncontrolled ... application would lead to a processing of data in the fascist sense".<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, we have a productivist approach to art, which bases itself on the mass reproducibility of images, as well as the cause of the proletariat (eg, the photomontages of John Heartfield). Here, however, we can detect signs of a prescriptive - even dogmatic - view of art in Benjamin's thinking: viz, Proletcult "theses" about art, which must now be used as a "weapon" against the class enemy, in order to "brush aside a number of outmoded concepts", etc (in contrast to an ultra-left tendency within the Russian avant-garde, "which led to extreme attacks on art itself").<sup>16</sup>

Bearing this in mind, according to Benjamin, the new technologies of mass reproducibility transformed "human sense perception", along with art, in a positive way. As long as artists were prepared to devote themselves to the productivist strategy, this would open up a new "exhibition" or functional role for art. Henceforth art can play a useful role in the struggle of the proletariat against fascism and for

socialism (independently of the 'official' communist parties, which he never trusted, and with good reason):

With the advent of the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction, photography, simultaneously with the rise of socialism, art sensed the approaching crisis, which has become evident a century later. [But] At the time, today, by the absolute emphasis on its exhibition value, the work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions, among which the one we are conscious of, the artistic function, later may be recognised as incidental ... today photography and film are the most serviceable exemplifications of this new function.<sup>17</sup>

This raises two important points: Firstly, as history had already shown, Benjamin *overestimates* the role of leftwing avant-garde art, along with that of isolated revolutionary intellectuals. At the same time, his prescriptive position *vis-à-vis* aesthetic theory, endangers the freedom of art itself. (Furthermore, it does not stop art from ending up in the wrong hands - eg, the fate of the Russian avant-garde, which was appropriated by the Stalinist bureaucracy for its own ends.) Secondly, even under the direction of leftwing intellectuals such as himself, technological art can only play a supporting role in the political struggle for a revolutionary communist party.

## Stultification

To return to Abrahamian, she now raises the theme of flagging creativity, despite the latest technology. Today's celebrity artists tend to rely on the ready-made approach: ie, the now outmoded *provocateur* antics of the Dadaists 100 years before:

Adam objects to these practices [mass-produced consumer goods branded with the artist's name, in order to mark up the price] not because they desecrate what is priceless [the idea of art being produced, because it is "an activity of his/her nature" - cf Marx?], but because the work they encourage turns out to be incredibly dull.

Tastes are becoming homogenised. Adam writes:

Any visitor to a major art fair will be struck by the similarity of offerings by the bigger galleries. Most will feature a mirrored sculpture by Anish Kapoor, a stack of bicycles by Weiwei, ... some photographs by Gilbert and George with a few rude words ... No wonder they call it a "lemming market".<sup>18</sup>

All this is being driven by the rise of the "global superrich". Their passion for collecting art is not necessarily for its own sake. It has more to do with vanity and social status.

In her first book *Big bucks*, Adam wrote that art is relatively high on the pyramid of billionaire needs: "After the prestige cars, diamond-encrusted watches, vast house and luxury yacht, comes the desire to own something that others do not and cannot have: a trophy work of art."<sup>19</sup>

To this end the rich employ a coterie of art advisors, art market experts, warehousing and storage operators; last but not least, accountants whose job it is to organise tax loopholes.

Then there is the endless spectacle of social gatherings to mark a new acquisition. So the commodification of art has also "turned into a lifestyle". Adam continues:

Art is used to sell real estate, to brand a hotel, to give a new building project or restaurant the most hip and 'now'

# What we fight for

credentials ... Even companies such as Uber, Airbnb, Volvo and Mazda ... have put on art-inspired projects ...<sup>20</sup>

Finally there is the question of counterfeiting: “The contemporary art boom is making it easier to produce knock-offs, because replicating an abstract, minimal, machine-made piece is far simpler than reproducing an oil painting hundreds of years old.”<sup>21</sup> And so it goes. (By now Benjamin must be spinning in his grave non-stop!)

Crisis? What crisis? Abrahamian points out that, unlike Adam, Hulst’s “new anthology of the art market argues that the state of the [latter] is simply an extreme version of the trends and anxieties that have preoccupied the art world for centuries.”<sup>22</sup> It is as old as capitalism itself. *Vis-à-vis* human perceptions of art in the past - however much of this was an activity of the elite - Hulst refuses to make any distinction between classical, let alone the early, middle and late stages of capitalism: ie, she rejects an essentialist, as well as a dialectical, approach to the question. It is simply a case that people’s attitudes to art have always been mercenary and that is that. For Hulst the art market simply evolved through the Medicis’ patronage of the arts in Florence (which became a means to “diversify their assets”), to a stage when the market took over. (But she does not make any distinction between the two.) During the Renaissance period, when art was based on patronage, following the example of the Medicis, other wealthy individuals also bought and displayed paintings, which

was itself a product of the new consumer mentality: it represented not just the objectification of cultural values, but “the rationalisation of possessiveness in the expanding world of goods”. As commercial centres changed, so did the market, from Italian city-states to Antwerp over the course of the 15th century, to Amsterdam in the 16th, London in the 18th, and New York in the 20th. Art markets appeared and reappeared wherever there was an accumulation of wealth, and migrated according to economic competition and political manoeuvring. The future, Hulst and Adam agree, is China.<sup>23</sup>

There is no sense here of Benjamin’s idea that “During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity’s entire mode of existence.” That

the uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition. This tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable. An ancient statue of Venus, for example, stood in a very different context with the Greeks, who made it an object of veneration, than with the clerics of the Middle Ages, who viewed it as an ominous idol.<sup>24</sup>

The same could be said for such an object today: ie, it is viewed differently.

At this point Abrahamian ends her review of Hulst and devotes her summing up to Adam’s book instead. Clearly she is unimpressed with Hulst’s less than dialectical approach to social relations and history itself. At least the former’s work is “filled with critics, dealers and galleries”, who say they are alarmed by the buyer’s overtly mercenary approach to the art market at the expense of art itself. So “Andy Warhol’s line about paintings being like stocks and a dealer like a broker has some truth about it.” But there is “no efficient stock exchange, so sales are conducted either at auction or through an unregulated network of agents and dealers”. When it is in storage, art yields no income. Therefore, to extract surplus value,

the wealthy can borrow money against their art: art-secured lending hit \$18

billion in 2016 (up from \$9.6 billion two years earlier); it grew popular after the recession thanks to low returns on conventional financial investments. Now auction houses have got into the business, with the added advantage ... that they aren’t regulated the way banks are. One FBI agent tells Adam that money-laundering using art is a “growing problem” ...

The question now is how much further the commodification of art can go, whether high prices will withstand (or even benefit from) a volatile market, and whether art will remain such a favoured vehicle for rich people’s money ... The next 12 months will give us some idea. (Perhaps the lemming effect will then kick in?) A Modigliani goes on sale at Sotheby’s in New York soon, with the highest estimate ever given to a painting at auction - at \$150 million. (This is before the bidding even starts.) For the moment, at least, it’s up, up, up.<sup>25</sup>

## That question again

But what is art? It is impossible to answer this question in a single sentence. So I shall make two main points.

Firstly, art is both objective and subjective in character. Marx stresses the subjective-objective productive role that man plays in his economic-philosophical views. Hence he quotes in his notebook (1857-58) a passage from Schiller, taken from Friedrich Theodor Vischer’s *Aesthetik*: “Beauty is [both] an objective and aesthetic state. It is at once form, when we judge it, and also life, when we feel it. It is at once our state of being and our creation.”<sup>26</sup>

Secondly, art has to be seen in the context of society and the epoch which shapes it. Even in the age of capitalist decline, the hierarchical division of labour, which it created in order to produce the accumulation of capitals more efficiently, remains firmly in place. We still have a division between head and hand labour - with art in between - which is a problem for communist consciousness; and the specialisation of tasks continues, splitting the labour force even further (and now we have a new problem: automation). Therefore it is still widely accepted that there are people called artists who produce things that are usually impractical, which the rest of us can appreciate, either because they are pleasurable in some way or they make us think about the world we live in; hopefully both. So we can judge these objects from an aesthetic standpoint, although one requires specialist knowledge - which is where the division between head and hand labour comes in.

Hence in his *Economic and philosophical manuscripts* (in the same section quoted above), Marx writes: “If you wish to enjoy art, you must be an artistically educated person.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, we must strive to overthrow the system which created the current division of labour, rather than accept it and enter into a race to the bottom: ie, a form of art appreciation which is dictated by the market. Meanwhile art cannot escape the corrupting influence of commodification. Enter the art market once again. Thus we return to Marx’s comment about the inverting power of money.

A propos an *objective* view of art, I stand by my argument in favour of a Marxist theory of art, which bases itself on the methodology of dialectical materialism. But, as I have said many times, we have to distinguish this from the notion that there is such a thing as ‘Marxist art’. That, of course, would mean that, as communists, we are entitled to prescribe what art is (like the ‘official communist’ art imposed by Stalinism in the Soviet Union, etc). This is *anathema* to Marxism. As Trotsky and Breton argue in *Towards a free revolutionary art* (1938), “The independence of art - for the revolution; the revolution - for

the complete liberation of art!”<sup>28</sup> That said, I shall offer the following, which is based on a talk which I gave to a student meeting at Goldsmith’s College last year:

1. *Aesthetic structure* is indispensable to the work of art. This is achieved through the *unity of form and content*. The artist experiments with form in order to express the content of the artwork. It is the basis of aesthetic labour or the *free play* of man’s *physical and psychic* faculties. Its driving force is the human desire for *freedom and fulfilment*.

● By so doing the artist is able to establish his/her own individuality (or style) and point of view.

● Aesthetic labour is therefore the *antithesis* of wage labour, which is *unfree*.

● Art is *subjective* from the standpoint of the feelings and thoughts of its creator - therefore it cannot be equated with philosophy and science, which are based on the *objectivity* of concepts. Art is *the free play between the artist’s sensuousness, feelings and reason*; whereas, for the philosopher or scientist, reason is *all*: there is no place for subjectivity in the work itself.

2. As long as the artist produces from an ‘inner human need’, he/she is an *unproductive* labourer. But if s/he works *primarily* for the purpose of the accumulation of capital, then s/he becomes a *productive* labourer.

● The artist’s inner need for *human freedom* is expressed by means of the need to protest against *prosaic* reality, because the latter is exploitative, alienating and oppressive (cf postmodernism’s emphasis on irony and superficiality).

3. Hence we can speak of art’s *relative autonomy*. Although it cannot escape commodification and ideology, art comes closest to a state of *disalienation*, as long as it is free from coercion by either church or state; it struggles against market forces. Thus the artist may be seen as the *harbinger* of man as *homo aestheticus*. I consider this to be a positive achievement of the bourgeois epoch: ie, prior to its decline.

The telos or final form of art can only be achieved in a future *communist* society:

● The latter will *abolish* the bourgeois division of labour - which is necessary for “the accumulation of capitals” - by ending the *separation of intellectual* from *practical* labour.

● It will also introduce more *leisure* time, leading to the “all-sided development of the whole individual”.

● Only communism can establish the *material* basis for “the development of human power which is its own end, the true realm of freedom”.<sup>29</sup> Thus we will see the emergence of *homo aestheticus* on a *broader and higher* basis, whereby people will be able to “engage in painting among other activities”, etc.

## Otherwise ...

That is Marx’s position (and also mine). He recognised that under capitalism there will always be a *tension* between art - as I have defined it - and the commodity form. The longer this continues, the survival of art’s autonomy is under threat. To summarise, there are four main reasons: (i) The bourgeois division of labour continues, unabated, despite universal education.

(ii) More than ever, the artist needs the imprimatur of the art institution, linked to the market. Therefore art remains a separate realm, produced by a “remote spectrum of experts”.

(iii) The market isolates the producer from the consumer; especially the worker. On the one hand, the worker is reduced to a mere commodity; on the other, the bourgeois division of labour reduces the worker to a “machine-like type of labour”; hence, from the standpoint of the worker, the aesthetic plays no part in the production process.

(iv) Increasingly the market *reduces* art to a mere commodity and therefore degrades it. The *tendency* is for *price* to become the determining factor, not the *quality* of the artwork.

Therefore the “inverting power of

money” is able to make black white, reason nonsense, etc. Today, that is *all-pervasive*, at both the individual and institutional level.

Compare the early 20th century with the *instrumental* present, whereby the aspiring artist sees him/herself as an entrepreneur. The heyday of art’s autonomy in the form of *aesthetic modernism* is long gone: ie, when artists produced impractical art objects, based on an inner need to create - or, as in the case of the Russian avant-garde, to serve the revolution - not just to live off the fat of the land ...

● Today alienation goes beyond the *drudgery* of wage-labour, which reduces the worker to a *machine*, whether the latter is skilled or unskilled.

● Thanks to the rise of the new mass media, the commodity form provides the basis for the *society of the spectacle* (ie, the ‘unreal reality’ of advertising/news or propaganda/entertainment industry).

Therefore it is not surprising that all this is *confusing* to the masses, which makes them *cynical* about art *per se* - along with the postmodernists themselves.

● Art objects acquire an inflated monetary value via the art auction, for which the art institution provides an *intellectual* fig leaf.

● In a recent interview, the British artist, Cornelia Parker, reassured viewers that the sale of British art had replaced the manufacturing industry! (Note the mindset, even if she was joking.)

● Hence, at both the conscious and practical level, we see a growing *fusion* between the artwork and the commodity form - or the *degradation* of art in the *epoch of capitalist decline*.

To paraphrase Marx, without the overthrow of capitalism the decadence of art becomes inevitable. From the standpoint of classical Marxism, art and the commodity form have always been *irreconcilable*; but never more so.

All this is implicit in Abrahamian’s review. But art, which is integral to what it means to be a fully developed human being, can only be rejuvenated - albeit on a broader and higher basis - via a communist organisation of society. Meanwhile, if the artist *chooses*, s/he can contribute to the political struggle (eg, for a revolutionary communist party), provided that the work undertaken retains its semi-autonomous character (see above).

Despite the odds, this is the only way forward if art is to survive ●  
rexgdunn@gmail.com

## Notes

1. K Marx *Economic and philosophic manuscripts*: www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Economic-Philosophic-Manuscripts-1844.pdf.
2. *London Review of Books* May 10 2018.
3. London 2018.
4. Oakland CA 2017.
5. *London Review of Books* my emphasis
6. *Ibid* p27, my emphasis.
7. *Ibid* p27.
8. *Ibid* p27.
9. K Marx *Capital* London 1992, chapter 1, p3.
10. II Rubin *Essays on Marx’s theory of value* Montreal 1982, pp262-63.
11. K Marx and F Engels *Communist manifesto*: www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf.
12. This is a reference to Hegel. See M Lifshitz *The philosophy of art of Karl Marx* London 1973, p14.
13. W Benjamin, “The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction” in H Arendt (ed) *Illuminations* New York 1969, p220.
14. *Ibid* p224.
15. *Ibid* p218.
16. C Gray *The Russian experiment in art, 1863-1922* London 1971, p274. Gray devotes the whole of her last chapter to the rise of the Russian avant-garde, which covers both formalism and constructivism; she notes, in passing, that a  *nihilist* attitude towards the art of the past is inherently dangerous.
17. W Benjamin *op cit* pp224-25.
18. *London Review of Books* p28.
19. *Ibid* p28.
20. *Ibid* p28.
21. *Ibid* p28.
22. *Ibid* p28.
23. *Ibid* p28.
24. W Benjamin *op cit* pp222, 223.
25. *London Review of Books* p28.
26. M Lifshitz *op cit* p96.
27. K Marx *Economic and philosophic manuscripts*: www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Economic-Philosophic-Manuscripts-1844.pdf.
28. See Leon Trotsky *on literature and art* New York 1970, p121.
29. K Marx *Capital* Vol 3, Moscow 1966, p820.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# weekly Worker

**General secretaries should be servants, not masters**

## Hold them to account

Kevin Bean of the University of Liverpool branch reports on the attempts by the UCU leadership to sabotage union democracy

What can only be described as unprecedented scenes of chaos and confusion, the annual congress of the University and College Union was last week brought to a premature conclusion by a walkout of full-time staff, including the general secretary, and the suspension of congress by the union's president.

This final suspension on the last day was the culmination of a simmering showdown between the UCU's leadership and the majority of delegates that had been building up since two similar walkouts and suspensions on the first day of the three-day gathering. The immediate issues in contention were two motions critical of general secretary Sally Hunt for her handling of the dispute with the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS): one from Exeter University called for her to resign, whilst the other - from King's College, London - censured her for her conduct during the dispute.<sup>1</sup> Although sections of the union leadership and full-time officials have attempted to muddy the waters with talk of "breaching employment rights" and "concerns over health and safety", the real issues at the heart of this turmoil are fundamental questions of democracy and the accountability of elected leaders to the membership of the union.<sup>2</sup>

This disruption was carefully orchestrated by the general secretary, president and a narrow majority of the national executive committee in close collaboration with senior full-time officials to both prevent discussion of these motions and silence wider criticisms of the way in which the pensions campaign had been handled. After each suspension and walkout the microphones were switched off, so that the majority of delegates who wanted to continue congress business were unable to do so: they were literally trying to shut us up. On four occasions over the three days a majority of delegates voted to discuss the two motions, which had been deemed to be within the standing orders of the union by the elected conference business committee. Yet still Sally Hunt and her coterie refused to have the debate and effectively wrecked the congress.

However, she did eventually put forward some sort of justification - three days after the congress! In an email to all union members on June 4, Hunt defended her sabotage by hiding behind the Unite branch which organises staff members employed by the UCU (and which she has only recently joined). Citing claims that the motions proposed "serious disciplinary penalties on an employee of the union, while denying them the due process", she suggested that quite justified criticisms of her were based on "the politics of personality" and an attempt to "nullify the democratic election of a general secretary".

In seeking to blame a militant minority for the wrecking of the congress, Hunt was joined by supporters of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, who



Sally Hunt at UCU congress: unaccountable

condemned critics as "ultra-left" and "opportunist" - their "antics", which included criticising the leadership and leaking such "disputes" to the press, "can only do damage" to the union.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the original print version of the report blamed "Socialist Workers Party and anarchist members of the union" for attempting to force Hunt's resignation, but this was later removed from the online version.

The current known as the Independent Broad Left forms the largest faction on the NEC and, in alliance with the leading full-time officials and supported by the CPB, are determined to maintain their control of the union's apparatus and thus their domination of the UCU's 'permanent government'.

### Significance

Let us be clear about the significance of what is and is not happening in the UCU. The immediate central issue is one of democracy: is the union to be run by a clique around the general secretary or by its supreme policy-making body, the congress elected by the membership? Hunt cannot have it both ways: on the one hand, she claims democratic legitimacy as a general secretary elected by the membership, but, on the other, she hides behind her rights as an employee of the union. On this somewhat theological reading of her status she is two persons in one and, as such, seems to be accountable to no-one at all - least of all to the members via their elected delegates.

That this question of democratic accountability has arisen at all should surprise nobody. For years the UCU

has been run as a relatively cosy club by the IBL-dominated leadership, only responding when it was absolutely forced by the demands of its membership for action on pay or worsening conditions in higher and further education. These campaigns of limited strikes, combined with political lobbying were largely ineffective in either defending the living standards of the membership or in halting the attacks on our sector. There was a widespread sense of defeatism, reflected in general demoralisation in our colleges and universities.

That changed with the USS pensions dispute earlier this year. A series of strikes in defence of our pension rights galvanised the membership and brought a whole new layer of activists into the union.<sup>4</sup> As the general secretary acknowledged herself in her report to congress, the union has been transformed by these strikes, which saw some 40,000 lecturers, researchers, academic-related and professional support staff take action across 64 institutions.<sup>5</sup> As a result UCU activism has increased and membership was boosted by no less than 16,000. Many of these new activists are from groups previously unorganised who are being drawn into trade union activity for the first time - such as early career academics on short-term contracts and other members of the growing precariat in British higher and further education. These new voices - bringing a new urgency and a radically different sense of how their union should be run - were very much among those we heard from May 30 to June 1. It was clear from listening to contributions from the floor that easily 50% of the speakers were

at their first congress. They brought the militancy of the picket lines and a belief that a fight could be won into the conference hall: in tone and enthusiasm they were a million miles from the stale platitudes and tired rhetoric heard from the platform.

The various defeats that the leadership suffered (when we were actually allowed to conduct congress business and discuss motions) and indeed the 'nuclear option' that Hunt and her friends ultimately deployed are pointers to the future.<sup>6</sup> They show both the militancy of the new wave of activists and the fear of the leadership that the balance of power in the union is finally shifting against them. This sense that the UCU was being transformed before our eyes was best captured in the dying minutes of the congress. When a national official, the head of democratic services (no irony intended), finally came onto the platform after the last walkout to announce that the conference had ended, a majority of delegates stayed put in the hall and convened an impromptu session which voted to continue the fight for a democratic union. After 30 minutes discussion the following statement was signed by 131 delegates, a clear majority of the delegates:

We, UCU elected delegates, voted repeatedly in line with the advice of our congress business committee to hear motions criticising the general secretary, which were in order. Unfortunately the general secretary and a narrow majority of the national executive committee refused to accept the right of congress to debate these motions.

We believe the union members have the right to hold our most senior elected officials to account. This is a basic democratic right in all trade union and representative systems (eg, parliament). We disagree with the walkouts and reject the notion that the motions include a threat to undermine staff terms and conditions. There is no issue with the conduct and performance of our wonderful and hardworking UCU staff members. To turn a debate about our democratic process as a union into a procedural employment dispute is to evacuate our capacity to act as a political body.

We resolve to continue to conduct the campaigns and defence of our members over pay and pensions that we all agree on and also to urge

a debate in all branches and union bodies to discuss democracy in our union. We also resolve to continue the motions at a recall conference and not be distracted from the campaign to defend our members' jobs, pay and pensions.<sup>7</sup>

The fight now goes out to the membership. As Sally Hunt's email has shown, the leadership and the full-time officials will attempt to utilise their control of the apparatus to put the case in defence of their actions at congress. In response activists are taking their case *directly* to the members by calling branch meetings and passing resolutions of protest. Elections for delegates to a special higher education sector conference on June 21 are also underway. Various regional and local committees are organising meetings and rallies to discuss the way forward for the defence of democracy in our union, such as a conference called by London region for June 9 on 'Which way for the UCU' or the rank-and-file network meeting in Sheffield on June 23.<sup>8</sup>

The issues are clear. The next few months will see serious battle joined - between those who are resisting change and defending the status quo, and those who want a democratic union fighting for our interests. The leadership must be held to account - for the future of the union it is a fight we must win ●

### Notes

- For the exact wording of the two contentious motions see [www.ucu.org.uk/article/9501/Business-of-the-Strategy-and-Finance-Committee#2](http://www.ucu.org.uk/article/9501/Business-of-the-Strategy-and-Finance-Committee#2).
- See [www.timeshighereducation.com/news/sally-hunt-clings-ucu-leader-congress-curtailed](http://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/sally-hunt-clings-ucu-leader-congress-curtailed).
- <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/communists-condemn-ultra-lefts-tactical-insanity-at-ucu-conference>.
- For examples of this process, see my *Weekly Worker* articles, 'Wave of militancy' (March 1), 'Taking stock at half time' (March 22) and 'Build on what we achieved' (April 26).
- See [www.ucu.org.uk/article/9516/UCU-general-secretary-Congress-2018-speech](http://www.ucu.org.uk/article/9516/UCU-general-secretary-Congress-2018-speech).
- Before the final shutdown on Friday, congress had passed a motion reaffirming the right of members to debate and vote on motions critical of our elected representatives. Delegates also committed the union to a recall congress at the earliest opportunity to deal with business lost as a result of the leadership's sabotage, along with a special delegate conference to discuss how to build greater democracy and transparency in the UCU.
- See #OurUCU: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1iFQDA3dv4tj1\\_m6fsZxlmK4DKidFaT-Bfht2gk7ZE/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1iFQDA3dv4tj1_m6fsZxlmK4DKidFaT-Bfht2gk7ZE/edit).
- For further details on the London region meeting see <https://uculondonregion.wordpress.com/2018/05/31/after-congress>. For the rank-and-file meeting see [www.facebook.com/events/2051183441873202/](http://www.facebook.com/events/2051183441873202/).

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