



weekly  
**worker**



**Does the departure of  
Johnson and Davis herald  
Norway status for UK?**

- Letters and debate
- Pride incorporated
- Torture UK
- Stalin's elite

No 1211 Thursday July 12 2018

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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# \$1 TRILLION TRADE WAR IN THE OFFING



# LETTERS



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

## Democracy

Last week Jack Conrad made a case against a 'people's vote' on the Tory-unionist deal to exit the European Union ('Oppose siren calls', July 5). He argued that all referenda should be opposed in principle. If any take place, they should automatically be boycotted. Behind the present call for a referendum stood the liberals and behind them various capitalists who wanted to halt Brexit.

In a short letter there is no time to deal with complex issues about whether it is right for communists to call for a 'people's vote' in the present conditions of the class struggle in July 2018. If we are opposed in principle, then there are no circumstances to agitate for one. If we are opposed in principle, then we do not need to waste time discussing which way to vote.

This is the CPGB case. Jack makes valid criticisms of referenda. But he crosses the road into ultra-leftism when he tries to make a general principle out of his criticism. He says: "... our objection to a second EU referendum is exactly the same as our objection to the first. And it has nothing to do with opinion polls. Referendums are by their very nature undemocratic."

Jack's arguments seem to rest on Kautsky's views. Kautsky makes strong criticism, but does not rule out referenda. Jack notes that "Kautsky claims that referenda might be useful in the weaker, less autocratic states", adding: "Maybe in the US, England and the English colonies, even under circumstances in France." So, whilst Jack implies principled opposition, this is not the case.

The big gap in his argument concerns the question of self-determination. The Bolsheviks demanded the national question be settled by peaceful rather than violent means. The peaceful separation of the Czech and Slovaks was much better than the violence inflicted on the Iraqi working class by the ruling class trying to impose the Iraqi union on Kurds, Shia and Sunni.

The RSDLP's 1913 'Thesis on the national question' says Social Democrats should "(b) demand the settlement of the question of such secession only on the basis of a universal, direct and equal vote of the population of a the given territory by secret ballot". A referendum provides for a peaceful resolution of the national question. Let's hope nobody forgets that in these troubled times.

Working class democrats are consistent champions of every kind of democratic demand. This does not mean being uncritical. There has to be critical appraisal of all forms of democracy under the rule of capital, such as elections, republics, universal suffrage, referenda and parliaments. This is not an argument to oppose them.

Working class democrats are critical of referenda. Jack gave us historical examples. It is the same approach that Lenin took to the republic. When Engels supported republican slogans, he did so by reminding everybody of the limitations of a democratic republic. He had no illusions in universal suffrage or indeed any democratic demands in capitalist society. Criticism of the dangers and limitations of referenda is not, however, the same as opposing all and every one in principle.

Referenda are, like elections and other examples of universal suffrage, an opportunity for millions to engage in political struggle. They are an opportunity for parties to engage, as the CPGB has done, in class struggle. They are, of course, political weapons, like elections, which are used by the capitalist class against the working class. Working class parties have to learn the threats, dangers and opportunities.

Universal suffrage has been used in referenda and elections to bring dictators to power. Jack reminds us of the anti-democratic coup by Louis Bonaparte "endorsed by a rapidly called referendum, followed by a second in 1852, which made him emperor". Hitler came to power in January 1933 after an election made the Nazis the largest party in the Reichstag. We cannot stop fascism by abolishing universal suffrage.

When 100,000 people march through London demanding the right to vote on the Tory deal, we are dealing with a mass democratic demand. Why should 46 million voters not have this right? I would expect communists, as the most militant democrats, to be in the vanguard in fighting for the right to vote by demanding working class demonstrations and more decisively political strikes.

Liberals have always been elitists who naturally prefer decisions to be taken by clever and educated people. They feel it is dangerous to allow the ignorant masses to have a say. If they had to choose between 635 MPs and over 800 Lords to decide on the EU or 46 million voters, the liberal elites prefer the former. When liberal Cameron posed as a 'democrat' by offering a referendum on the EU it was intended to be 'advisory' to parliament.

The ruling class are not going to concede another referendum if they can avoid it. This is clear from the Tory and Labour leaders. It is too risky. At present the CPGB is supporting Tory-Labour leaders' position that ratification of the Tory deal must be carried out by the crown-in-parliament alone and that working class people should not be allowed to vote. Their opposition is based on naked class interests and risk assessments. The CPGB has based their position on a non-principle, which negates the right of nations to self determination referenda.

We might assume that the CPGB aggregate will discuss their view on the Tory deal and quite possibly vote against it or take no view. Without any sense of irony, the same communists will vote to oppose the right of working class people to have a vote. Voting is just for cabinet meetings, the Commons and Lords, or CPGB aggregates. But this is a class question and we must demand the right of the working class to interfere with the prerogatives of the crown and parliament.

**Steve Freeman**

London

## An education

The *Weekly Worker* is superb. The letters pages and the fairness is incredible - even when you are being slagged off (you can defend yourself, of course). Even the Donovan/Northall, etc stuff is published, despite some moans from a few intolerant readers.

Seeing arguments presented - even those that look dangerous and some worry may have undue influence - then ably refuted is an education in analytical thought in itself. There is too much of the left seeking to clamp down on dissenting views rather than refute them. I am gobsmacked and amazed at how you continue to publish strongly dissenting and attacking views, whilst having the confidence of your position. You even wait a week before publishing replies. You model what real communism should be - debate, debate, debate until the matter is settled.

Of course, being incredibly fair about allowing opponents a full reply does not mean you are obligated to publish everything. It is all about what is a legitimate point of view that can marshal facts in its support, even if others bitterly disagree, then encouraging coherent refutations. I've never seen any other paper on the left that doesn't just push one interpretation or tendency. And the *Weekly Worker* is a real education with a startlingly different way of looking

at things, while spotting the angles so many others miss.

Mike Macnair's stuff on intersectionality and the history behind what seem like recent new arguments is essential reading. How does he read all the stuff to note references? He sums a book up in a few sentences. How much reading does he do, so he can write four instalments?

You have such a talented team of writers - I look forward to every issue. I flick through *The Socialist* and *Socialist Worker*, disappointed at how brief and predictable their coverage is and at their total failure to allow dissenting views to be covered. They are both boring.

Take their coverage of the recent PCS conference, which was a travesty of a lack of debate. It decided to ballot on PCS action alone, without winning the agreement of other unions. If PCS loses the ballot or strike action fails to win a pay rise, I will have been proved right (PCS cannot win by itself) and 800 delegates, all the NEC and Mark Serwotka proved wrong. That would be extremely worrying, when so many activists cannot think for themselves and weigh up the situation correctly. Of course, I hope I'm wrong, but if not ...

However, the other left papers proclaimed they love the emperor's new clothes - only the *Weekly Worker* gives space for those laughing at the naked king. If only PCS delegates regularly read it, we'd make different decisions and not have ever fewer members voting in our NEC elections.

You deserve a wider readership, but it is serious stuff requiring real concentration. You are doing a great job and have educated me so much (except for some areas, I'm sure you will feel - like immigration! But in this area you just assert your stance and fail to justify it convincingly).

Anyway, I'm pleased to donate £50 towards the CPGB's Summer Offensive.

**Dave Vincent**

Manchester

## Red herring

Although I agree with the conclusions of Mike Macnair's article, 'Getting beyond capitalism' (July 5) and his critique of intersectionality and identity politics, I disagree with some of the arguments he presented.

1. In the United Kingdom it was not the Maoists (who were numerically insignificant) who pursued gender/black, etc equality at the expense of working class struggles. Often it was the Trotskyist groups, including the International Marxist Group and Socialist Workers Party, as well as Eurocommunists, who took such a line. So blaming Maoists is not valid as far as the UK is concerned.

2. The predominance of intersectionality and identity politics in society did not occur just because the left made mistakes. Capitalism saw how it could benefit from the issue of the double exploitation of women, while turning it into an easy win, and ultimately that was what made the difference. I argued this point in an article in 2013 ('Out of the mainstream, into the revolution', April 18 2013).

3. At the end of the day arguments about the labour aristocracy in advanced capitalist countries were a red herring, as globalised capital was changing the nature of work worldwide. However, when the US Maoists and Marxists in the third world raised the issue, it was an accurate assessment of the conditions of the international working class. It is easy to laugh at it now, when the working class in the third world and the advanced capitalist countries share similar experiences, but that wasn't the case in the early 1970s.

**Yasmine Mather**

email

## Programme?

At the Socialist Workers Party's 'Marxism' session on 'South Africa after Zuma' on July 6, Ronnie Kasrils, organiser of the

heroic London Recruits from the 1960s and then government minister for 14 years from 1994 to 2008, described the "looming economic meltdown" facing the people today. With unemployment at 25% (60% among young people) and growth "just above zero", 15 million of the poorest people are now dependent on government grants - the "beginnings of a welfare state" - which the state will soon be unable to pay.

The "optimistic new light on the horizon" coming from a rebellion within the South African Communist Party and the trade unions - particularly the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa), the largest union - is the birth of the South African Federation of Trade Unions to rival the SACP-led Congress of South African Trade Unions; and a new party, the Socialist Workers Revolutionary Party, due to be launched in October. Unfortunately, this most important issue was not explained further. Will it provoke a split in the SACP? Ronnie did not say and, in the discussion period, none of the SWPers showed any interest in the question.

The promise of the "fantastic new beginning" after Nelson Mandela left prison in 1990, when "people began to think that a revolution could take place", has not been fulfilled, and "hopes have been dashed". The people are highly critical of the African National Congress, he said, and everyone, especially young people, now think that "Mandela was a sellout". The ANC government, Ronnie said, "failed to carry through an education programme" about the years of struggle before the end of apartheid. "Class politics are out the window, and, like everywhere else, have been replaced by identity politics." There is "populism, demagoguery, and everything is viewed through the prism of racism".

What went wrong? In 1992 Mandela toured the world and brought back the same advice from the leaders of China, Cuba and big business: "Don't nationalise, or you will get no investment." So we put the economic programme of the Freedom Charter on the back burner. Joe Slovo told Ronnie: "If we fall out with Mandela, we'll be isolated." In other words, the SACP, instead of playing an independent, leading role, followed Mandela.

We thought that with universal suffrage, after gaining political power, economic power would follow, he explained. But putting economics on the back burner was "a Faustian pact". Vigilance was slackened, trade unions grew weaker, comrades were "seduced" by capitalist posts, and a gulf opened up with the masses. "A major betrayal took place. Errors of political judgement abounded. We gave far too much to business. We agreed the International Monetary Fund diktat to reduce corporation tax from 48% to 28%, and lifted currency exchange, allowing them to "suck their money out".

The SACP and Cosatu "became very angry" with Mandela and the corruption under president Thabo Mbeki from 1999, and eventually, in 2008, the ANC replaced Mbeki with Jacob Zuma, in what Ronnie called the "Zuma putsch against Mbeki", at which point Ronnie resigned from the government.

Three-minute questions and contributions to discussion followed Ronnie's opening, including SWP national secretary Charlie Kimber, who explained that, while the defeat of apartheid was "a massive victory", the question of "cooperation with capital" or "confrontation with capital" is "the key dividing line between reform and revolution". One comrade asked: "What can we do here to help the struggle there?" When I was lucky enough to get my pennyworth, I showed the comrades a copy of *Labour Party Marxists*, and answered that our best act of solidarity would not only be to transform Labour into a united front of the entire working

class, but bring our divided left in Britain together into a genuine communist party, acting within that united front, in order to make revolution here. I said that the fight for a communist party is the fight for a Marxist programme; that both the South African Freedom Charter and the Communist Party of Britain's programme are *national* roads; and that the SWP, far from being "the revolutionary party", doesn't even have a programme.

**Stan Keable**  
Hammersmith

## Open-minded

As someone who believes that most Marxists are unaware of the forces manipulating human society, I was pleasantly surprised when I recently discovered that research into unidentified flying objects in China is either under the leadership of the Communist Party of China or at least communists are involved in this research. The UFO organisation is a member of China's Association for Science and Technology. According to Timothy Woods, "Most of China's UFO researchers are scientists and engineers, and many UFO groups require college degrees and published research for membership."

Woods says that "The Beijing UFO Research Society includes Communist Party cadres or managers, and air force officials regularly attend important meetings." According to Sun Shili, a retired foreign ministry official who heads China's UFO research, "if the conditions for membership weren't so strict we'd have millions of members by now".

Wood concludes that, "Ironically, a country renowned for its repression of liberalism now leads the world in liberal academic discussion relating to this controversial and multi-faceted subject." This is a far cry from the American authorities, whose present policy is one of disinformation and keeping people in a state of ignorance relating to this issue. Fear of losing ideological control of the masses is what dictates official western position. China needs to be congratulated for its open-minded attitude, which is the only scientific stance.

**Tony Clark**  
email

## Legalise drugs

The illegal drugs market is a gigantic pyramid-selling operation, where users often become petty dealers to help fund their drug taking.

Legalisation of all drugs would bring an end to this pyramid-selling operation and put the online suppliers, the drug networks, the petty drugs dealers, and the drug cartels of Latin America and Afghanistan out of business. Legalisation would not mean that drugs would be available on supermarket shelves, nor would it mean that it would be legal to take drugs in public places.

Cannabis would be made available through independent shops, as happens in Colorado, Alaska, Oregon, California and now Canada; and in member-only cannabis clubs, as happens in Spain. Cocaine would be available from specially licensed pharmacies. Heroin would be made available to registered heroin addicts at GP-run clinics, as happens in Switzerland.

Legalisation of all drugs would bring with it quality control, labelling and a public health campaign detailing the dangers of drugs specifically targeted at teenagers. It is time to legalise all drugs.

**John Smithee**  
Cambridgeshire

## Apology

Due to a technical error, footnote numbers were inadvertently omitted from all articles in last week's *Weekly Worker*. We apologise and are trying to ensure that this error is not repeated.

**Peter Manson**  
Editor

**LAW**

# Muddying the waters

The left should not endorse the party's new code of conduct, declares Labour Against the Witchhunt

The Labour Party's new anti-Semitism code of conduct, published last week, was clearly intended to put an end to the campaign of false allegations of anti-Semitism. Instead it has achieved the precise opposite. The code has been the subject of a fierce attack by Zionist organisations and the mass media. It has also caused confusion amongst our allies, some of whom have welcomed it.<sup>1</sup>

The campaign of false allegations is not driven by a failure to define anti-Semitism, but is a politically motivated attack by the right and supporters of Zionism. The code will not prevent the weaponisation of anti-Semitism by those whose primary concern is defence of Israel, right or wrong. The expulsion of Tony Greenstein, Marc Wadsworth, Cyril Chilson and others was the product of a deliberate smear campaign aimed at the Corbyn leadership. Those who believe that the code marks the end of the false anti-Semitism campaign against the Labour Party are sadly mistaken.

Anti-Semitism is easy to define. According to the Oxford English Dictionary it is "Hostility to or prejudice against Jews".<sup>2</sup> Equally suitable is the definition drawn up by Oxford academic Dr Brian Klug: "Anti-Semitism is a form of hostility to Jews as Jews, where Jews are perceived as something other than what they are".<sup>3</sup>

The Zionists, however, have been insistent that the Labour Party adopt all 450-plus words of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of anti-Semitism,<sup>4</sup> including 11 supposed examples, seven of which refer to Israel. They have reacted furiously because four of the examples, which equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism, have been omitted from the code. In the words of *Jewish Chronicle* editor Stephen Pollard, the problem is that "Labour has excised the parts which relate to Israel and how criticism of Israel can be anti-Semitic." (In his fury Pollard openly compares Jeremy Corbyn to a Nazi,<sup>5</sup> himself falling foul of one of the IHRA examples: "Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis".)

The false allegations of 'anti-Semitism' are about Israel, not racism against Jews. That is what the leaders of Zionism themselves say. We should believe them. In their Open Letter to Corbyn,<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Arkush of the Board of Deputies and Jonathan Goldstein of the Jewish Leadership Council were quite clear about this:

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

Arkush then accused the Jewish group, Jewdas, with whom Corbyn shared a Seder night, of being a "source of virulent anti-Semitism".<sup>7</sup> As a parting shot on his retirement, Arkush, who effusively welcomed Donald Trump's election,<sup>8</sup> accused Corbyn of being an anti-Semite.<sup>9</sup>

We do not accept the assertion of Marie Van der Zyl, Arkush's successor, that "It is for Jews to determine for themselves what anti-Semitism is."<sup>10</sup> The Jewish community does not have one single view. It is divided between supporters and opponents of Zionism. To pretend otherwise is dishonest. What the Board of Deputies means is that anti-Semitism is whatever Israel's supporters say it is. Anti-racist or anti-Zionist Jews don't count. Anti-Zionist Jews are the 'wrong sort of Jews'.

The reason for the Zionist obsession with definitions of anti-Semitism is not



They will not be appeased

hard to find. Last week saw a violent attack by Israel against the Palestinian village of Khan al-Ahmar, an exercise in ethnic cleansing. That is real racism. So is the mass murder by Israel of 120 unarmed demonstrators in Gaza, an action defended by Labour Friends of Israel. Instead of condemning these war crimes, Israel's supporters rely on false accusations of anti-Semitism.

## Plus or minus?

Although the code in principle concedes that anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism are separate and distinct, in practice it muddies the waters.

We do not accept, just because the Zionists oppose the code, that we should endorse it. We should not put a plus where our opponents put a minus. We should examine the code from our perspective, not theirs.

Why should there even be a separate definition of anti-Semitism? Anti-Semitism is a marginal form of prejudice. It is the victims of the Windrush scandal, the targets of mosque bombings and racial attacks, the hounding of Roma with the support of people like John Mann MP and racism against black and Asian people which should be the Labour Party's focus of attention.

Unfortunately the code, instead of rejecting outright the bogus IHRA definition of anti-Semitism, takes it as its starting point. In so doing it ignores the opinion of Hugh Tomlinson QC that:

The IHRA definition does not purport to provide a legal definition of anti-Semitism. It does not have the clarity which would be required from such a definition.<sup>11</sup>

Stephen Sedley likewise said in his article, 'Defining anti-Semitism', that the IHRA definition "fails the first test of any definition: it is indefinite..." It is "protean in character and is open-ended".<sup>12</sup>

Tomlinson argued that because it "lacks clarity and comprehensiveness" it has a "potential chilling effect on public bodies, which, in the absence of definitional clarity, may seek to sanction or prohibit any conduct which has been labelled by third parties as anti-Semitic without applying any clear criterion of assessment".

The code begins with a half-truth (paragraph 5): "Labour is an anti-racist party." Labour historically was as much a party of empire as the Conservatives. That was why Poale Zion, which campaigned for a boycott of Arab workers, affiliated to the Labour Party in 1920. More recently, only eight Labour MPs voted against the 2013 Immigration Act, with its intention of creating a "hostile environment", which directly led to the Windrush scandal.

It is welcome that paragraph 7 accepts that "the expression of even

contentious views in this area will not be treated as anti-Semitism unless accompanied by specific anti-Semitic content (such as the use of anti-Semitic tropes) or by other evidence of anti-Semitic intent." But this begs the question as to what "anti-Semitic tropes" will mean in practice, since our experience so far is that virtually anything can count.

The code quotes approvingly other examples of anti-Semitism that the IHRA definition gives: eg, "Calling for, aiding or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion." Why add "in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion"? Would killing or harming Jews be acceptable if it was in the name of a progressive ideology or a mainstream religion? This formulation is Islamophobic.

The implicit assumption running throughout the code is that there is a thin line dividing anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism and that anti-Zionism is often a cover for anti-Semitism. What is far more frequent today is the reverse - anti-Semites use support for Israel and Zionism as a cover for their anti-Semitism. No better example is there than Tommy Robinson, the British fascist who combines support for Israel with befriending anti-Semites and holocaust deniers.<sup>13</sup>

Labour's new anti-Semitism code of conduct is not the panacea that many people are hoping it will be. Whether its adoption will mark a break from the past will depend on how it is implemented. Will the suspension of Jackie Walker and other socialists be lifted, and will those already wrongly expelled be reinstated? The case of Jackie Walker in particular will be a litmus test ●

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

## Notes

1. See, for example, [www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/blog/jvl-welcome-for-the-nec-statement-on-antisemitism](http://www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/blog/jvl-welcome-for-the-nec-statement-on-antisemitism).
2. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/anti-semitism>.
3. [www.jmberlin.de/sites/default/files/antisemitism-in-europe-today\\_2-klug.pdf](http://www.jmberlin.de/sites/default/files/antisemitism-in-europe-today_2-klug.pdf).
4. [www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism](http://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism).
5. [www.thejc.com/comment/comment/labour-s-new-guidelines-show-it-is-institutionally-antisemitic-1.466685](http://www.thejc.com/comment/comment/labour-s-new-guidelines-show-it-is-institutionally-antisemitic-1.466685).
6. [www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/shame-on-you-rally-against-anti-semitism-in-u-k-labour-gets-heated-1.5949527](http://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/shame-on-you-rally-against-anti-semitism-in-u-k-labour-gets-heated-1.5949527).
7. [www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/jonathan-arkush-claims-jewdas-is-a-source-of-virulent-antisemitism-1.461817](http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/jonathan-arkush-claims-jewdas-is-a-source-of-virulent-antisemitism-1.461817).
8. [www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/board-of-deputies-president-jonathan-arkush-under-fire-after-message-congratulating-trump-1.54660](http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/board-of-deputies-president-jonathan-arkush-under-fire-after-message-congratulating-trump-1.54660).
9. [jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/arkush-corbyn-future](http://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/arkush-corbyn-future).
10. [www.thejc.com/jeremy-corbyn-labour-definition-antisemitism-1.466626](http://www.thejc.com/jeremy-corbyn-labour-definition-antisemitism-1.466626).
11. <http://freespeechisrael.org.uk/ihra-opinion/#st-hash.0Ga4CaDH.DfH0vF10.dpbs>.
12. [www.lrb.co.uk/v39/n09/stephen-sedley/defining-anti-semitism](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v39/n09/stephen-sedley/defining-anti-semitism).
13. [www.haaretz.com/opinion/why-the-u-k-s-neo-nazis-are-posing-with-israeli-flags-1.5439928](http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/why-the-u-k-s-neo-nazis-are-posing-with-israeli-flags-1.5439928).

# ACTION

## London Communist Forum

**Sunday July 15:** No forum.  
**Sunday July 22, 5pm:** Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group: study of August Nimtz's *Lenin's electoral strategy from Marx and Engels through the revolution of 1905*. This meeting: appendix B.  
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).

## 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>.

## Demonstrate against Trump

**Wisbech, Friday July 13, 12 noon:** Assemble Clarkson Memorial, Bridge Street, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire.  
Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).  
**London, Friday July 13, 2pm:** Assemble BBC, Portland Place, London W1 for march to Trafalgar Square.  
Organised by Together Against Trump: [www.facebook.com/events/176581893155207](http://www.facebook.com/events/176581893155207).

**Glasgow, Friday July 13, 5pm:** Assemble George Square, Glasgow G2.  
Organised by Scotland United Against Trump: [www.facebook.com/Scotland-United-Against-Trump-2197007203854762](http://www.facebook.com/Scotland-United-Against-Trump-2197007203854762).

**Manchester, Friday July 13, 5pm:** Assemble Albert Square, Manchester M2.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).  
**Edinburgh, Saturday July 14, 12 noon:** Assemble Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh EH1  
Organised by Scotland United Against Trump: [www.facebook.com/events/628616174183456](http://www.facebook.com/events/628616174183456).

## 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).

## Oppose the far right

**Saturday July 14, 1pm:** Assemble at Old Palace Yard, Westminster, London SW1 then march to Whitehall  
No to Trump, Tommy Robinson and the FLA.  
Organised by Unite Against Fascism: <http://uaf.org.uk>.

## 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).  
Organised by Momentum: <https://peoplesmomentum.com>.

## Labour Against the Witchhunt

**Monday July 16, 5pm to 7.15pm:** Lobby of Hammersmith and Fulham Council meeting, Hammersmith Town Hall, King Street, London W6. Reinstate Stan Keable! Expressing an anti-Zionist opinion at a political event is not a disciplinary offence!  
**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).

## Tolpuddle Festival

**Friday July 20, 12 noon to Sunday July 22, 6pm:** Annual commemoration, Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum, Dorchester Road, Tolpuddle.  
Organised by Tolpuddle Martyrs: [www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk](http://www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk).

## Remember the International Brigades

**Tuesday July 24, 7pm:** Spanish Collection launch, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Film screenings, and talk. Speaker: Dr Peter Crome, son of Len Crome, chief of medical services in International Brigades 35th division. Plus exhibition.  
Organised by Marx Memorial Library: [www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk](http://www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk)

## China's global impact

**Wednesday July 25, 7pm:** Educational meeting, first floor function room, The Wellington, 37 Bennetts Hill, Birmingham B2. Speaker: Jenny Clegg (advisor to CND and Stop the War).  
Organised by Birmingham Socialist Forum: [ser14@btinternet.com](mailto:ser14@btinternet.com).

## Arise: Labour left ideas

**Friday July 27 to Saturday July 28:** Two-day political festival and conferences, various central London venues.  
Organised by Jeremy4PM  
[www.facebook.com/events/226915667862647](http://www.facebook.com/events/226915667862647).

## Seven men of Jarrow

**Saturday July 28, 10.30am:** Commemoration of transported miners. Assemble Jarrow colliery deepshaft, John Street, Jarrow NE35, for march to Viking statue, Salem Street, Jarrow NE32.  
Organised by Durham Miners Association: [www.durhamminers.org](http://www.durhamminers.org).

## The dead end of intersectionality

**Sunday July 29, 5pm:** London Communist Forum, Calthorpe Arms, Gray's Inn Road, London WC1. Speaker: Mike Macnair.  
Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk).

## CPGB wills

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

**ECONOMY**

Order for trade war signed

# A \$1 trillion trade war

Michael Roberts looks at the likely end result of Trump's new tariffs

July 6 was a threshold date for the global economy. Donald Trump's US administration started imposing trade tariffs on \$34 billion of imports from China, while Beijing looked set to target an equal amount in retaliation. Add that to the pile of tariffs and counter-tariffs growing across the Atlantic and North America, and the value of trade covered by the economic wars that Trump has launched raced immediately through the \$100 billion mark.

And that is just the beginning. This escalating trade war could easily surge through the trillion-dollar mark, taking 1.5% of global GDP. It would be equivalent to a quarter or more of the US's \$3.9 trillion total trade with the world last year and at least 6% of global merchandise trade (worth \$17.5 trillion in 2017, according to the World Trade Organisation).

The \$34 billion in Chinese imports targeted by the Trump administration are roughly equivalent in value to a month of imports from China. In this tranche, a 25% import tax has been applied on 818 products, ranging from water boilers and lathes to industrial robots and electric cars. In return, Beijing has imposed a similar tariff on a list that includes soya beans, seafood and crude oil. Both countries have also issued further product lists that would take the total trade covered to \$50 billion on each side.

Angered by China's retaliation, Trump ordered a further \$200 billion worth of imports to be targeted for a 10% tariff and threatened to go for another \$200 billion beyond that. To which Beijing vowed its own response. US imports from China were worth \$505 billion last year, while US exports to China reached a record \$130 billion. So a \$450 billion rise in tariffs will sweep across much of China's imports.

The Trump auto wars could be worth even more than \$600 billion. In a televised interview the US president called his plan to impose tariffs on imported cars and parts in the name of US national security "the big one". And that is certainly how the EU and others see it. According to official

data, the US imported \$192 billion in cars and light trucks in 2017 and a further \$143 billion in parts for a total of \$335 billion.

Then there is the North American Free Trade Agreement (Nafta). The US trades more with Canada and Mexico (\$1.1 trillion) than it does with China, Japan, Germany and the UK combined. Trump is seeking to renegotiate it just as a left-nationalist president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, was elected in Mexico. Trump seems to believe the auto tariffs will give him leverage over the European Union and Japan in trade negotiations, as well as over Canada and Mexico in the continuing talks over an updated Nafta. Mr Trump is dialling up the pressure to force capitulation. For that reason, the US could impose 20% tariffs on some or all of those imports.

Then there is the 'Fair and Reciprocal Tariff Act' (Fart), which Trump is planning to push through Congress. Fart would allow Trump to abandon the WTO's tariff rules, granting him new authority to unilaterally change tariff agreements with certain countries; and to abandon central WTO trade rules - namely the 'most favoured nation' principle that keeps countries from setting different tariff rates for different countries outside of free trade agreements; and 'bound tariff rates', the tariff ceilings that each WTO member-country has previously agreed to. In short, it would give Trump the authority to start a trade war without Congressional oversight, while flouting the WTO's rules. It would mean the end of the WTO, in essence. Trump's short-lived communications director, Anthony Scaramucci, has already tweeted that Fart "stinks". But the smell is getting worse.

Any US tariffs are likely to be met with retaliation. EU officials have been working on a plan to target upwards of €10 billion in goods from the US if it goes ahead with tariffs on the \$61 billion in cars and parts it imported from the EU in 2017. But in the extreme scenario - of like-for-like, tit-

for-tat tariffs - more than \$650 billion in global trade would be covered, with consequences for companies globally.

## Impact

What is the likely impact on global growth from this trade war? Well, Paul Krugman, Keynesian economist, won the Nobel prize in economics for his work on international trade and recently he did a "back of the envelope" calculation.<sup>1</sup> Krugman reckons that "there's a pretty good case that an all-out trade war could mean tariffs in the 30%-60% range; that this would lead to a very large reduction in trade - maybe 70%!" And the overall cost to the world economy would be about a 2%-3% reduction in world GDP per year - in effect wiping out more than half of current global growth of about 3%-4% a year (and the latter assumes that there is no new global recession).

Krugman reminds us that in the great depression of the 1930s the trade war launched by the US with the 1930 Smoot-Hawley tariff act, pushed tariffs up to 45%: "So both history and quantitative models suggest that a trade war would lead to quite high tariffs, with rates of more than 40% quite likely." Remember, current global trade tariff rates are about 3%-4% only.

Already, world trade has been staggering from the impact of the great recession and the subsequent long depression. And world trade share in terms of global GDP has stagnated at about 55%. Indeed, the great era of globalisation is over. Now the trade war - another consequence of the great recession and the long depression since 2008 - could roll back the world trade share to 1950s levels, according to Krugman: "If Trump is really taking us into a trade war, the global economy is going to get a lot less global."

Given this, Krugman looked at the hit to US economic growth. He reckoned it could take 2% of GDP off real growth each year. As average growth is expected to be about 2% a year over the next five years (assuming no world slump), that would mean the US economy would stagnate. That is

not as bad as the great recession, which knocked 6% off US real GDP growth, but it is bad enough to sustain a further leg of the current long depression.

And other countries will be hit even harder. Several major economies rely on trade much more than the US and Europe for growth. In the league of global value chain for trade, Taiwan is top with nearly 70% of value-added coming from exports; and many eastern European countries also have high export ratios. The US is only at 40% - and indeed China is under 50%.

According to Pictet asset management, if a 10% tariff on US trade were fully passed on to the consumer, global inflation would rise by about 0.7%. This, in turn, could reduce corporate earnings by 2.5% and cut global stocks price-to-earnings ratios by up to 15%. All of which means global equities could fall by some 15%-20%. In effect, this would put world stock market prices back by three years - indeed a crash.

Meanwhile, Asian governments, led by China, are continuing their drive to relax trading restrictions among themselves, while retaliating to Trump's trade war. Last week, the 16-nation Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership - which includes China, Japan and India, but not the US - met in Tokyo to try and complete a new trade pact that would include the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations as well as South Korea, Australia and New Zealand, covering one third of the world's economy and almost half its population.

And of course, as I have argued previously,<sup>2</sup> China is driving forward its 'belt and road' global investment scheme across central Asia. So, although many Asian and eastern European economies may suffer more than the US initially from a global trade war, in the longer term trade pathways may alter to make them more Euro-Asia-centric, to the detriment of the US and Latin America.

Global growth has been picking up in the last 12 months after a near-recession in 2015-16. Indeed, Gavyn

Davies, *Financial Times* economics blogger and former Goldman Sachs chief economist, has reckoned that world growth was growing at 4.4% - about 0.6% above trend - and a full percentage point higher than a couple of months ago.<sup>3</sup>

But the trade war will particularly hit the manufacturing and productive sectors of the major economies. And, while global growth as a whole may have picked up recently, world manufacturing growth is looking frail. Indeed, the US stock market has not bounced very much, because counteracting the one-off rise in corporate profits has been the possibility of rising interest rates driving up the cost of borrowing and servicing existing debt and the potential hit from the coming trade war.<sup>4</sup>

Hopes for a sharp rise in productive investment from the tax cuts appear dashed. Instead of more investment, there has been a threefold increase (\$150 billion) in share buybacks. In the first quarter of 2018 alone, US corporations collectively repatriated \$217 billion of their international stashes - around 10% of the \$2.1 trillion of greenbacks estimated to be currently offshore. But JPMorgan calculates only \$2 billion of the \$81 billion repatriated by the top 15 companies was spent on productive investment.

In other words, world economic growth (and US growth) may have peaked in the second quarter<sup>5</sup> and now there is the prospect of an all-out trade war ●

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

## Notes

1. [www.nytimes.com/2018/06/17/opinion/thinking-about-a-trade-war-very-wonkish.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/17/opinion/thinking-about-a-trade-war-very-wonkish.html).
2. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2018/04/04/trump-trade-and-the-tech-war>.
3. [www.ft.com/content/78dbfa26-7ac1-11e8-bc55-50daf11b720d](https://www.ft.com/content/78dbfa26-7ac1-11e8-bc55-50daf11b720d).
4. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2018/06/10/trumps-tantrums-and-the-world-economy>.
5. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2018/04/20/global-economy-peaked>.

**TORIES**

# Brexit chaos

The cabinet's 'unanimously agreed' acceptance of May's 'political coup' did not last very long, writes **Eddie Ford**

**W**e had a dramatic beginning to the week with the resignations of first Brexit secretary David Davis and then the ludicrous foreign secretary, Boris Johnson - along with a clutch of junior ministers and two obscure party vice-chairs. It is rumoured that hard Brexiteers are threatening a "drip, drip" of resignations in order to undermine Theresa May - maybe even drum up the numbers for a vote of no confidence.

But we shall wait and see - most Tory rebels are all talk and no backbone, and do not appear to have the numbers to topple the prime minister. Neither do they want to inadvertently trigger a general election that could possibly lead to the advent of a Labour government - whether led by Jeremy Corbyn or not. With the Tories in their current state of chaos, they are not exactly confident of being re-elected.

It was pretty clear that sooner or later there would be a crisis. May could not continue indefinitely trying to make the right noises to both the hard Brexiteers and those who thought it essential to retain the closest possible ties with the European Union - if some kind of 'remain' could not be wrangled, that is. It was just too good to be true when the entire cabinet 'unanimously agreed' to May's post-Brexit plan at Chequers on July 6. It seems Davis did not even know all the details beforehand.

It would be churlish to deny, however, that Theresa May had prepared her position extremely well, swotting being one of her skills. She courted not just allies, or potential allies, in the cabinet, but also Tory backbenchers - including 'loyal' Brexiteers. The *Financial Times's* coverage of the 'awayday' is instructive, praising the prime minister's "carefully planned political coup" that saw hard Brexiteers "fall in line" and agree a "pro-business position" - one that keeps Britain "intimately bound" to the European Union single market and customs union (July 7).

For the paper, May's "confrontation" with the hard Brexiteers was the "decisive moment" when she finally "put economic stability first" - the prime also insisting that from now on *all* ministers would be bound by collective responsibility: if you cannot toe the line, get out or be sacked. Greg Clark, the business secretary, also did his bit as well - getting big business to make a lot of noise, with Airbus, Jaguar Land Rover, Nissan, etc all demanding "clarity" and access to the single market.

Which is what they essentially got with May's 'facilitated customs arrangement' (FCA) - a rehashed version of her previously rejected 'new customs partnership'. Hence Johnson's widely quoted comment at Chequers about "polishing a turd". According to the three-page summary of the proposed deal, after Brexit the UK will "maintain a common rulebook for all goods" with the EU, including agricultural products - but not for services like banking. This should mean that Airbus, Jaguar, Siemens, etc would not be affected in any meaningful way by Brexit, whilst British banks operating in Europe would still be able to straddle the



**Jacob Rees-Mogg: but 'leave' always meant 'remain'**

world in the fearless buccaneering spirit that once made Britain great. Meanwhile, a treaty would be signed committing the UK to "continued harmonisation" with EU rules and the borders between the UK and EU would be treated as a "combined customs territory" - thereby avoiding in theory a hard Irish border and removing the need for the infamous "backstop" arrangements, keeping Northern Ireland in "full regulatory alignment" with the single market.

Additionally, parliament would oversee the UK's trade policy and have the ability to "choose" to diverge from the EU rules, "recognising that this would have consequences" - and "cooperative arrangements" would be established between EU and UK competition regulators, with "different arrangements" for services "where it is in our interests to have regulatory flexibility". A "joint institutional framework" would be established to interpret UK-EU agreements and any decisions by UK courts would involve "due regard paid to EU case law in areas where the UK continued to apply a common rulebook" - cases would still be referred to the European Court of Justice as the interpreter of EU rules, but if "cannot resolve disputes between the two".

Furthermore, the UK would apply domestic tariffs and trade policies for goods intended for the UK, but charge (higher) EU tariffs and their equivalents for goods which end up heading into the EU - though that raises the obvious problem of smuggling, especially across the 'frictionless' Irish border, not to mention its workability.

Freedom of movement would come to an end, apparently, but there would be a "mobility framework" to allow UK and EU citizens to travel to each other's territories - May refusing to rule out preferential treatment for EU citizens.

The document ends by stating that these proposals represent a "precise and responsible approach to the final stage of the negotiations", reminding us that this is only the opening salvo. In reality, of course, the final deal - assuming there is one - will be quite different from the one outlined in the Chequers dossier. It is fairly inconceivable that Michel Barnier and his team would just nod it through: what about the other freedoms, people and services?

That has always been their position and it is hard to see it changing. You can guarantee, therefore, that the EU will seek to extract more concessions from the British government - making's Theresa May's soft Brexit even softer. How would the hard Brexiteers react to that?

## Colony?

In other words, the result so far is something more like Norway with a few minuses than the 'Canada plus, plus, plus' originally imagined, or dreamed of - hard reality is setting in. And, two days after the 'away-day', Davis quite his job, having threatened to do so many times before. In his resignation letter, Davis said "the current trend of policy and tactics" was making it "look less and less likely" that the UK would leave the customs union and single market - he was "unpersuaded" that the government's negotiating approach "will not just lead to further demands for concessions" from Brussels. Rather, the "general direction" of May's approach "will leave us in at best a weak negotiating position, and possibly an inescapable one".

Davis later told the BBC that he had objected to Theresa May's Chequers plan right from the outset, telling colleagues that he was "the odd man out" - he felt the UK was "giving away too much and too easily" to the EU in the negotiations. He insisted that he did not want to bring down May's government, arguing - reasonably enough in some respects - that the proper time to do that would have been after her disastrous general election campaign, in which she lost her parliamentary majority. Getting the short straw, Dominic Raab, a stalwart hard Brexiteer, replaces Davis as Brexit secretary - sticking to her policy of like-for-like swaps to maintain the political balance in the cabinet.

As for Johnson, he only went over the top after someone else had taken the initial hail of bullets. Johnson declared in an overblown resignation letter that the government "now has a song to sing", but the trouble is the words "stick in the throat" - he went on to accuse May of pursuing a mere "semi-Brexit". In fact, Johnson wrote, the Brexit "dream is dying, suffocated by needless self-doubt". Johnson claimed that the current plan meant Britain was "truly headed for the status of colony" - the prime minister

"sending our vanguard into battle with the white flags fluttering above them". Johnson was swiftly replaced by Jeremy Hunt, who was despised as health secretary by NHS workers. He had campaigned for 'remain' during the referendum, but in his own words is a "convert" to the Brexit cause.

Naturally, Jacob Rees-Mogg and his not-so merry band of the European Research group are not at all happy. They published an 18-page briefing document, saying it "would lead directly to a worst-of-all-worlds black hole Brexit" - if the UK has to follow EU laws and ECJ rulings, then the country would not be able to develop an "effective international trade policy". How is that 'taking back control'? Indeed, Rees-Mogg told the BBC, the proposed plan could be worse than leaving the EU without a deal.

Inevitably, rumours abound that Rees-Mogg and other hard Brexiteers are trying to gather the 48 MPs' signatures needed to force a vote of no confidence in the prime minister. But they would struggle hard to muster the 159 votes needed to oust May, who by all accounts has said "bring it on" - confident that she would win any such contest, especially as there is no viable alternative candidate (Michael Gove? Sajid Javid?). The Brexiteers, as Rees-Mogg must surely know, would be unwise to move now, given that party rules stipulate that you can force a no-confidence vote only once every 12 months - tactically best, you would think, to let events develop and pick a more opportune time to strike. After all, the EU might reject May's soft Brexit, which must be the calculation of the hard Brexiteers - sit tight and things might eventually go their way.

By the same token, Theresa May knows that she will struggle to get her FCA plan through parliament. This perhaps explains why Labour MPs were briefed about the government's soft Brexit plan by the prime minister's *de facto* deputy, David Lidington - a possible sign that Downing Street is beginning to accept that it will need to draw on cross-party support if it is to stand a chance of parliamentary approval. Of course, this further infuriated Rees-Mogg, who grumbled bitterly about May being dependent on "socialist votes" to get the Chequers plan through parliament.

Having said that, the prime

minister must also know that Labour, Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National Party will almost certainly vote against *any* Brexit deal she puts forward. Sir Keir Starmer, the shadow Brexit secretary, has certainly indicated that Labour will vote down anything that fails to meet its six tests, which essentially require that any plan must deliver the "exact same benefits" as Britain currently enjoys as a member of the single market and customs union. Labour sources have said they do not believe defeating any final Brexit agreement would set a course for the UK to leave the EU with no deal.

With no parliamentary majority for a hard Brexit we seem to be entering Brexit paralysis. May might be left with no option than to apply to extend the article 50 exit process, whilst holding a general election in a bid to break the impasse - then almost anything could happen. One thing that can be said without any reservation is that a Labour victory is far from guaranteed, let alone a Corbyn premiership. Nevertheless, the chances are that a new parliamentary configuration, certainly a national government of some kind, would save the day for the interests of big capital and go for the softest of soft Brexits, a Brexit which puts Britain in the position of a Norway or a Switzerland. In other words leaving the EU but remaining in the EU. Inevitably, that would bring forward charges of betrayal and treachery. A heady and dangerous brew.

## Rule-taker

Jacob Rees-Mogg has often complained that a soft or semi-Brexit could leave Britain as a "vassal state" - a rule-taker and not a rule-maker. This is not the sort of language communists would use, but it would be stupid to deny that what Rees-Mogg says contains a kernel of truth. Objectively speaking, it does seem ludicrous to 'leave' the customs union, but at the same time stay in it - forced to pay due heed to the ECJ, and EU rules and regulations in general, but having no direct say or vote in how those laws are drawn up or implemented. A Norway or Switzerland with no pluses, still paying into the EU budget, accepting free movement (sorry, "mobility framework"), and so on.

In which case, what is the point of it all? Because, we are told, there was a referendum and you have to respect 'the will of the people' - which, funnily enough, never mattered before and will probably never matter again. Brexit means Brexit, except that it does not seem to mean much at all. If by some very unlikely sequence of events, the UK ends up with either a hard Brexit or 'no deal', then it is doubtful whether Airbus and co will immediately pull down the hatches and shut up shop. But in all likelihood any future investment decisions will leave the UK out of the equation, and in the longer term they will physically transfer production and operations elsewhere. As far as the hard Brexiteers are concerned, it is a hit they are prepared to take - banking will make up for it, they hope. As Boris Johnson famously said, "Fuck business" - by which he presumably meant *industrial* capital ●

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## SEXUAL POLITICS

# The degaying of Pride

This year's Pride parade was embroiled in controversy - a minor miracle, reckons Paul Demarty

**M**y own Pride this year began with a work do.

The office was bedecked with rainbow-coloured balloons. We had a bake sale, proceeds to go to a gay youth charity, and signed a canvas with a rainbow-flag version of the company logo on it. Fun was had by all, and all were encouraged to attend, with that sort of HR cheerfulness that carries the implied threat of being put on a list somewhere if your participation is insufficiently enthusiastic.

This was a long way from the event's roots, to put it mildly. The first Gay Pride march in London took place in 1972, with some 2,000 participants, and was - it somehow now needs to be said - unambiguously radical gathering. Homosexuality had been partially decriminalised in Britain in 1967, but gay people faced severe discrimination in almost all areas of social life, including - in particular - routine police harassment.

The picture was pretty similar all over the capitalist world, and the London event was part of a great political wave that followed the Stonewall riots in New York in 1968, and more generally the tendency for 'new social movements' to emerge on the model of US civil rights, not to mention the greater influence of the left within the labour movement, with the effect that patriarchal sectionalism in the unions and parties of the left was put under serious challenge.

We could go through the whole intervening history here, but really it is better to just pose the thing in sharp contrast. Today's Pride march is effortlessly corporate, the mirror in which the liberal establishment - that is, an establishment that has been forcibly remade as liberal - regards itself. The march itself is not enormously bigger, because it is ground down by bureaucracy. Participants must all be registered in advance. Wristbands are strictly limited. This all seems to be a consequence of the event no longer being categorised, even for formal purposes, as a political march, and instead as a street party, and thus not covered by the reverence English law supposedly has for free speech.

The best organised contingents, then, end up being the ones with the most money, and so Pride nowadays is primarily a marketing opportunity for retailers of consumer goods to cast their various sorts of tat in the cosy glow of universal human brotherhood. The attitude at work is exemplified by a recent billboard advert for Smirnoff vodka, with a cheerful, Instagrammable picture of a group of attractive, sexually ambiguous millennials enjoying a spirit and mixer in a club, with the slogan, "Labels are for bottles, not for people". Vodka is the path to self-realisation; and if you want to be more of a unique, affirmed individual, just drink more of it. The parade ends up less a valuable thing in itself, but rather an opportunity for people to follow along and party nearby; only 20,000 marched, but a million or more people participated in related events.

It is in this context that the one bit of actual controversy to have come up should be evaluated. At the beginning of the march, a group of 10 or so radical feminists held a sit-down protest at the front, proclaiming their opposition to 'trans activism', which they consider anti-lesbian - a common complaint of such so-



Some politics at last

called 'trans-exclusionary radical feminists' (terfs) is that lesbians are being bullied into including biological males in their pool of potential sexual partners. In the case of this lot - centred around a website, Mayday4Women - things have gotten so bad that it is time for lesbians to separate from "this absurd coalition called LGBTQIA+" - "#gettheLout" was the chosen hashtag, which seems, at a glance, to be rather dominated by their opponents.<sup>1</sup>

In the end they were 'moved along', but in such a way that they led the march, in spite of their acronymic misgivings, which was not an outcome met with enthusiasm from wider society. "I am appalled that transphobic protestors were allowed to lead the march and the crowd asked to cheer them on," said Jennie Rigg, leader of the Liberal Democrats' LGBT section. "This is a betrayal of the thousands marching. The Pride organisers should resign and offer a full apology." Similar statements came forth from the Labour equivalents, and the feeling seems almost unanimous that the organisers should have done more to prevent it.

We do not propose to relitigate the trans wars here. The interest is simply in the fact that the appearance of disagreement should meet with such an extraordinary allergic reaction. Janice Raymond's 'Terf' ur-text, *Transsexual empire: the rise of the she-male*, came out in 1980, and is obviously a response to an already fiery controversy. The overlap between terf-ism and political lesbianism is large enough that this *contretemps* must, surely, have already disrupted the unity of a Pride march in the last 40 years.

The terfs will no doubt conclude that this whole episode reveals the residual misogyny of society, or

at least that 'official' opinion is violently opposed to them. There is certainly *some* truth to that - the liberal media is at least tendentially pro-trans, although bigots in the *Daily Mail* are certainly not on message. Yet the picture is a little less clear: the terfs, and their habit of getting no-platformed at university speaking engagements, are being used as a stick to beat the left on campuses in the so-called 'free speech wars', which are in reality nothing of the sort. Establishment opinion, then, can come down on either side, according to convenience.

## Corporate PR

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the allergic reaction is on the part of the marketing machine, for which Pride is a matter of gloopy, cosmopolitan lifestyle choices and corporate PR. A marketing department's job is to present to the atomised consumer's consciousness a picture of the world, in which some positive desire is inextricably linked to the acquisition of the marketed commodity. Political contestation is the worst possible input to this equation. It gets people defensive, and thus less immediately pliable. It gets them *thinking*, at which point perhaps they will decide to go for a Grey Goose instead. The need for consensus follows from the corporate reality of Pride: no disharmony may defile the photo-ops on the GlaxoSmithKline float.

And so, while anti-terf types are spitting blood over the presence of their tormentors at the head of the march, perhaps they ought to stop and think about that - at least those among them with any pretence to political radicalism; about what is also rejected, along with these particular enemies, which is the possibility that violent disagreement has a place in the LGBT movement. Gripes about the loss of Pride's political edge are

becoming something of a tradition themselves, of course, but it does not make them any less real. We feel for Peter Tatchell, as he bemoans the bureaucratisation of the event, its detachment from any meaningful political cause, its - a lovely word - "degaying".<sup>2</sup>

Yet that is the paradoxical result of the considerable victories won over the years, the remarkable turnaround from the passing of section 28 - the last hurrah, so far at least, of serious anti-gay legislation - to a *Tory* government's legalisation of gay marriage. Anti-gay prejudice certainly still exists. Yet I return to the story of my workplace: such officially trumpeted Pride-mongering would have been quite unimaginable in the 1980s, and indeed much later. In the old days, we would find 'revolutionary' arguments for pursuing gay rights to the effect that capitalism was so reliant on the heterosexual nuclear family that it could never accept homosexuality without somehow imploding. We would also find arguments from the bigoted right saying the same thing - that the result of liberalisation of sexual prohibitions would be the collapse of civilisation.

The disappearance of the latter idea from establishment discourse in this country 'degays' the gay movement, because gay life itself is 'degayed' by wider acceptance; it moves from counterculture to subculture, and indeed from subculture to mainstream bourgeois culture. The 'radical' version of it lives on, after a fashion, in literary academia as queer theory, but, despite moral panicking on the part of 'anti-PC' whingers like Jordan Peterson, the radicalism of its teachings is strictly limited to the 'queering' of various texts, reading them as far more polymorphously perverse than they actually are<sup>3</sup> - an activity that

essentially amounts to a comfortable bourgeois hobby. One of the culture war skirmishes that led to section 28 was over the Danish children's book, *Jenny lives with Eric and Martin*, which depicted a gay family unit. Such families are, at least in major metropolitan centres, normal now, and all the more so single-sex marriages.

The question then arises - what problems face us that demand a gay movement, or perhaps rather renewed left attention to the question of sexuality? There is, first of all, the risk of serious reversal - capitalism is not flatly incompatible with sexual freedom, but demands ideological manipulation for its long-term health, up to and including violent lurches towards 'purity politics' and patriarchy. The other problem is that large numbers of people's sexual lives are still alienated and experienced as unpleasant or coercive; this is at issue in the battle between the lesbian terfs and the pro-trans activists - the former identifying the latter as coercing them into heterosexuality, and the latter accusing the former of forcing them into a sexual frame that ill suits their relationships with their bodies.

The trans-terf wars unfortunately teach us very little about the problem, except that extrapolating from particular niche experiences will not get us anywhere, since at first blush such experiences can lead in diametrically opposed and futile political directions. (One so very rarely gets the impression that these people *actually read* each other's material, preferring instead to resort directly to moral blackmail.) The peculiarity of modern identity politics is its combination of 'anti-foundationalist' theoretical propositions with an absolutist conception of individual identity, with the result that its rhetoric careens between policing borders and multiplying them. It is, therefore, an obstacle to any new, more liberated sexual cultures that might emerge, reproducing only the pathological social economies of late capitalism in smaller and smaller cliques.

A more fundamental obstacle is the hyper-commercialised sexuality promulgated from the disposable material culture around us, where single life is about bodies on display and marriage - gay, straight or anything else - is a matter of getting from one end of the John Lewis catalogue to the other. In reality, for a combination of economic and psychological reasons, *nobody* lives these lives, not even those comfortably enough off in theory to afford it.

Unfortunately, Pride is little more than a gaudy shop window for it these days, and you do not have to be a lesbian terf to want out ●

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## Notes

1. A scan of their leaflet can be found at <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/Dhg7FDWAAAUbX0.jpg>.
2. [www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/pride-london-commercial-corporate-sponsorship-march-protest-party-peter-tatchell-lgbt-gay-rights-a8433426.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/pride-london-commercial-corporate-sponsorship-march-protest-party-peter-tatchell-lgbt-gay-rights-a8433426.html).
3. The great example of this method is Lee Edelman's *No future: queer theory and the death drive*, which offers (for example) a reading of Charles Dickens' *Christmas carol* as being a story of Scrooge's 'degaying'. A reasonable (albeit much earlier) critique of these sorts of highly artificial readings can be found in John Hills's 'Ideology, economy and the British cinema', in M Barrett, P Corrigan, A Kuhn and J Wolff (eds) *Ideology and cultural production* (London 1979) - specifically the discussion of *The young Mr Lincoln*.

## SECRET STATE



UK worked hand in glove with US

# Complicity in torture

The details of 'extraordinary rendition' are finally out in the open. **Yassamine Mather** looks at the UK's responsibility for 'enhanced interrogation techniques'

**L**ike everything else about the 'war on terror', we will never know the true scale of UK complicity in the torture carried out by the US. However, in late June two parliamentary reports shed light on some aspects of the cooperation of UK security services with both the CIA and a number of unsavoury dictatorships between 2002 and 2006.

Last week, former Conservative justice secretary Kenneth Clarke said he "regrets" stopping the Gibson inquiry in 2012, claiming he did so because it clashed with separate police investigations. Clarke is now in favour of a "full, independent, judge-led inquiry" as "the only way that the full truth of Britain's involvement in extraordinary rendition and torture will be revealed".<sup>1</sup>

According to one of the parliamentary reports, it was "beyond doubt" that the UK knew how the US mistreated detainees, and the MPs rejected claims by intelligence agencies that the cases of rendition were no more than "isolated incidents". In fact British agencies "continued to supply intelligence to allies despite knowing or suspecting abuse in more than 200 cases".<sup>2</sup>

The parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) "found the UK intelligence agencies to be complicit in hundreds of incidents of torture and rendition, mainly in partnership with the US in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantánamo". The ISC chairman, Dominic Grieve, said UK renditions had facilitated the sending of prisoners to countries "with very dubious human rights records, where it would have been very likely that the person would be in fact tortured or ill-treated".

The reports are themselves incomplete. The ISC confirms that Theresa May protected the intelligence services by blocking evidence from officers who were working directly with US intelligence services. Clarke tells us: "I simply cannot understand... the prime minister's basis for this decision."

Former Labour foreign secretary Jack Straw, who was responsible for overseeing GCHQ and MI6 between 2001 and 2006, said, on the one hand, he was not aware of the activities or approach of the agencies. On the other hand, he claimed: "Many lessons... have since been learnt." However, there are some gems in the reports, contradicting such claims of ignorance, including this one regarding MI6: it "sought and obtained authorisation from the foreign secretary" to pay for an entire plane used in the rendition of a single individual.

A number of 'human rights' groups, including Amnesty International UK, Reprieve and Liberty, are up in arms. They have produced a joint statement saying the ISC's reports "revealed shocking new details of UK complicity in torture and rendition". What is more, these were "just the tip of the iceberg" and so they are calling for an independent inquiry.

However, only one group - Reprieve - is calling for a police investigation, as far as I know: "The police must also be free to follow the evidence and pursue prosecutions against those who were ultimately in charge and responsible for these appalling actions."

### Hypocrisy

It goes without saying that these findings make a mockery of claims by supporters of 'civil society' in capitalism and the British state that adherence to the 'rule of law' guarantees civil and human rights. Of course, the UK establishment prides itself in being a pioneer in the abolition of torture, yet even a superficial look at the history of torture shows the hypocrisy of such claims.

As early as 1215 'trial by ordeal', administered by priests, came to an end by order of the pope. The accused were subjected to painful and dangerous mistreatment, and their condition afterwards was supposed to ascertain whether they were guilty or innocent. Usually this was a test of life or death - if you survived, you must be innocent. Then in 1275 a law was introduced which allowed people to be tortured if they refused to go to trial before a jury.

Of course, on top of this, torture was still used for obtaining intelligence or as a means of terrifying dissidents. However, during the 14th century in a dispute between Edward II and the pope, the English sovereign first refused to endorse torture, only to agree later that the prisoners could be taken to France, where the legal constraints that existed in England would not apply.

According to Danny Friedman QC, "These events are of interest to 21st century public lawyers", because they deal with two kings planning rendition and the use of torture: "Despite the power of the monarchy, something akin to a principle of legality appears to have been in play."<sup>3</sup> In other words, there is no contradiction between the use of torture and the 'rule of law'.

Torture was also considered legal between 1540 and 1640, when it was formally abolished by parliament.

However, a couple of years later during the English Civil War, the Earl of Clarendon came up with the idea of establishing a prison on an island off the British mainland, where torture could be employed. This practice continued until 1679, when the Habeas Corpus Act was passed.

But none of this has stopped the authorities from mistreating prisoners. Ian Cobain who has investigated the history of the use of torture, reminds us that it "was a frequent, even routine, thing in 1939-1945 Britain", carried out in secret interrogation centres. During 'the troubles' in Northern Ireland the 'five techniques' - isolation, sensory deprivation, exhaustion, humiliation and seemingly self-inflicted pain - were commonly used.<sup>4</sup>

Republican political prisoners faced unprecedented pressure both during interrogation and when incarcerated - false confessions, such as those obtained from the Birmingham Six, were not achieved in conditions of adherence to the conventions signed by the UK. In 1975, Hugh Callaghan, Patrick Joseph Hill, Gerard Hunter, Richard McKenny, William Power and John Walker were each sentenced to life imprisonment following their convictions for their alleged role in pub bombings in Birmingham. Four of them had actually signed confessions, even though it was eventually established that they could not have been responsible. The court of appeal finally quashed their convictions in 1991.

In 1988 the Criminal Justice Act made it an offence for any public official to "intentionally inflict severe pain or suffering on another in the performance... of his official duties" and in 2001, after Tony Blair declared the UK to be the US's main partner in the 'war on terror', the security forces and the police might have been more reluctant to physically mistreat those suspected of being Islamist 'terrorists'.

### 'Outsourcing'

That is when, in collaboration with the CIA, 'rendition' - or what has been called the 'outsourcing of torture' - began. According to the website of the Liberty group, "'Extraordinary rendition' refers to the deliberate apprehension and transfer of detainees to foreign countries for interrogation, outside of the law, where there is a risk that the person might be tortured or subjected to other ill-treatment."

By 2005 the United Nations Committee Against Torture had published data confirming what we all knew by then: "extraordinary rendition

has taken place on a significant scale"; and there was "evidence of hundreds of CIA flights over Europe" for this purpose.

A number of writers have chronicled the horrific stories of innocent men and in some cases women who were abducted in 'civilised' countries and sent to where torture was common practice. The website of the Rendition Project has registration and flight details of a number of the planes used, although it is likely they account for only a tiny proportion of the total number of renditions.<sup>5</sup>

There are numerous allegations, made by both journalists and former prisoners themselves, about the extent of the torture - one prisoner is said to have been 'waterboarded' 83 times by the CIA. And, according to the ISC, Abu Zubaydah was a CIA prisoner who went through all 12 of the agency's "enhanced interrogation techniques" - including being beaten, deprived of sleep and locked in a small box. And the ISC is clear that MI6 had "direct awareness" of Zubaydah's "extreme mistreatment and possibly torture".

Yet despite this knowledge, according to its report, from 2002 to at least 2006, MI6 and MI5 actually supplied his interrogators with the questions they wanted answered.

In their defence security forces claim that such measures 'saved lives', yet there were just so many arrests, which were often completely irrational. In Afghanistan and Pakistan in particular there are many cases of baseless accusations and the settling of feuds through false accusations that led to the arrest and rendition of individuals with no connection to Islamist groups of any kind, never mind 'terrorists'. Further, the methods used were so cruel that it is unlikely that any reliable 'life saving' information could have been obtained.

Of course, now we know - not least as a result of Hillary Clinton's many emails, TV interviews and witness statements - that all along it was the US's main allies in the region, Saudi Arabia and the emirates of the Persian Gulf, who were funding the likes of al Qa'eda.<sup>6</sup> She once went so far as to say, "We created al Qa'eda."<sup>7</sup>

The governments of the US and the UK were the flag-bearers of 'democracy' during this period. They were punishing 'third world' countries for 'violation of human rights', while they were doing exactly what any dictatorship might do. They

associated any Muslim accused of political dissent with 'terrorism' to justify torture - and claimed they were 'saving lives'!

Have "lessons been learnt"? Of course not. The recently appointed US secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, as well as senior figures in the CIA, still defend the use of waterboarding. As for "prosecutions" of "those responsible", it goes without saying that Blair and his ministers will not be touched. If there are any charges, they will be directed against those below who were obeying orders. It is highly unlikely that the people who planned and organised these dreadful events will ever face justice.

It is amazing how quickly this story has disappeared from the news in the UK. However, not surprisingly, the Iranian media gave it a lot of attention. The hypocrisy of the British state was presented as justification for Iran's own brutal methods of forcing confessions from political prisoners.

I gave a short interview on the subject to the BBC Persian service and suddenly a large number of people in the United States seem interested in my articles, while others with titles such as "security chief" seem to want to access what I have written via social media. Of course, such people know full well how to hide their identity, when viewing social media or web pages. I can only assume that identifying their location - in some cases their rank in the armed forces - is a subtle attempt at sending out a warning.

Presumably we are supposed merely to repeat what George W Bush kept saying during his presidency: these were merely "enhanced interrogation" techniques. They were not illegal and certainly not torture! ●

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### Notes

1. www.ft.com/content/5667e2f2-8101-11e8-af48-190d103e32a4.
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## REVIEW

# Into the swamp

Yuri Slezkine *The house of government: a saga of the Russian Revolution* Princeton University Press, 2017, pp1096, £30

"People may do him the honour of abusing him; read him they do not."<sup>1</sup>

**O**n December 7 1937, Volodia Moroz, a 15-year-old boy who lost both his parents in Stalin's purges, wrote in his diary:

If a person who had fallen into a deep sleep 12 years ago were to wake up now, he would be amazed by the changes that had taken place.

He wouldn't find the old leaders. Instead, he would see a government of callow fools, who had done nothing for the victory of the revolution, or aged scoundrels, who had sold out their comrades for the sake of their personal wellbeing. He wouldn't see the 'former' legendary Red Army commanders, the builders and organisers of the revolution, the talented writers, journalists, engineers, artists, theatre directors, diplomats, statesmen, etc. Everything is new: the people, the human relations, the contradictions, the country as a whole (p875).

Moroz made the mistake of speaking his mind. Exiled in an orphanage far from his previous home in Moscow, he wrote a letter to Stalin describing the children of "important, esteemed people", who "do not respect anything: they drink, lead dissolute lives and are rude to others" (p877). Two months later, he was arrested, sentenced to three years in a labour camp. Moroz died in prison of tuberculosis in 1939 aged 17.

## Everything is new

Who were the new "people" Moroz observed were now leaders? Stalin needed an elite and an intelligentsia prepared to treat all workers as slaves. The purges brought into being a new social group that would do this. These were brutalised controllers, who in other settings might be described as sociopaths.

Why did Stalin choose to unleash the purges against the old guard of Bolsheviks? By 1935, the regime had failed to establish full control over workers. Despite the use of slave labour, Stakhanovism and draconian labour laws, workers could move from plant to plant and to other parts of the country in search of different or better livelihoods. This caused shortages and problems with turnover and targets. Other workers turned up for work when they wanted. Absenteeism was therefore another problem.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, workers had opportunities for collective resistance. This included mass demonstrations, food riots, strikes, slowdowns and violent attacks against officials. Decrees had been passed to criminalise truancy and introduce internal passports and work books, but many of the old guard of Bolsheviks sympathised with workers and cooperated with their resistance. Some managers turned a blind eye to the decrees.

In order to enforce anti-working class measures, Stalin decided to kill off the generation of Bolsheviks that had supported him into power. They had done this either by avoiding being drawn into the opposition during the debates of the 1920s or changing sides. Despite its loyalty to



**For the elite: luxury living**

Stalin, the old guard were tainted with revolutionary ideas, such as workers' control, industrial democracy and an abhorrence of forced labour. Members of the old guard had the potential to organise an opposition based on workers' interests and needs. They might become critics of the regime. They were therefore suspect and had to be removed as "wreckers and saboteurs". Once a new group of controllers were in charge, Stalin believed the draconian labour laws could be enforced. By June 1940, he was able to criminalise workers who tried to change their jobs. Workers who did not turn up for work were also punished harshly.

What were the new "human relations" the purges brought into being? The aim of the purges was to achieve full control of the surplus product, so that the elite could function as a class. The fact that this failed became apparent 40 years later when the regime disintegrated and the elite was assimilated within the capitalist class. In the interim period, the enormous police powers the KGB possessed meant that the population remained thoroughly atomised. Atomisation meant that collective forms of resistance were impossible. Terror disciplined both the workforce and the intelligentsia in a system of command. This was at every level in Soviet society and gave the regime a stable appearance.

On the basis of this, Stalinism pretended to be a viable alternative to capitalism. The result of the purges was therefore a society with one man in total control, a fully atomised population and no possibility of collective opposition - especially workers' opposition. Marxism was permanently extinguished. This enabled Stalinism to survive as long as it did.<sup>3</sup>

What were the new "contradictions" Moroz observed? The purges brought into being a system that failed. Stalinism never gained complete control over the labour process. However atomised workers were, they could still resist individually. They could turn up for work drunk, they could work at their own rate and they could sabotage

machinery and the product. This was one of the reasons Soviet goods were of such poor quality and planning was impossible. Individuals could not act independently of the state. They were dependent on the state for everything. Nonetheless, they could not be forced to produce a surplus of sufficient size and quality either to satisfy the needs of the population or the elite's desire to become a ruling class. The idea that a combination of nationalised property relations and forced labour is a viable alternative to capitalism is now totally discredited.<sup>4</sup>

## Children

Volodia Moroz was the son of the former head of the Cheka investigations department, Grigory Moroz - a member of the old guard of Bolsheviks. Moroz senior had sided with Stalin during the period of the Left Opposition. In 1927, he organised a raid of the homes of allies of Trotsky, such as Smilga and Preobrazhensky. The oppositionists had organised a demonstration calling for the fulfilment of Lenin's *Testament*. This was broken up by a crowd that had

thrown ice, potatoes and firewood at them. Moroz supported the crowd, some of whom broke into the oppositionists' apartments and started beating them up. He locked the oppositionists in a room until they had a chance to escape (pp296-97).

Moroz's reward was promotion to the post of head of the Union of State Trade and Consumer Employees - a grand name for a trade union official in charge of trade. He and his family were also given an apartment in the House of Government in Moscow. This was relatively luxurious.

But Moroz's loyalty to Stalin was of no help to him in the long term. The family lost the apartment during the purges and Moroz was denounced as a "rightist", arrested and disappeared in July 1937. His wife was arrested two months later. Apart from the eldest, the children were sent to orphanages (p789).

The Moroz family apartment was one of 505 in the House of Government. They had typically a study, a studio, a living/dining room with a piano, children's rooms and a kitchen with space for a maid or nanny to sleep in. They were in the largest residential building in Europe at the time, located in Moscow in an area called "the Swamp" across the Moskva River from the Kremlin. It contained a shop, café, clinic, crèche, hairdresser's salon, post office, telegraph, bank, gym, laundry, library, tennis court, theatre and cinema.

In 1935 there were 2,655 tenants, 700 of whom were state and party officials. The others were dependents, including 588 children. The building also housed 600-800 waiters, gardeners, painters, plumbers, janitors, laundresses, floor polishers and 57 administrators (pxi). Although Stalin's relatives lived there, Stalin himself stayed across the river in the Kremlin. Much of the Soviet elite of the 1930s lived in this building with their maids, nannies and governesses. Almost a third of the residents of the building disappeared during the purges of 1937-38.

Moroz and his family are a few of the people whose lives are described in *The house of government*. The book

records the fates of about 80 tenants and their families. This is a lost social group and it is to the author's credit that he restores their existence and experience. The author, Yuri Slezkine, is a Russian-born American historian, writer and translator, who has written about Russian and Jewish society.<sup>5</sup> He subtitled the book a "family saga" and most of his attention is on those tenants and their children who left literary traces of their existence. It is the story of children born to Bolshevik families after the revolution in the 1920s and 1930s whose parents were purged. It is in their own words, using diaries, memoirs, autobiographies, letters and novels as primary sources.

There is a therapeutic function to the author's work - its stories should encourage the few remaining survivors of the purges to talk about the trauma they and their families experienced.

Slezkine gives a special focus to the lives of the children of the purged old guard Bolshevik elite (p980). These children were sent to orphanages or cared for by relatives - many of them were reintegrated within the elite as adults. As the quotes Slezkine selects show, they learned to stay silent, put a positive slant on what had happened to them and talk about safe subjects, such as Pushkin, poetry and patriotism. If still alive, they would be now in their 80s or 90s. This generation will have families, including many people living today that have been directly or indirectly affected by the distress their relatives suffered as children. I guess that Slezkine, born in 1956, may well be one of these.

## Comprehension

The literature Slezkine selects shows how far, from 1928 until 1934, the subjectivity of the old guard became increasingly irrational. Their uncritical belief in the possibility of socialism in the Soviet Union was utopian. It required a form of worship of the Communist Party and its leaders as the embodiment of a mystical historical progress. The selections show that this loyalty led to quasi-religious forms of behaviour during the purges, including the confession of sins against the party and calls for repentance.

By far the most interesting parts of the book are the selections from diaries, memoirs and letters of the people purged (pp699-812). Reading these scripts, one experiences a profound sense of shock and non-comprehension. Some writers reassure family members that it is all a mistake and the misunderstandings will be sorted out soon. Others are letters from labour camps, full of optimism, positivity and patriotic praise (written in the vain hope that the censors who read them might be persuaded the charges against the writers are false). Some are desperate appeals to the oppressor's humanity and intelligence.

The old guard seemed to have no idea of what was happening to them. In their imagination they could conceive that there might be people who were part of a plot to overthrow Stalin. But, until interrogated, tortured and forced to 'confess', this didn't include them or anyone they knew personally. They had remained loyal to Stalin and the idea of

**Yuri Slezkine: when it comes to Marxism and Bolshevism, he is a very bad historian**



socialism in one country. How could Stalin ever consider turning against them? The author shares this sense of puzzlement with his subject matter.

Without a political economy of the purges, Slezkine is at a loss to explain the terror his raconteurs experienced. According to the author, the purges were the consequence of a siege mentality that infected the elite (p712). The Soviet Union was a "besieged fortress". It was under threat internally from hidden or unknown enemies. These had connections with external enemies, such as Nazi Germany and Japan. This theory coincides nicely with the justification of the purges given by the regime and its apologists - including the characterisation of Trotsky as a fascist.

It is true that the civil war, the boycott of the USSR and the defeat of the European revolution isolated the Bolsheviks and, by doing so, contributed to the rise of Stalin and the emergence of Stalinism in the 1920s. However, the purges further enfeebled a country weakened by war and famine. It was less able to defend itself. The purge of military officers made the USSR even more vulnerable to hostile invasion. The Axis powers fully exploited this during World War II. As a consequence, there were millions more unnecessary deaths.<sup>6</sup>

## Marx as scapegoat

In the absence of a coherent explanation, Slezkine looks for a scapegoat. Someone is to blame. But who is it? The author turns to Marx. Until the purges, the Bolsheviks were followers of Marx and the purges were therefore the natural consequence of Marxist theory. Marx becomes the evil demiurge responsible for both Stalinism and fascism. According to Slezkine, Marx's early essays, *On the Jewish question* and *A contribution to the critique of Hegel's philosophy of right*, are the foundation of the "entire edifice of Marxist theory" (pp109-10). He declares of the former that Marx "wanted to abolish money by abolishing the Jews" (p110). Of the latter he states that Marx thought that the emancipation of humanity "depends on the resurrection of Germany" (p113). In other words, Marx was a German nationalist and an anti-Semite. According to Slezkine, both Hitler and Stalin were descendants of Marx: Hitler by identifying a tribe - the Jews - as the enemy; and Stalin by targeting a class - the capitalists (p714).

Our author is a historian, not a novelist.<sup>7</sup> A reviewer has stated this is "not an ordinary academic book".<sup>8</sup> Yet, however extraordinary a book is, surely a historian should use some criteria of accuracy and truthfulness. While there is no evidence that Slezkine deliberately tries to misrepresent Marx, he does seem to suffer from a virulent form of anti-Marxist prejudice. An example is his pejorative description of Marx's writings as "obscure, oracular formulas" (p113). This prejudice appears to have clouded his judgement. Slezkine is unconcerned whether his peers confirm his judgement or not. One would think that, given the controversial nature of his opinions - making him vulnerable to being attacked for poor scholarship and misleading his readers - he would have looked for and tried to find more allies prepared to defend his anti-Marxist prejudices.<sup>9</sup>

To explain how Stalin behaved during the purges, Slezkine sets out to prove that Marx was the founder of a religion. Slezkine believes that Stalin tried to turn the Soviet Union into a cult modelled on the sectarian nature of the Bolshevik Party. In order to do this, Slezkine undermines the distinction between the natural and the supernatural, and between the secular and the religious by outlining two approaches to defining a religion and suggesting that Marxism is a religion on both counts.

The first is that religion entails the belief in supernatural entities. Marxists are materialists who question the existence of such phenomena. Yet Slezkine does not mention the notion that a supernatural entity consists of a non-material substance. Instead he argues that the idea of a communist future is supernatural because it is "incapable of falsifiable verification". He takes this idea from the liberal philosopher, Karl Popper. But it is arguable that Popper is wrong to believe that the Marxist prediction of a classless future is unfalsifiable. Surely it would be falsified if a new form of class society emerges out of capitalism. This was a real consideration during the cold war, when people imagined that Soviet-type regimes would evolve out of bureaucratic relations within capitalism.<sup>10</sup>

Slezkine derives a second definition of religion from Durkheim - a religion consists of a moral community united around some sacred thing. Slezkine argues that "every society is religious by definition" if it includes "a comprehensive ideology (including secularism)" that creates and reflects a "moral community" (p75). For example, we should consider US politics to be religious, because a moral community has grown up around the idea that the US constitution is sacred. It follows that to state that one is not religious is also a statement of religious belief if one is part of a moral community (say of humanists) and hold that secularism is sacred.

According to Slezkine, Marxists have built a moral community around the idea that a classless future society is sacred. It is therefore a religion. But what makes something "sacred"? In origin it is its association with the supernatural, spiritual or divine - in which case, to describe secular phenomena as "sacred" is metaphorical. It means that something is revered, respected or argued for passionately. It does not mean it is "religious" except by analogy with the uncritical enthusiasm that religious people sometimes exhibit.

The uncritical enthusiasm born of terror that people showed towards Stalin suggests that to say his personality was "sacred" is meaningful - thus references to his cult of personality. By analogy, Stalin's book *The history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): short course* could also be described as "sacred". No-one dared criticise it. On the other hand, if the only reason people in the Soviet Union read it was to escape being purged, then, despite pretence, there is no evidence of genuine reverence or respect for the text. There would be then no justification for describing it, like the *Bible*, as "sacred". I do not know a single person - Marxist or non-Marxist - that has any reverence or respect for Stalin's writings. I am also unaware that a moral community existed around Stalin. These considerations throw doubt on one of the strongest candidates for a secular religion - Stalinism.

The Marxist belief in the possibility of a classless future is thoroughly secular. The notion of classlessness depends on the ideas that it is possible to end the capitalist division of labour, create an abundance of products sufficient to meet people's needs, shorten the time necessary to reproduce society through the use of robots, enlarge the amount of time individuals have to develop their creativity and sociability, generate surpluses controlled by producers and democratise the planning process within a global society. All these ideas are contestable, falsifiable and subject to critical reflection. Marxists may be wrong to think that conditions within capitalism pose the possibility of classless social relations, but the attempt to explain the nature of these conditions and whether they can be superseded is a scientific activity, not a religious one. History will tell whether

or not Marxism became the dominant paradigm in the social sciences.

## 'Millenarian sect'

*The house of government* has over a thousand pages, it is in six parts and has 33 chapters. Consistent with Slezkine's characterisation of Marxism as religion, each part is titled according to an ideal progress in the life of a millennial sect. Thus part 3 is titled "The second coming"; part 4 "The reign of the saints" and part 5 "The last judgement". So the book's purpose is to prove that the Bolsheviks were religious fanatics. In Slezkine's words, they were "millenarian sectarians preparing for the apocalypse" (pxii).

This thesis preoccupies his account of 1917. He describes the Bolsheviks as "the most exclusive and immanentist of the Russian millenarians, most suspicious of the swamp of daily routine ... and most willing to fight not only against the swamp, but also against those who are turning towards the swamp" (p129). The swamp was full of philistines - people uninformed of Marxism or disdainful of studying it. Marxists, Slezkine alleges, are motivated by the "sheer power of their hatred" for people who are not Marxists (p58).

In order to show that Bolshevism was a religious sect, he states that it was not a political party. Bolshevism was dedicated to bringing into being "life without politics" - in other words, a rejection of the real world and its replacement with a world of the religious imagination. If it had been political it would have been interested in "securing power within the Russian state or society" (p58). Bolshevism was "a secret community of the self-chosen" (p55). Secrecy was needed in order to secure the sect's rejection of the world (p59). Evidence of this involves the Bolsheviks' refusal to participate in electoral politics. This is, of course, piffle. As every student of the October revolution knows, the Bolsheviks actively participated in electoral politics.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, secrecy was a response to oppression - a survival strategy - and not, as the author suggests, a rejection of the world. It is a pity that Slezkine's extensive work on the sociology of sects is wasted on the Bolsheviks. Their immersion in secular politics disproves his thesis.

Marxism is not a world rejecting religion, but a world embracing science. To argue the contrary, Slezkine would have to show that Marx's critique of capitalism rejects the world in some meaningful sense. In other words, he would have to refute the notion that Marx was a materialist. He would have to deny that instead of rejecting capitalism Marxists aim to understand the nature of capital accumulation in order to create the conditions for its supersession. This means that a classless society preserves and develops certain features presently associated with class societies, such as labour-saving machinery and the application of science and technology. He would also have to refute the notion that there were historical circumstances specific to the genesis and degeneration of socialist political groups in the 20th century. These encouraged members to be ignorant of Marxist literature and political economy in general, and to disrupt and denounce the ideas of other socialists. To do this Slezkine would need to make a clear distinction between Marxism and its nemesis, Stalinism. Sadly he does none of this.

## Conclusion

Regardless of his hostile interpretation, Slezkine's observation that Marxism ceased to have any useful function after the purges seems to be correct. Slezkine states that the old guard Bolshevik elite "never figured out how to get their children to inherit their faith" (pxii). After the purges, no-one seemed to take Marxism seriously. It had failed as a potential state ideology. Unlike Christianity, which became the successful ideology of feudalism, the

Soviet elite abandoned Marxism.

Slezkine states that the House of Government children inherited their parents' tastes in literature, but not their interest in Marxist theory. The children had no knowledge of Marx's political economy. If they had any awareness of Marx's and Lenin's contributions to world culture, it came from history book summaries and speeches. It appears that no-one bothered to read the Marxist classics and only a few highly privileged individuals were allowed to discuss them. The literature the children of the purged old Bolshevik elite read confirms this. There is no mention of Marx - not even of Lenin. After the purges no-one wanted to have anything to do with their ideas any more.<sup>12</sup>

These are important observations. The elite's rejection of Marxism began in 1924 and found its fullest form in the purges. I can think of three reasons why this might have happened. Firstly, Slezkine notices there are two kinds of socialists - Marxists and nationalists (p23). When a socialist becomes a nationalist, they cease to be a Marxist. The essence of the doctrine of socialism in one country was the substitution of Soviet patriotism for Marxism. From the time of Lenin's death in 1924 to the defeat of the Left Opposition in 1928, there were hopeless attempts to justify the doctrine in Marxist terms. It could not be done. The children therefore inherited the patriotism of the old Bolsheviks loyal to Stalin - not their Marxism.

Secondly, Marxism contradicted the children's experience of the regime they lived in. Marxism is egalitarian, but the regime boasted of its own inequality. Marxism is opposed to anti-Semitism, but the regime was anti-Semitic. Marxism proclaims the idea of workers' emancipation, yet the regime oppressed and exploited workers. Marxism is opposed to fetishism, yet the regime fetishised Stalin and the party. To show knowledge of Marxism would make an individual vulnerable to loss of status, livelihood, freedom, sanity and life. As a result the brutalised post-purge elite took no interest in Marxism and did not believe or understand it if they did.

Thirdly, the children inherited a form of self-interest from their parents. Self-interest had motivated the old guard's loyalty to Stalin and the regime. The parents were rewarded with both powerful positions and a relatively luxurious lifestyle in the House of Government. There were gross levels of inequality between the workers and this privileged elite. After all, self-interest meant agreeing with Stalin that egalitarianism is a petty bourgeois idea.<sup>13</sup>

However, the purges proved that self-interested loyalty to Stalin was insufficient for survival. In order to cope, the children were forced to internalise their post-purge, atomised condition by becoming anti-social and anti-human and dissociating themselves from family and friends. In Moroz's words, they drank, lead dissolute lives and were rude to each other (p877). In order to survive they had to treat social relations with distrust and suspicion. They had to stay silent, when faced with controversial opinions to do with politics, economics or religion. They had to pretend that a malfunctioning, oppressive regime was a workers' utopia. They had to think of workers as animals.

As a result, basic humanist and rationalist assumptions informing Marx's work were out of kilter with the children's strategies of survival. Slezkine gives an excellent example of the anti-humanism of one of the children in his account of the life of Andrei Sverdlov - son of the revolutionary hero, Yakov Sverdlov.

Sverdlov junior joined the NKVD and became responsible for many arbitrary atrocities and betrayals of former school friends (pp883-86).

Finally, the purges cannot be explained, as Slezkine tries to do, by reference to a mindless form of quasi-religious irrationalism. Certainly the purges were mindless. It is true that neighbours denounced neighbours in order to get better accommodation. It is a fact that children were encouraged to denounce their parents in order to get praise from their teachers.<sup>14</sup> However, the purges would not have happened if the attempt to extract a surplus from workers and peasants through forced collectivisation and industrialisation had succeeded. Stalin needed an elite and an intelligentsia that was prepared to enforce draconian labour laws with a more extreme form of brutality than before. The nationalised property relations of the former USSR enabled him to generalise the overall move to the atomisation and bureaucratic control of the whole of the population.

The problem with the old guard Bolsheviks were that they had memories of the revolution and a time when workers had some collective democratic control of the labour process. This group's attachment to workers was suspect. It might organise an opposition basing itself on workers' interests and needs. The purges made sure this would never occur. As a result, Stalin made sure the inequalities between the elite, intelligentsia and workers would be preserved within the new, more brutal, post-purge society.

This was neither capitalist nor socialist. It was an unviable social formation, incapable of planning, unable to generate a surplus sufficient to sustain its atomised social relations, powerless to reproduce itself and destined to disintegration and collapse ●

Paul B Smith

## Notes

1. J Macdonnell, 'Karl Marx and German socialism' (1875); quoted by M Gabriel *Love and capital* London 2011, p464 and p662.
2. D Filtzer, 'Labour and the contradictions of Soviet planning under Stalin: the working class and the regime during the first years of forced industrialisation' *Critique* Nos20-21 (1987). See also Filtzer's *Soviet workers and Stalinist industrialisation* London 1987, p233; and J Rossman *Worker resistance under Stalin* Harvard 2005.
3. HH Ticktin, 'The political-economic nature of the purges' *Critique* No27 (1995).
4. See S Weissman, 'The role of the purges and terror in the formation of the USSR' *Critique* No27 (1995).
5. He is also director of the Institute of Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies at the University of California, and author of *The Jewish century* Princeton 2004.
6. See R Medvedev *Let history judge* Oxford 1989.
7. Some reviewers have compared the book to a work of fiction. They suggest it is in the style of a novel by Tolstoy or Grossman (see S Fitzpatrick, 'Good communist homes' *London Review of Books* July 27 2017). Slezkine disagrees. He states emphatically the book is a "work of history" in his frontispiece.
8. S Fitzpatrick *op cit* p3.
9. Slezkine cites one ally in note 94, p1009. This is JJ Talmon, the author of *Political messianism: the romantic phase* (London 1960). Unfortunately for Slezkine, Talmon would not have supported his belief that Marxism is anti-Semitic: "While Fourier, Toussanel, Proudhon, Pierre Leroux and Bakunin loathed the Jews, ... Marxism was in spite of Marx's spleen against his own race fundamentally not anti-Semitic." See [www.cambridge-focast.org/MIDDLEEAST/TALMON.html](http://www.cambridge-focast.org/MIDDLEEAST/TALMON.html).
10. In 1941, James Burnham, a former Trotskyist, argued something like this in his book, *The managerial revolution*.
11. See, for example, A Rabinowitch *The Bolsheviks come to power* London 2017, pp91-93.
12. S Fitzpatrick *op cit* p7.
13. In a 1931 article titled 'New conditions, new tasks', Stalin attacked egalitarianism as "petty bourgeois stupidity" and denounced the ideal of social equality as "not socialist". See D Filtzer *Soviet workers and Stalinist industrialisation* London 1987, p106.
14. In May 1934 a 13-year-old boy was declared a hero for reporting his mother to the authorities. She stole grain to feed the family. See E Ammende *Human life in Russia* London 1936, p103. See also how the state propagandised the myth of Pavel Morozov - another 13-year-old boy who allegedly denounced his father to the political police for forging documents and selling them to enemies of the Soviet state in 1934. See O Figes *The whisperers: private life in Stalin's Russia* London 2007, pp20-31.

## POLEMIC

# Irrational optimism

Mike Macnair responds to Rex Dunn's arguments about Trotskyism and May 1968

**R**ex Dunn's exchange with me over the last few weeks calls for a little more than just another letter.<sup>1</sup> It is, nonetheless, necessary to avoid most of the beguiling byways of historical details into which one might be drawn, in order to focus on the core issues.

My original point in the talk which provoked the exchange was one which I have made in several ways, repeatedly, before. The modern far left is characterised by a politics which is in the last analysis Bakuninist. That is, it imagines that, if masses can be mobilised in strikes and on the streets, they will radicalise and become revolutionary in ways which (it is imagined) are *impossible* in more 'normal' times; and that this is the centre of the road to the overthrow and replacement of capitalism.

I call the politics Bakuninist because it is, in essence, the core of the 1860s-80s Bakuninists' alternative to the ideas of Marx and the 'Germans', in spite of the fact that the modern left groups in question would mostly call themselves 'Marxist'.

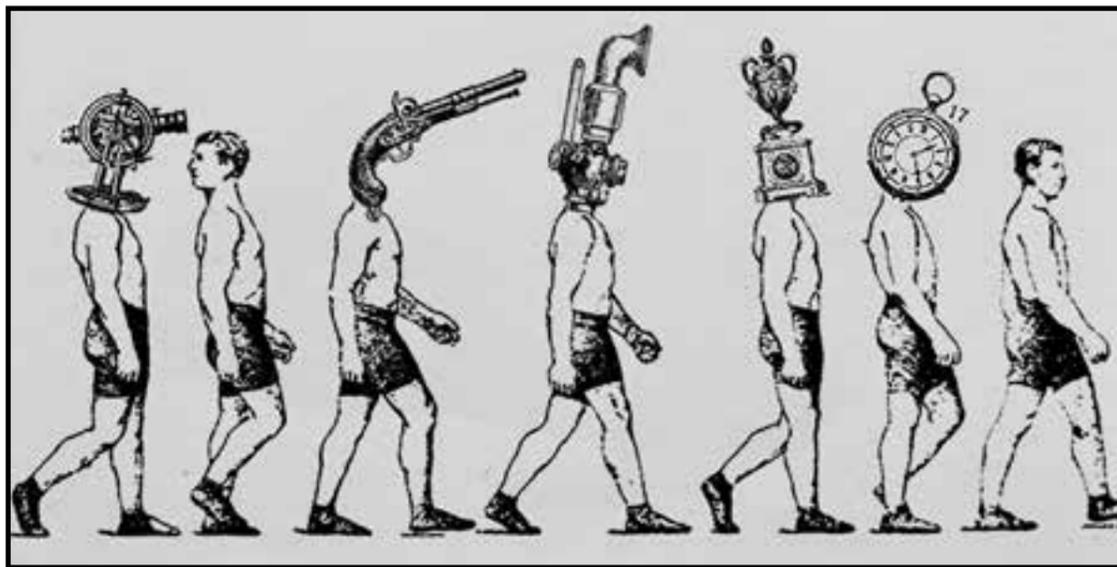
The *image* of the French May 1968, I have argued more than once, serves as 'charter' for this politics. The far left defines itself as the 'revolutionary' left by virtue of its commitment to these ideas, as opposed to 'parliamentary' politics and to 'gradualism'.

The result is an endless succession of attempts to get masses on the street or on strike without fighting to change political ideas or to *organise*. And these repeated attempts prove merely demoralising; and simultaneously, a ground for deepening far-left opportunism and abandonment of the political platform of workers' power and socialism in favour of forms of liberalism *enragé*.

I argued specifically in *this* talk that, while capitalist political managers promoted the ideology of Fabian gradualism and 'managerialism' in the 1950s-70s, so that 'revolution' in the sense of strikism (etc) looked like a political alternative to this, from the later 1970s capitalist political managers moved back towards classical liberalism - including positively advocating extraparliamentary actions and the revolutionary overthrow of states, *in the interest of free markets and 'human rights'*.

Once this change took place, the far left's Bakuninist version of 'revolutionism' turned out to be unable to distinguish between *anti-capitalist* revolution and *pro-capitalist* revolution, and has in particular succumbed to being conned by 'revolutionary' theatrics of 'colour revolutions' in eastern Europe and elsewhere. This happened most strikingly in the 'Euro-Maidan' events in Kyiv.

Comrade Dunn's June 14 response is misconceived because it takes my argument to be addressed to *Trotskyism as such*, though in reality my argument is addressed to *the post-1956 'new left'* - and the



Wrong, wrong, wrong ...

parts of the post-1968 far left which were heavily influenced by 'new left' ideas. Mao Zedong's 1930 essay, 'A single spark can start a prairie fire',<sup>2</sup> was a favourite among the European and North American 'soft Maoists' of the period, who shared the general approach which I criticised.<sup>3</sup> In Britain, the 'new left' approach was *more* clearly expressed in 1970s International Socialists-Socialist Workers Party Cliffism than in 1970s International Marxist Group Mandelism, and in particular in the version of Cliffism which set up Rosa Luxemburg as representing a strategic alternative to Lenin (ie, was further from orthodox Trotskyism).

That being the case, the vast bulk of comrade Dunn's June 14 article, discussing the post-war history of the Trotskyist movement, is completely irrelevant to the argument I offered.

## Shachtmanism

For this reason I do not mean to engage with his points in detail at all, beyond the last point I made in my June 21 letter. This was that, when the Fourth International in 1947 called for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from eastern Europe, it *broke with Leon Trotsky's explicit line* in relation to the 1939 partitioning of Poland and the Soviet invasion of Finland,<sup>4</sup> in favour of Max Shachtman's line. I pointed out there that withdrawal of Soviet troops "would have led in short order to a new imperialist aggression against the USSR".

Comrade Dunn's June 28 response argues that the case for calling for the withdrawal of Soviet troops was "motivated by rational optimism". It is hard to explain on this basis why Trotsky - certainly a 'rational optimist', if not an over-optimist - did *not* make such a call and *explicitly refused* to make such a call in relation to both Poland and Finland in 1939-40.<sup>5</sup> As late as the 1940 *Manifesto of the Fourth International* he wrote:

... the advanced workers understood that the crimes of the Kremlin oligarchy do not strike off the agenda the question of the existence of the USSR. Its defeat in the world war would signify not merely the overthrow of the totalitarian bureaucracy, but the liquidation of the new forms of property, the collapse of the first experiment in planned economy, and the transformation of the entire country into a colony; that is, the handing over to imperialism of colossal natural resources, which

would give it a respite until the third world war. Neither the peoples of the USSR nor the world working class as a whole care for such an outcome.<sup>6</sup>

It should be clear enough that even 50 years later the collapse of the 'eastern bloc' in 1989 and of the USSR in 1989-91 has *precisely* not set free the curbed energies of the working class from the incubus of Stalinism. Rather, to paraphrase the 1940 *Manifesto*, it has 'transformed entire countries into semi-colonies' and 'handed over to imperialism colossal natural resources'.

## 'Rational optimism'

Nonetheless, the issue is a real one. If calling for the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1947 was 'rational optimism', and the illusory belief that the working class could have taken power in France in May 1968 is 'rational optimism' - then 'rational optimism' has a very specific meaning.

'Rational optimism' must in this argument of comrade Dunn's require us to imagine that the working class can, and can only, break through to power by a general-strikist policy, *in the absence* of prior 'gradual' work to build a mass workers' party and all the other necessities of a mass workers' movement;<sup>7</sup> and that this real possibility was blocked by the *existence* of mass reformist and Stalinist parties and trade unions (and by Soviet troops in eastern Europe).

The post-war history of Trotskyism then becomes relevant. But it only does so if (a) revolutionary crises which could have led to Trotskyist victory *without a pre-existing mass Trotskyist party* were defeated because of the presence of Stalinist and reformist parties; and (b) *Trotsky's and the pre-war Trotskyists' view* was actually a general-strikist line like that of the 'new left' groups.

Both propositions are false. The first is, in substance, to collapse into Bakuninism. By assuming that it is only the obstacle of Stalinism and reformism which has defeated mass strike waves and revolutionary outbreaks, it fails to take into account the experience of defeated mass strike waves and revolutionary outbreaks *before* the rise of Stalinism and, indeed, of reformism. The reason is that the general strike or mass strike wave poses immediately the question of the coordination of production, disrupted by the strike action, and hence *authority over the whole society*.

Hence, if we imagine some sort of 'Rapture' in the year 1945 miraculously

removing all the members and supporters of the Socialist and Communist Parties to heaven, so that the Trotskyists stood alone<sup>8</sup> in relation to the unorganised masses - then the fate of the mass movement would *certainly* have been that of yet another failure of a short-lived spontaneous movement. Grouplets of hundreds or less are simply incapable of giving effective leadership to millions. The necessary supposition is that the mass strike wave can produce a workers' revolution without a workers' independent political party.

It is, of course, true that parties can grow rather rapidly under the right conditions. For example, the Chinese Communist Party, starting with 50 members in 1921, after its 1922 entry in the Kuomintang grew to around 1,000 members in January 1925 and then to around 58,000 in April 1927.<sup>9</sup> This sort of story can be paralleled elsewhere. But this was not in a *brief* crisis, but over five years, during a prolonged period of instability - and when there was, in substance, no pre-existing mass workers' party.

The second proposition is *obviously* false. Trotsky, writing against Lenin in 1904 in *Our political tasks*, certainly defended a 'spontaneist' or 'objectivist' position, that the logic of the class struggle would override the issue of parties and their leaderships. But in 1917, on his own later account, he recognised that he had been wrong, as against Lenin on the party question.

Thereafter, he consistently argued for the necessity of a party. *The lessons of October* (1923) contains sharp polemic against strike fetishism and Soviet fetishism. The 1931 pamphlet *The revolution in Spain* famously contains, close to its conclusion, the statement that "For a successful solution of all these tasks, three conditions are required: a party; once more a party; again a party."<sup>10</sup> In the 1940 *Manifesto* the formula is:

There remains the question of leadership. Will not the revolution be betrayed this time too, inasmuch as there are two Internationals in the service of imperialism, while the genuine revolutionary elements constitute a tiny minority? In other words: shall we succeed in preparing in time a party capable of leading the proletarian revolution? In order to answer this question correctly it is necessary to pose it correctly. Naturally, this or that uprising may end and surely will end in defeat owing to the immaturity of the revolutionary

leadership. But it is not a question of a single uprising. It is a question of an entire revolutionary epoch.

The capitalist world has no way out, unless a prolonged death agony is so considered. It is necessary to prepare for long years, if not decades, of war, uprisings, brief interludes of truce, new wars, and new uprisings. A young revolutionary party must base itself on this perspective. History will provide it with enough opportunities and possibilities to test itself, to accumulate experience and to mature. The swifter the ranks of the vanguard are fused, the more the epoch of bloody convulsions will be shortened, the less destruction will our planet suffer. But the great historical problem will not be solved in any case until a revolutionary party stands at the head of the proletariat.<sup>11</sup>

Trotsky's course of action after 1933, in calling for new parties and a new international rather than carrying on as an external faction of Comintern, arguably failed to grasp the extent to which the advanced workers remained loyal to Comintern and the communist parties in spite of the catastrophic defeat in Germany. The reason for Trotsky's choice at this point was, however, that he was determined to avoid the error of undue conciliation of political opponents and failure to build a serious organisation, which he himself recognised had affected his work between 1904 and 1917 (and in particular between 1914 and 1916).

This was, indeed, 'rational optimism', and the argument of the 1940 *Manifesto* just quoted was also 'rational optimism'. But though rational, it was radically misinformed.

First and fundamentally, there were *not* about to be "long years, if not decades, of war, uprisings, brief interludes of truce, new wars, and new uprisings", but after 1948 a radical restabilisation of capitalist rule worldwide, thanks to an enormous destruction of capital values in 1939-48, the transfer of world hegemony to the USA and the creation of the cold war regime. Trotsky had in 1938 imagined the world situation as "the death agony of capitalism"; in fact, it was merely the death agony of British world hegemony.

Second, Trotsky certainly imagined that the Stalinist regime could not survive the war: the stresses of war would force either Soviet defeat or the overthrow of the regime. In the words of the 1940 *Manifesto*, "The Kremlin has once again revealed itself as the central nest of defeatism. Only by destroying this nest can the security of the USSR be safeguarded."

This belief rested on implicit assumptions about the military character of the war, which were explicit in Trotsky's military writings of the early 1920s - ie, that the further development of industry would make the war more like the 1914-18 western front. The fall of France and Norway falsified this assumption, but Trotsky did not have time to work through the implications - that is, when the Nazis invaded the USSR, Britain and the US would be driven by the German successes in the west to ally with Stalin. The consequence of this alliance and the resulting Soviet victories was the *global* plausibility of Stalinism among workers and colonial peoples.

Third, Trotsky imagined that

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# What we fight for

he was in contact with a large, if suppressed, opposition in Russia; but in fact, his supposed contacts were wholly controlled by the NKVD Russian security apparatus, through the agent, Mark Zborowski.<sup>12</sup> Had the Russian Left Opposition really existed (other than in the form of disorganised survivors in the gulag), then, in turn, if the war had taken the course Trotsky predicted, there might have emerged a large Trotskyist party in Russia, with profound implications for the rest of the world.

## Irrational

But after the victory of the USSR in World War II (and in the midst of the Chinese civil war, shortly to end in the collapse of the Kuomintang regime and victory of the CCP) to call for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from eastern Europe in the hope that the microscopic forces of the Trotskyists - a lot less than they had been in 1938 - could lead the masses to power, would have been irrational optimism (if it was any sort of optimism at all, and not merely an aspect of the Fourth International's attempts at this period to reunify with the Shachtmanites<sup>13</sup>).

The point is utterly fundamental. Comrade Dunn accepts that the Trotskyists were too weak for their ideas to become a material force, yet also argues that the Stalinists prevented this from happening. But the question posed is: *why were the Stalinists able to do so?* OK, there were NKVD operations, assassinations and so on. But the Bolsheviks before 1917 faced the notorious tsarist Okhrana secret police ...

The same issue arises even if you imagine (as comrade Dunn does, but I do not) that the Parti Communiste Français could have taken power in May 1968 in France, after it had been educating the French working class for 20 years in cross-class coalitionism, pacifism and gradualism. Still, *why was the PCF able to stop the strike wave*, and so on?

The answer, of course, is in the first place that the large majority of the advanced workers supported either the reformist labour or socialist parties) or the communists (or else were 'pure trade unionist' militants).

Secondly, this was not merely a matter of a sentimental attachment to the belief that the socialist parties, or the communist parties, were 'really' revolutionary parties. (If that had been the case, 'betrayal' might have led to large splits and the creation of mass revolutionary parties - as occurred in Germany and elsewhere in 1914-20.)

As far as the labour and socialist parties were concerned, rejecting communism in favour of loyalty to the 'democratic' (meaning liberal) constitution had already become ideologically foundational to them in the 1920s.

The communist parties had lost a lot of members in the 'third period', but had then recruited a lot in the 'people's front' period; and, though they lost members in 1939-41, the episode was short enough for them to grow sharply in 1941-45. At this period came the victories of the USSR and their consequences - Soviet troops on the Elbe, communist-led partisan victories in Yugoslavia and Albania, the expansion of the CPC-held zone in China, the partitioning of Korea and Vietnam; all under the ideological banner of the people's front, national roads to socialism and the party monolith.

Trotsky wrote in 1937 that the Stalinist bureaucracy has no ideology:

In keeping with its essential

interests the caste of usurpers is hostile to any theory: it can give an account of its social role neither to itself nor to anyone else. Stalin revises Marx and Lenin not with the theoretician's pen, but with the boots of the GPU.<sup>14</sup>

This was plausible enough for its own time. But, in reality, Stalinism had no ideology in this period because it had no *victories* to its credit. In contrast, the labour and socialist parties could point to real reforms achieved (apparently) on the basis of constitutional loyalism. It is for the same reason that the Soviet regime found it necessary to conduct fantastical show trials, and even after these to assassinate Trotsky as well as his son and a number of his associates.

All this changed with the Soviet victories in World War II and their consequences. Now Stalinism could become an ideology, and one not merely produced by OGPU-NKVD-KGB operations run out of Moscow, but reproduced in competing centres (in rough chronological order: Belgrade, Beijing, Havana, Tirana, Pyongyang ...) and in wholly independent Stalinist, Maoist, and so on, parties in various countries.

The consequence is that the "two Internationals in the service of imperialism" amounted to a very much larger obstacle to Trotskyism than any of the post-war Trotskyists (or the various new leftists) imagined: both had sunk deep roots in the consciousness of the advanced workers.

This, in turn, has the consequence that the Trotskyists - or any other left opponents of 'official' communism, for that matter - faced a *long haul* struggle to engage with the existing supporters of 'official' communism (and of social democracy); not a short route to trigger revolution.

Left opponents of 'official' communism and of social democracy commonly tried another route: this was to try to build up rival organisations *in competition* with these forces by recruiting newly radicalising militants, on the basis that the Stalinists and social democrats were irreformable. But, in reality, it turned out that this approach required adapting to the *politics* of social democracy or Stalinism and pretending to be the only 'genuine left' - and it generally could not get further than a few thousand.

As time has gone on, the optimism has become more and more obviously irrational and has reduced itself to an 'official' optimism for which the size of every demonstration and the significance of every strike is exaggerated, and every political difficulty affecting a government is a 'crisis'.

## Wasted years

At the end of the day, it turned out that the 1940 *Manifesto* was right to say that "The Kremlin has once again revealed itself as the central nest of defeatism. Only by destroying this nest can the security of the USSR be safeguarded." It was the top bureaucracy itself which restored capitalism - to make way successively for the kleptocrat oligarchs, and after them for the new Bonapartist-nationalist securocrat, Vladimir Putin.

It just took a lot longer than Trotsky anticipated. The frontal assault of German capital ended in defeat and strengthening the Soviet regime. The USA used much more gradual methods of techno-blockade, military-expenditure attrition and enticement in the borderlands (on both sides: bank loans to lure the Yugoslav, Polish, Hungarian and Romanian bureaucratic leaders; Christian and social democracy and Labourism for

the western Europeans; land reforms and toleration of protectionism for Japan and the 'Asian tigers'). US state actors *expected* from the 1970s that these methods would bring down the Soviet bloc; they just did not expect the way it actually happened.

What did not manifest itself was any sort of serious working class resistance to the restoration. The fall of the regimes and what followed it was the sharpest possible demonstration of the uselessness of both irrational-optimist spontaneism and third-campism. But it should also stand as a clear rebuke to those 'official' communists who, like Andrew Northall in his June 28 letter, assert the marginality of the Trotskyists (I agree), but then fail to see that 'official' communists' political choices have to take primary responsibility for the utter demoralisation of Soviet and eastern European workers in the 1980s, and after and their inability to even contemplate resistance to the restoration of capitalism.

The forces to the left of 'official communism' (Trotskyists, Maoists, and so on) received a big boost from the large class struggles beginning before the time of the May 1968 events and carrying on for some years after. But, at the end of the day, when we - the post-60s far left - could have engaged in a serious project of building parties and an international movement to the left of the "two Internationals in the service of imperialism", we did not do so. Instead we collectively engaged in endless efforts to be the single spark that lights the prairie fire.

Our commitment on this basis to 'tactical intransigence, programmatic flexibility' meant that we ended both with innumerable splits and with educating that minority part of the broader, advanced section of the working class that was willing to listen to us in ... 'anti-factional' refusal of the possibility of legitimate open disagreements; Dimitrov's version of the united front through self-censorship; economism in electoral work; and popular frontism in the form of 'anti-fascist' unity and of intersectionality.

The upshot is that a section of the younger generation, for whom 'live' Stalinism and Maoism are not even memories, but merely history

lessons, imagine that these politics have something better to offer than the degraded versions offered by present-day 'Trotskyisms'.

The task of building a real Communist Party still faces us. It may be that - like the Trotskyists, faced with World War II, and the left groups, faced with the episodic revolutionary crises which *have* emerged from time to time (as in Portugal in 1974-76, or Iran in 1979-80) - we will just have to do the best we can with totally inadequate forces to project an orientation to workers' power and socialism as the way out of the crisis.

But our present task is the struggle for a Communist Party in times which do *not* immediately pose the question of power. Overcoming the temptations of the image of May 1968 in France as a 'charter' for strikist spontaneism and 'agitare, agitare, agitare' is a part of this struggle for a party ●

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## Notes

1. My transcribed talk published in this paper on May 31; comrade Dunn's 'Trotskyism and May 1968' (June 14); my letter (June 21); his response and Andrew Northall's 'official communist' letter in response to comrade Dunn's June 14 article (both June 28).
2. www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1\_6.htm.
3. *Orthodox* Maoists had more of a party conception.
4. Argued at length in articles collected in *In defence of Marxism*: www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/tdom/dm/index.htm.
5. I pointed out in *Revolutionary strategy* (2010), chapter 4, that Trotsky's arguments in relation to the specific Polish and Finnish questions were problematic. I do not retract that argument. My present point is that *Soviet* defencism in general was required, because the irrationality of handing the territory back to imperialist subordination meant that third-campism on this front could not be justified to advanced workers.
6. www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/1938-1949/emergconf/fi-emerg02.htm.
7. Trade unions, cooperatives, mutuals, women's organisations, youth organisations, etc and workers' clubs of one sort and another.
8. Or, rather, in reality, accompanied by the anarchists, Bordighists, 'council communists' and so on.
9. T Saich, 'The Chinese Communist Party during the era of the Comintern (1919-1943)': https://sites.hks.harvard.edu/tsasaich/chinese-communist-party-during-comintern.pdf, at p14.
10. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/spain/spain04.htm.
11. See note 5 above.
12. Convenient summary at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark\_Zborowski.
13. Eg. www.marxists.org/archive/shachtma/1947/03/unity.html (March 1947).
14. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1937/08/stalinism.htm.

## Summer Offensive

### Confident

Readers are now responding with some enthusiasm to our emails requesting a donation to the CPGB's Summer Offensive, our annual fundraising drive. The most generous so far is comrade TG, who made a £100 bank transfer to the *Weekly Worker*. But also deserving a mention are three comrades who each donated £50 to the paper - AN, WC and DV (at least I *think* the final one is from DV, as he said he was going to stump up, but there's no recognisable reference!)

But the largest individual contributor this week is CPGB comrade VP, who parted with no less than £415 (admittedly some of that took the form of unclaimed sundries). Anyway, over the last seven days the SO running total has gone up by £1,331 to £6,630.

Our target is £25,000, to be raised by August 25, so we still have more than six weeks to make up the £18K-plus we still need. And, the way things are going, I'm really feeling confident. So many

comrades are responding in such a positive way - not least when it comes to supporting their favourite political paper. (Just a reminder - everything donated to the *Weekly Worker* is added to the grand total, though it will be used exclusively for the purpose intended.)

Anyway, I know lots of comrades have received individual emails, but haven't yet responded. And there are follow-up phone calls to look forward to as well. But, as I say, so far the attitude we've encountered is very positive - so many comrades recognise the value of both the *Weekly Worker* and the CPGB in fighting, week after week, for the single, united, democratic-centralist, Marxist party they know is needed.

Are you one of them? If so, send us a cheque, go to either website and click on the PayPal button, or make a transfer (CPGB: 08-92-99, 65109991; *Weekly Worker*: 30-99-64, 00744310) ●

Peter Manson

■ 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

The politics  
of 1945 are  
the politics  
of Labourism

# End the farce

Surely it is time to join the fight to transform the Labour Party, writes Peter Manson

On June 16 Left Unity held its fifth annual conference, but it is pretty clear that the organisation is on its last legs. Just a couple of dozen comrades turned up at an event where every member is entitled to attend and cast their vote.

What a contrast to the first conference, held in November 2013, where around 450 comrades were present, and by early 2014 LU had over 2,000 members. Although the main far-left groups - namely the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party in England and Wales - declined to participate, a number of others, including the CPGB, did (there were no restrictions on such dual membership). Nevertheless, the majority of LU members were unattached - a good number were disillusioned former members of one or another of the left groups, who were now looking for a home.

At that time, the majority of such comrades did not even consider joining the Labour Party. While some might have accepted that Labour remained a bourgeois workers' party, since the days of Tony Blair it looked to most like an organisation that would forever be controlled by the pro-capitalist right. Ed Miliband was marginally to Blair's left, who had not quite managed to transform Labour into a bourgeois party pure and simple, but he was definitely regarded by most such comrades as a warmonger and trusted member of the capitalist establishment.

It was against this background that leftwing film director Ken Loach, along with Kate Hudson and Gilbert Achcar, wrote the article, 'The Labour Party has failed us. We need a new party of the left' (March 25 2013), which is still available on *The Guardian's* 'Comment is free' website.<sup>1</sup>

Almost immediately comrade Hudson - until 2011 a member of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain and still a leading figure in both the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Stop The War Coalition - issued, alongside Andrew Burgin (who, like comrade Hudson, had been a member of various left groups and campaigns), an appeal for left unity (lower case) within a new leftwing party.<sup>2</sup>

Needless to say, the basis of such a new party was hardly that of Marxism and socialist principle. It harked back to the "spirit of 45", when we saw "the post-war generation transforming the lives of ordinary people by bringing improved health, housing, education and social security to the people of Britain". The following sentence made the proposed new party's limitations clear: "We need to defend these achievements and continue the tradition of protecting the most vulnerable in society."

Nevertheless, we in the CPGB welcomed this development. As we wrote at the time,

... the revolutionary left should seek to actively involve itself in any unity process. Not unity for the sake of unity, but with the aim of winning



the argument for a Communist Party armed with a Marxist programme ... We support left unity as a step towards a Communist Party.<sup>3</sup>

The following week, we set out more precisely what the left should be fighting for within any new party:

Firstly, the resulting organisation must take the Labour Party seriously. We all know that its leadership is rightwing and detestable. But it is also organically connected to the trade unions and other mass organisations of the working class.

Secondly, the existing far left must, equally, be taken seriously. The squabbling sects of which it is comprised may not have the institutional heft of Labour, but contain in their ranks the necessary raw material for building any new organisation from scratch. Left unity requires a battle against the bureaucratic sect regimes that currently perpetuate our divisions - not trying to ignore them.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, right from the beginning, we were putting forward something rather different from the majority. Not just the need for a single Marxist party, but the medium-term aim of transforming Labour into a genuinely working class formation. We were adamant that Labour was still a bourgeois workers' party, within which there was still a battle to be fought.

Of course, we had no idea what was to happen within two years - the election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader, thanks to the actions of the rightwing "morons" in the Parliamentary Labour Party. They nominated him as a leadership candidate for the sake of appearances, never believing for a second that he would have the remotest chance of winning.

But we took our place within the

new formation, which adopted the name, Left Unity, at its founding conference on November 30 2013. As we suspected, the agreed platform was hardly radical. It aimed for a party that "stands for equality and justice", reducing the political significance of class to one among a number of parallel 'discriminations' and of socialism to one among a number of parallel 'visions'.

What was more important than socialist principle for an influential section of the membership was the politics of intersectionality, identity and 'safer spaces'. Right from the beginning this section had a totally different vision of a left party to anything that had previously existed. But it was unable to force through its aims and even today appendix 1 of the LU constitution (headed 'Safer spaces policy') reads in its entirety: "Still in process of drafting".<sup>5</sup>

However, as we wrote at the time, there were no bans and proscriptions, and so "Marxists, communists and revolutionary socialists have the possibility of openly organising and openly campaigning for their views."<sup>6</sup>

## Corbyn

You might have thought that, with Corbyn's election in September 2015, there would have been a substantial rethink among the LU leadership. After all, Left Unity had been founded specifically on the basis that "The Labour Party has failed".

But at its November 21-22 conference comrades Hudson and Burgin - respectively national secretary and treasurer - put forward a motion that was basically 'business as usual'. It began with a routine welcome for Corbyn's "landslide victory", and made the well founded claim that this "opens a new period of class struggle". But, faced with what they described as an "historic opportunity", comrades

Hudson and Burgin merely proposed to cooperate with the development of Momentum, organise another talking shop conference in a few months time and "reassess our electoral strategy" the following year.

But elsewhere among the leadership the attitude was precisely the opposite. Principal speakers Pete Green and Salman Shaheen and media officer Tom Walker were among those proposing to "dissolve" Left Unity "as a political party" and reconstitute it as a loose "network", working mainly, but not exclusively, within the Labour Party.

For our part, we proposed a motion whereby LU would continue to exist as a party, but with the aim of "transforming the Labour Party into an instrument for working class advance and international socialism". Labour must become the "umbrella organisation for all trade unions, socialist groups and pro-working class partisans" and towards this end we called on Left Unity to "demand the complete elimination of all undemocratic bans and proscriptions" and seek affiliation to Labour.

Unfortunately, however, it was the Hudson-Burgin motion that was carried, while our motion won the support of just a couple of dozen comrades. Meanwhile the dissolution motion won precisely 10 votes, provoking the immediate resignation from LU of comrade Shaheen, who was subsequently joined by other leading figures.

In her report as national secretary, Kate Hudson paid lip service to the need to "change the context in which we work" as a result of Corbyn's victory. But, apart from defending him against the right and cooperating with the movement to support him, particularly within Momentum, it seemed it was a case of business as usual and building Left Unity on virtually identical politics to those of Corbyn.

For his part, comrade Burgin admitted that LU shared "many of the policies" of Corbyn, but, he asked, "what can be achieved by Labour", which remains dominated by the right? "Even if the Labour Party returns to social democracy", it will have many "differences with the radical left". So basically we should just carry on as before. A number of comrades hoped that when Corbyn "predictably falls" there will be a mass influx into Left Unity. Dream on!

We in the CPGB decided to continue the fight in Left Unity for the time being, but when a few months later the LU national council voted to stand candidates against Labour in the forthcoming local elections and rejected our call for an emergency national conference dedicated exclusively to the Labour debate, this was the last straw.

Of course, we were far from the only ones who gave up on LU - the vast majority of unattached comrades either drifted away or actively resigned, so as to play their part in the battle within the Labour Party. I do not know what LU's real membership is now, but it is certainly just a tiny fraction of the 2,000 it once boasted.

If the list of motions before the June 16 2018 national conference is anything to go by, it is still a case of 'as you were' - as though nothing at all had happened in Britain's bourgeois workers' party. The one motion that referred to Labour was moved by Dave Landau and Pete McLaren. This condemned the conflation of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism in the Labour Party, opposed the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of anti-Semitism and called on LU to hold "public meetings about the struggle to defend Corbyn from false accusations, to oppose anti-Semitism, including an understanding that anti-Semitism can impact on the left and campaigning for Palestinian rights."

The motion was passed - but only after an amendment was agreed which deleted "to defend Corbyn from false allegations"! This had the effect of skewing the original motion to such an extent that it almost appeared to be siding with the Labour right.

Well, Left Unity still exists - just about - but it is now completely and utterly irrelevant. The remaining members should follow the lead of the vast majority of their former comrades - join the fight where it really matters! ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.co.uk

## Notes

1. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/mar/25/labour-party-left.
2. http://leftunity.org/appeal.
3. 'Loach makes his bid for unity' *Weekly Worker*, March 28 2013.
4. 'Realise potential, avoid pitfalls' *Weekly Worker* April 4 2013.
5. http://leftunity.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Constitution-as-of-7-12-13.pdf.
6. 'Plans for the hard left' *Weekly Worker* December 12 2013.

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