

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly  
**worker**



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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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# NOTHING TO APOLOGISE FOR



# LETTERS



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

## Compromises

In the *Weekly Worker* a debate has begun over a possible future referendum on the Tory 'Brexit' deal. The 2016 European Union referendum has divided the UK into reactionaries and ultra-lefts on one side, and liberals and democrats on the other. The slogan, 'No to a second (or repeat) referendum: Yes to a ratification referendum', is not only a democratic slogan, but the slogan of working class democracy.

Everybody knows that a people's referendum means universal suffrage. Hence the members of every class can vote. We also realise that the working class is by far the largest class of voters. On a level playing field working class voters would carry the day. But, although the pitch is tilted massively against the working class and the referee has been bribed, working class democracy is not afraid to fight.

A ratification referendum offers the best opportunity to rebuild political unity in a working class deeply divided over Europe. This is opposed by reactionaries and ultra-lefts who oppose any referendum and the liberals who want to repeat the last referendum and overturn the result. Working class democracy does not draw an equal sign between reactionaries who want to leave and liberals who want to remain in the EU.

A second or repeat referendum would further harden the divide in the working class. The liberals are interested in the profits of the big corporations (or 'jobs', as they call it) and do not give a fig about working class unity. By contrast advanced workers would relish the opportunity to unite the working class against the Tory government and consign the actual dirty Brexit deal to the dustbin of history.

Hence the task facing communists and democrats is to force the Tories to concede this. The CPGB cannot provide leadership armed with a 'principle' of opposing every referendum. It lines up with the Tory government, Ukip and the Tory right and the wobbly Corbyn. It is worse than this. It surrenders to liberal calls for a second/repeat referendum with an abstract principle.

Let us return to the original debate about the theory of referenda in general. Jack Conrad says: "Comrade Freeman begins with a bald statement: that Jack Conrad 'argued that all referenda should be opposed in principle'. He says: 'It is certainly true that as a matter of principle the CPGB is opposed to referendums'" ('Tactics, principles and willing dupes', July 19).

Jack adds a qualification that "this general principle does not translate into one of refusing to call for a referendum under all circumstances. Nor does it translate into a general principle of always responding to a referendum organised by our enemies with a corresponding call for an active boycott".

Jack illustrates this by reminding us that the CPGB "urged a 'yes' vote in Ireland's May 2015 referendum on gay marriage; the same with Ireland's May 2018 referendum on abortion. And, in the UK, while being critical of the Liberal Democrat proposal for reforming the parliamentary voting system, the CPGB called for a 'yes' in the May 5 2011 referendum."

At first I had to admit to struggling with this flexible concept of 'principle'. Maybe we are arguing about the meaning of principles, not referenda? I needed to think again. Principles are principles and we have to stand by them on all (or virtually all) occasions.

In *Leftwing communism* Lenin reminds us we can 'compromise' our principles. 'No compromises' is an ultra-left slogan. If we are held up by an armed robber, we may have to compromise by handing over our wallet. We live to fight another day. So Jack is right to say the CPGB were not being ultra-left when they compromised their

principles and handed over their wallets.

Jack confuses the issue by using the word "tactics". Instead of principles, set aside by honest and necessary compromises, we have principles made meaningless by "tactics". If every principle can be overturned by the requirements of tactics we end up with opportunism.

Let us summarise the difference as follows: The CPGB opposes all referenda on principle. This is 'strategic-programmatic' opposition. The demand for a referendum cannot and does not appear in the CPGB minimum (or maximum) programme. On the odd occasion that the CPGB is forced to compromise it adopts tactical positions on voting 'yes', 'no', abstain, or boycott.

Hence the CPGB opposed an Irish referendum on gay marriage. Then the CPGB was forced to compromise and drop its opposition and decided to vote 'yes' to gay marriage. This becomes 'tailism'. Before adopting tactics the CPGB has to disentangle itself from a non-existent Kautskyan principle.

By contrast working class democrats do not oppose referenda on principle. The demand for a referendum can appear in the minimum programme. There is no principle to be compromised. It is simply a 'tactical question'. It is perfectly acceptable to call for a referendum before any other class has done so. It is a matter of analysing the conditions of the class struggle and making a tactical decision ('yes', 'no', abstain or boycott).

Let us return from principles to the present. A possible future referendum on the Tory deal is directly connected to the 2016 referendum. In 2016 the CPGB opposed the referendum and called for a boycott. There was no mass boycott and no mood in the working class to prevent it. It was a theoretical idea based on Kautsky. I doubt if it had a single supporter who was not a member of the CPGB.

A Tory referendum designed by the Tories could only divide the working class. The interests of the European working class were best served if Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales voted to remain and England abstained. The following votes were cast for remain - Scotland 1.7 million, Northern Ireland 0.44 million and Wales 0.77 million. In England 10.5 million abstained.

Millions of workers voted on these lines. Unfortunately in Wales a majority voted to leave and in England not enough people abstained. Of course, I do not claim that anybody reads my blogs or letters in the *Weekly Worker*. That would be ridiculous. Workers did what they thought was best in the circumstances. The case for democratic revolution was closely connected with how millions of working people were actually voting.

I did not advocate an all-UK abstention, but explained that the working class in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales voting to remain was in the interests of democracy and the wider European working class. The central message was highlighting the link between the European question and the national question. Two years later, this truth shows that Ireland and Scotland (but hardly Wales) present special, if not insurmountable, problems for the Tory government and Labour unionists.

**Steve Freeman**

London

## Better in

How extremely astute comrades at the *Weekly Worker*/CPGB will now appear to be, how sparkingly impressive - by which I mean to any freely questioning, socially conscious plus humanitarianism-orientated folk out there. But as will become clear, that's being said with tongue very firmly in cheek.

Last week saw the Confederation of British Industry call for net migration targets to be scrapped after Brexit - to be replaced by a system that "ensures people coming to the UK make a positive contribution to the economy". These proposals from the CBI also stipulate that EU citizens should be "registered on arrival to the UK and restrict

their visit to three months, unless they can prove that they are working, studying or are self-sufficient".

In a barely masked further declaration of their intention to protect profits (no doubt also to ensure global market positions), the CBI goes on to point out that "the stakes are high. Get it wrong, and the UK risks having too few people to run the health service, pick food crops or deliver products to stores around the country."

So there we have it: Whatever may be the box-like thinking on the nature of the European Union by *Weekly Worker*/CPGB (to a point of supra-rigidity) - not to mention those correctly Marxist niceties/the never-endingly examined details of your position on referendums - this is the outcome. In fact, some might say an outcome arrived at with 100% predictability.

Instead of free movement for all citizens within the EU, the organised/top-level corporations of UK capitalism now plan to dictate the terms and conditions upon which people can travel in order to find work. Quite outrageously, not only is a corporately controlled 'two-tier grading' of social status to be created, but the bedrock of our purportedly democratic way of life is to be redefined.

This proposal from the CBI represents big corporate control of society via now undisguised leverage of its political mechanisms - something that in turn can be seen as a modern-times incarnation of fascism, or at least the early stages of it, surely? In other words, a seemingly balanced and rational, oh-so-very-British 'seeding' process, with ingeniously ramped-up exploitative advantages as their ultimate Nirvana.

If looked at in conjunction with the fact that the *Weekly Worker*/CPGB consider Corbyn's self-proclaimed 'socialist' Labour Party to be a potential breeding ground for Marxist ideologies and interventions - despite the fact that this concept is now lying in tatters, given Corbyn and co's multiple backtracks, as well as their all but comic feeble-mindedness, etc - surely it's now time for an urgent 'change of heads' in the manner of Wozel Gummidge.

To be found amongst that choice of heads will be one that allows flexibility for the purpose of achieving elements of a communist minimum programme. In this instance, that should lead directly to a call from the *Weekly Worker*/CPGB to Corbyn's Labour Party that, in turn, they adopt a policy of remaining within the European Union - (ie, that they reject outright any Brexit.) Instead, Labour should aim for ongoing membership, namely on the basis of both empathetic and constructive renegotiations of its terms, as they affect UK working citizens.

After all is said and done - and as everybody should keep in mind as arguably the most significant aspect in this entire matter - UK citizens will continue to be living under the general terms of global capitalism, whether their homeland is an EU member or not! In that exact same context, better surely to have the limited advantages of free movement, etc, rather than additional obstacles to developing a socialistic thinking process amongst our co-citizens, as will be created by both economic and cultural isolation. Not to forget the increased intensity of subjugation, exploitation plus oppression that will exist under a so-called sovereign (and thereby distinctly more primitive!) British state apparatus. Those 'advantages' are already being latched onto by the CBI!

Most simply put - better to remain inside the EU rather than be stuck with new, plus horribly inherent difficulties, having split away. At least until such time as modern life can occupy that far superior habitat within fully formed/properly established socialism, naturally!

**Bruno Kretschmar**

email

## Immutable?

Rex Dunn slates the CPGB and Labour Party Marxists for our strategic call for the transformation of Labour into "a real party of labour", so that it can become "a united

front for all pro-working class partisans and organisations" (Letters, August 9). But he completely misunderstands what we are arguing.

He writes: "... given the fact that [LPM] is only tiny, it cannot be seen as an effective 'material force', capable of transforming the party into a united front of the left." So we are wasting our time! Yes, Rex, we know we are "tiny", but we are attempting to lead by example. As the *Weekly Worker* never ceases to point out, if only the revolutionary left as a whole took the Labour Party seriously, it could make a decisive impact upon the strategic battle to defeat the pro-capitalist right.

But comrade Dunn is wrong when he says: "This implies that the latter can go a long way towards winning political control of the Labour Party and begin to transform it into a revolutionary one." No, it does not. The term, "united front", means what it says. While it is certainly possible for Labour to be opened up to the influence of Marxists, it cannot be transformed into a democratic centralist party. That is why, alongside our work in Labour, we insist on a single, united Communist Party, which is vital to lead the working class to state power.

But why does comrade Dunn say that Labour cannot be transformed into a united front? He states point-blank: "In the epoch of capitalist decline, it is impossible to transform social democratic parties into a united front of the left." This is a totally unsubstantiated assertion. *Why* is it "impossible"?

Let us focus on the Labour Party itself. Despite the grip of the pro-capitalist right and, in particular, the anti-democratic measures imposed by the Blairites, it basically retains its original structure as a party based on the trade unions and other working class affiliates. Comrade Dunn states that our task is to defeat reformism and specifies what he means: "concretely the Labour Party and its affiliated trade unions".

It is true that the unions are at the moment dominated by reformism, but is he seriously suggesting that they too cannot be won to actually challenge the system itself? In that case, we might as well all give up. Our aim must be to win a majority for the idea of working class power and, if that is possible, surely it must also be possible for that idea to become accepted in the unions. And, if it is true that we can win the unions away from reformism, why can't they become a key asset in the transformation of the party they were instrumental in founding?

Comrade Dunn writes: "... in 1920-21, whilst the British working class was

dominated by reformism, the majority of the workers were organised collectively". He adds: "the rise of half a million Corbynists cannot be compared to the rise of the leftwing movement back then".

Is there really such a dramatic difference between that period and today in terms of organisation? Yes, the Communist Party had just been founded, but it was hardly a mass force. Or is he talking about the unions, which in any case he claims have always been a mainstay of reformism? It is true that today working class organisation is at a very low ebb, but we revolutionaries know that this situation must change. If comrade Dunn shares our optimism, then he must also accept that it will be possible to win the majority of workers to the cause of communism. Yet, somehow, reformist control of the Labour Party is immutable.

Writing of the period 1920-21, comrade Dunn states: "Moreover Labour had yet to come to power. Therefore Lenin's position may be seen as a necessary strategy for exposing reformism at that time: ie, the workers had to go through the experience of a Labour government, which would be a valuable political lesson." But Labour "cannot be seen as a primary arena for the class struggle today".

Yes, the Bolshevik leaders did believe it was important to win the proletariat away from reformism by exposing the reformist leaders. But that does not tell the whole story. For example, this is what Trotsky had to say in July 1920 at the Second Congress of the Communist International:

"We must say openly that the Communist Party can be affiliated to the Labour Party if it is free to criticise and to conduct its own policies ... All trade union members participate in the Labour Party. It is a very unusual formation of a kind that is not found in any other country ... This is so important for the whole movement that we absolutely insist that the British communists must form a link between the party - that is, the minority of the working class - and the remaining mass of the workers."

In other words, this tactic was about far more than just exposing the leadership. The idea was to bring together all working class forces and organisations into - if you want a term for it - "a united front for all pro-working class partisans and organisations".

Today also, the Labour Party *can* be transformed. But, as I say, the first step must be to win the revolutionary left itself to the centrality of such a strategy.

**David Shearer**

Labour Party Marxists

## Summer Offensive

### See you at CU

Just as I was hoping, in the penultimate week of the CPGB's Summer Offensive fundraising drive, we took a big leap forward towards our £25,000 target. We received a magnificent £4,042, taking us up to £16,236.

The overwhelming majority of that came from just three comrades, who between them contributed no less than £3,035. I'm talking about comrades YM, MM and PK. Mind you, there were a couple of dozen others who donated a much more modest sum - we're talking about single figures in some cases. But it all adds up!

Anyway, as I write, there are nine days to go before the end of the Summer Offensive - the grand total raised will be announced at our celebratory meal on Friday August 24. This will be held on the final evening of Communist University, which begins on Saturday August 18 and ends a week later on

Saturday August 25 (see p7).

I am now more than confident that we will get the £8,764 we still need by then. As I've previously said, CU is a good money-raising event (the stalls, the food and drink, the evening socialising ...) as well as being a fantastic learning experience.

So, if you can, why not come along to south London next week? Contribute to both the debates and to the SO. But, if you can't make it, then you can still make a donation - use PayPal via the website of either the CPGB or the *Weekly Worker*. Better still, make a bank transfer to the CPGB (sort code 08-92-99; account number 65109991) or the paper (sort code 30-99-64; account number 007443110).

Best of all though is to come along to Communist University and hand over your contribution in person. See you at CU! ●

**Peter Manson**

## ECONOMY

# Rethinking economics

Can economics ever become 'pluralist'? Will the universities and research institutes in the major capitalist economies expand their teaching and ideas to cover not just mainstream neoclassical and Keynesian theories, but also more radical heterodox themes (post-Keynesian, Austrian and Marxian)? If you look at the list of study courses that are considered heterodox by *Heterodox News*, the few that there are in the UK and US are concentrated in a just few colleges - with the big names having no such courses at all.

*Rethinking Economics*, a pressure group of academics and students, was launched over four years ago to turn this around. In July, it said Britain's universities were failing to equip economics students with the skills that businesses and the government say they need. Following extensive interviews with employers and organisations such as the Bank of England, it found that universities were producing "a cohort of economic practitioners who struggle to provide innovative ideas to overcome economic challenges or use economic tools on real-world problems". Moreover, the group said, "when political decisions are backed by economics reasoning, as they so often are, economists are unable to communicate ideas to the public, resulting in a large democratic deficit".

There are efforts among some academics to broaden the outlook of economics graduates. The Core project was adopted by 13 UK universities last September and has won a £3.7 million grant from the Economic and Social Research Council. As *The Guardian* put it,

... the developers of the programme also claim it has freed itself from neoliberal thinking, which judges markets to be self-adjusting and consumers and businesses to be operating with the same information. The world is full of asymmetric power and information relationships, and Core reflects this.<sup>1</sup>

The Core project has produced an antagonistic reaction from rightwing commentators. The prolific political blogger, 'Guido Fawkes', tweeted: "The left in the universities are trying to rehabilitate Marxist economics to poison the future. Very concerning that they got £3.7 million of taxpayers' money to do it." One strong promoter of both Core and *Rethinking Economics*, left economist Jonathan Portes, responded to Fawkes that he was sure that none of the contributors to the Core programme were Marxist and "I'm obviously not a 'Marxist'".<sup>2</sup> And that is true.

The reality is that *Rethinking Economics* and Core are dominated by Keynesian ideas with hardly any look-in for Marxist ones. It is true that Sam Bowles is one of the main coordinators of the Core textbook project and he considered himself a (neo?) Marxist in the past - but his recent comments on Marx's theories at the 200th anniversary now suggest otherwise.

I am reminded of that first London conference of *Rethinking Economics*. At that meeting, leading radical economists Victoria Chick and Sheila Dow told us that reform of society would be impossible until we can change the 'closed mindset' of mainstream economics. As if the issue was a psychological one. Mainstream economics is closed to alternatives because there is a material interest involved. But Chick and Dow seemed to think that it is

just a question of market-supporting economists changing their mindset - for their own good, because austerity and neoliberal policies are actually bad for capitalism itself.

More recently, leading left economists in the UK held a seminar on the state of mainstream economics, as taught in the universities. They kicked this off by nailing a poster with 33 theses critiquing mainstream economics to the door of the London School of Economics. This publicity gesture attempted to remind us that it was the 500th anniversary of when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the Castle Church, Wittenberg and provoked the beginning of the Protestant reformation against the 'one true religion' of Catholicism.

The economists were purporting to tell us that mainstream economics was like Catholicism and must be protested against, just as Luther did back in 1517. But, as I commented then, is a revolution against the mainstream really to be painted as similar to Luther's Protestant revolt? The history of the reformation tells us that the Protestant version of Christianity did not lead to a new pluralistic order and freedom to worship. On the contrary, Luther was a bigot who worked with the authorities to crush more radical movements based on the peasants, led by Thomas Müntzer.

Don't get me wrong: attempts to expand economic ideas beyond the mainstream can only be good news and the content of the Core project is really stimulating and educational. But it seems that, for *Rethinking Economics* and Core, the mainstream economic 'religion' is just neoclassical theory and that it is neoliberal economics that must be overturned. They have nothing to say against Keynesian economics - indeed variants of Keynes are actually the way forward for them.

Take the new course at University College London for undergraduates. It is called 'Rethinking capitalism' - described as "a new elective module for UCL undergraduates". Run by Mariana Mazzucato, the director of the Institute of Innovation and Public Purpose (IIPP) and author of *The value of everything*, it is a great initiative, with guest lecturers including Branco Milanovic. The module aims to

help students develop their critical thinking and make the connections between economic theory and real world policy issues. It will provide an introduction to a range of different economics perspectives, including neoclassical, post-Keynesian, ecological, evolutionary, Marxist and institutional economics theories and how their different assumptions link to different public policies.<sup>3</sup>

But, looking at all this, I am sceptical that students will hear much about Marxist economic theory within its 'heterodox' approach.

Keynesian theory dominates in *Rethinking Economics* and so do the policy conclusions arising from Keynesian ideas in wider left circles. Take the recent seminar organised by the IIPP in the UK's House of Lords<sup>4</sup> to discuss the financing of innovation (badly needed, given the poor performance of the British capitalist sector in productivity growth). But who did the IIPP line up to discuss with Mazzucato the very limited proposal for a UK national investment bank to replace the European Investment Bank when

the UK leaves the European Union next year? It was Tory Lord David Willetts - and, as keynote speaker, Liberal leader Sir Vince Cable! Cable was quoted approvingly as saying: "The current enthusiasm for 'selling the family silver' (ie, privatisation) has its roots in bizarre treasury accounting conventions." This was very rich hypocrisy coming from Cable, who when in coalition with the Conservatives, presided over the privatisation of Royal Mail, selling it off for a price at least £1 billion below market value - yes, "selling the family silver". I am not sure the IIPP will get far with its aim of increasing the state role in innovation and investment by relying on these people for support.

And Keynesian ideas are central for Jeremy Corbyn's key advisors. In a recent article, Ann Pettifor, director of Prime Economics, blamed the economic crisis in Turkey and other 'emerging economies' on "orthodox economics" - in particular the move by central banks to hike interest rates and 'normalise' monetary policy. I will be debating with Ann Pettifor on what to do about finance at Momentum's 'The World Transformed' event taking place during the Labour Party conference in Liverpool in late September. Like me she has pointed out the risk that this policy entails for the world economy when profitability is still low and debt is high.

Pettifor's conclusion is that "it was time to ditch economic orthodoxy" and "revive the radical and revolutionary monetary theory and policies of John Maynard Keynes" as the way to avoid another global crisis. But regular readers of my blog will know that I have shown Keynes's ideas were far from radical, let alone revolutionary. And they certainly would not avoid another global crisis - thinking they would do so would be a step back for the labour movement and its leaders.

One key point is that capitalism is not just a monetary economy, as Keynesians think: it is a *money-making* economy. You can print money indefinitely, but you cannot turn it into value under capitalism without the exploitation of human labour. When you sift through the body of ideas in Core, one thing stands out: the failure to analyse modern economies with a law of value and a theory of exploitation for profit. Profit and exploitation do not appear in the body of Core work (except for fleeting references to Marx). And yet this is at the heart of capitalism and is the soul of Marxist theory.

My favourite textbook offering a Marxist alternative to neoclassical and Keynesian schools is *Competing schools of economic thought* by Lefteris Tsoulfidis. Then there is *Contending economic theories* by Richard Wolff and Stephen Resnick and the new two-part work on microeconomics and macroeconomics by Ben Fine and Ourania Dimakou. And, of course, there is Anwar Shaikh's monumental *Capitalism* (which the dedicated can dip into if they have their brains working!). These should be on the curriculum of Core and *Rethinking Economics* courses.

Maybe they will be - but it will require a rethink! ●

Michael Roberts

## Notes

1. www.theguardian.com/business/2018/aug/04/economics-students-dangerously-poorly-educated?CMP=Share\_iOSApp\_Other.
2. https://twitter.com/jdportes.
3. www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/public-purpose/programmes/rethinking-capitalism-new-elective-module-ucl-undergraduates.
4. www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/public-purpose/news/2018/jun/iipp-holds-patient-capital-and-industrial-strategy-workshop-uk-parliament.

## ACTION

### London Communist Forum

Sunday August 19 and Sunday August 26: No forum.

Sunday September 2, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group: study of August Nimitz's *Lenin's electoral strategy from 1907 to the October Revolution of 1917*. This meeting: Introduction. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk; and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

### Corbyn, anti-Semitism and Palestine

Tuesday August 21, 7pm: Meeting, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Speakers include: Tariq Ali, Richard Kuper (Jewish Voice for Labour), Ben Jamal (Palestine Solidarity Campaign), Lindsey German (Stop the War Coalition). Organised by Corbyn, anti-Semitism and Justice for Palestine: www.facebook.com/events/1419622408182810.

### Palestine solidarity

Saturday August 25, 6.30pm: Fundraising garden party, Bow, East London. Tickets £15.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org/events/fundraising-garden-party.

### Love Music, Hate Racism

Sunday August 26, Monday August 27, 9am: Carnival, Ladbrooke Grove, London W10. Join the LMHR float.

Organised by Love Music, Hate Racism: www.facebook.com/events/761409207582970.

### Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions

Saturday September 1, 11am to Sunday September 2, 6pm: Student conference, University of Manchester Students Union, Oxford Road, Manchester M13.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org/events/student-bds-conference.

### Stand up to the EDL

Saturday September 1, 1pm: Counterdemonstration, Worcester town centre. Check www.facebook.com/events/2175607859351532 for details.

Organised by Black Country Stand Up To Racism: www.facebook.com/Black-Country-Stand-Up-To-Racism-1137612022985017.

### Derby Transformed

Saturday September 1, 9am to midnight: Day of debate, St Peter's Church, 10 St Peter's Churchyard, Derby DE1. Hosted by Chris Williamson MP.

Organised by Momentum: www.facebook.com/events/544102699319978.

### Health, safety and wellbeing

Monday September 3, 10.30am to 3.30pm: Conference, Salisbury Rugby Football Club, Castle Road, Salisbury SP1.

Organised by South West TUC: www.tuc.org.uk/south-west/events/health-safety-and-wellbeing-work-tuc-south-west-conference

### End the witch-hunt - NEC lobby

Tuesday September 4, 11am: Lobby of Labour Party national executive committee meeting, Southside, 105 Victoria Street, London SW1.

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

### Stop the War Coalition

Saturday September 8, 9.30am to 5pm: Annual general meeting, Arlington Conference Centre, 220 Arlington Road, London NW1.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: https://www.stopwar.org.uk

### TUC Congress

Sunday September 9 to Wednesday September 12: TUC Congress, Manchester Central Convention Complex, Windmill Street, Manchester M2.

Organised by TUC: www.tuc.org.uk/tuc-congress-2018.

### National Shop Stewards Network

Sunday September 9, 1pm: TUC rally, Manchester Mechanics Institute Conference Centre, Princess Street, Manchester M1.

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

### The World Transformed

Saturday September 22 to Tuesday September 25: Momentum's festival of politics, art and music, running alongside the Labour conference, Liverpool, various venues.

Organised by The World Transformed: https://theworldtransformed.org.

### End the witch-hunt - Labour fringe

Sunday September 23, 6:30pm-9:30pm: Labour Party fringe meeting, Roddick Rooms, 54 St James Street, Liverpool L1. Speakers include: Chris Williamson MP. Organised by Labour Against the Witchhunt: www.labouragainsthewitchhunt.org.

### Why we need an anti-war government

Monday September 24, 5pm: Labour Party fringe meeting, suite 3, Jurys Inn, 31 Keel Wharf, Liverpool L3.

Speakers: Chris Williamson MP, Lindsey German (Stop the War), Andrew Murray (Unite). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.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.

**LABOUR**

# The politics of offence

Does it matter if Labour adopts all of the IHRA's examples of 'anti-Semitism'? Eddie Ford thinks so

**P**redictably, Jeremy Corbyn is coming under increased pressure to accept *all* of the examples of 'anti-Semitism' supplied by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.<sup>1</sup> This has now become a totemic issue for Corbyn's critics inside and outside the Labour Party - even for some of his supporters. The fact that the Labour leadership has accepted in full the IHRA's "working definition" of anti-Semitism makes no difference, of course. Unless Corbyn commits himself to the IHRA's full text, it will be yet more incontrovertible proof that he is not serious about tackling Labour's supposed 'anti-Semitism' problem.

Hence the leaders of the Unison, GMB and Usdaw unions have now all called upon Corbyn to back down and sign up to the entirety of the "internationally recognised" IHRA document. Sounding as innocent as a virgin, Paddy Lillis, Usdaw's boss and member of Labour's NEC, told the *Jewish News* he was "shocked" to find Labour mired in allegations of racism - how on earth could this have happened to his beloved party? Nothing to do with the systematic and extremely well organised slander campaign against the Labour leader, of course. Jeremy Corbyn has "clearly stated that there is a problem with anti-Semitism" in the party, Lillis declared, and "is right in his determination to tackle it". This only serves to demonstrate that Corbyn should not have issued his absurd apology for "pockets" of anti-Semitism within the Labour Party, which only exist on the fringes of the fringe: just go to a Labour Party meeting if you don't believe me. Anyway, like a mantra, Usdaw's chief thinks it is "essential" that the party "regains the trust of Jewish communities" - as if they were a monolithic entity. All Jewish people are morbidly sensitive Zionists, it seems, who take terrible offence at the slightest of things - not least criticism of Israel, which is what the IHRA's carefully crafted examples are actually aimed at.

The GMB's Tim Roache and Unison's Dave Prentis have come out with similar sentiments. Prentis argued that Corbyn's refusal to adopt the examples is costing the party "the moral high ground" from which to oppose racial hatred and oppression. In fact, according to him, when Boris Johnson "shed his court jester act this week to engage in flagrant Islamophobic bigotry" about fully-veiled Muslim women, it was made easy for his supporters to wave away criticism by pointing to the ongoing 'anti-Semitism' crisis gripping the Labour Party. It never occurs to Prentis, alas, that if the Labour leadership had stood up to the 'anti-Semitism' campaign from day one then these Johnson supporters would never have been able to make such a comparison at all - what would there be to criticise?

The anti-Semitism question "should never have become such a divisive issue," we learn, as it is "an unnecessary schism in a party that on so many issues is genuinely united". Tell that to the Labour *right*, which has done everything it can to provoke this "unnecessary" split. In the same way, Tim Roache of the GMB protests about party members "knocking lumps out of each other" when they should be exploiting Tory divisions over Brexit and everything else. For Roache, it is "abundantly



Tunisia 2014: nothing to apologise for

clear" that Labour has to accept the IHRA's examples of anti-Semitism in full - while "agreeing" that criticism of the Israeli government and supporting the rights of the Palestinian is not being anti-Semitic. Well thanks a lot, Tim. It would probably come as news to the oppressed Palestinians that the colonial-settler state of Israel is *not* "a racist endeavour", as the IHRA insists in one of its examples of 'anti-Semitism'.

Meanwhile, the president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, Marie van der Zyl, demanded that Corbyn "comes out of hiding" and face up to the music - primarily, it almost goes without saying, by acknowledging "the problematic nature of his own past actions". That is, the Labour leader should apologise over and over again in the most abject possible way for any expression of solidarity with the Palestinians. Not wanting to be left on the sidelines, Jim Murphy, the former Labour leader in Scotland, took out a full-page advert in the Glasgow edition of the *Jewish Telegraph* to accuse the party's leadership of being "intellectually arrogant, emotionally inept and politically maladroit."

## Delegitimise

In other words, what our happy trio of union bosses are saying to Jeremy Corbyn: just adopt the IHRA's damned examples as demanded by the JLM, *Jewish Chronicle*, *Jewish Telegraph*, etc - bring an end to this divisive row - it does not really matter at the end of the day.

But it *does* matter. The reality is that the campaign is not just about strengthening Zionism, but strengthening the right - not just within Labour, but society as a whole - as part of the campaign to *delegitimise* the Corbyn leadership. One irony of the current wretched situation is that all these calls and demands are done using the language and prevailing common sense of the left. Rather, stop banging on about Zionism, Israel, Palestine, US imperialism, etc. In fact, avoid anything controversial. Instead, we should concentrate on austerity, the NHS, jobs, wages and

conditions - then we will win, and a Labour government can deliver all things wonderful to the people. This is the dismal economic common sense of the left.

That is precisely why the likes of Corbyn, John McDonnell and Diane Abbot are willing to compromise and issue endless apologies on this question and many others - believing they are keeping their eyes on the prize of governmental office.

The problem, of course, is that once you compromise in this way, you open up the floodgates to accusations of anti-Semitism against almost the entire left - except for the social-imperialist Alliance for Workers' Liberty, no group on the left seriously thinks the Zionist project is legitimate. The bogus nature of the IHRA examples is highlighted in particular by one, which Jeremy Corbyn has unfortunately accepted, of "denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination" - apparently this is anti-Semitic. But what on earth does it mean? Now, it might be different if the passage talked about the *Israeli-Jewish* people, or nation, but it does not. Are we meant to believe that Jewish people in New York, London, Paris or Amsterdam *all* have the right to "self-determination"?

Anyhow, suffice to say that Jeremy Corbyn - as alluded to by the president of the Board of Deputies - falls foul of these various examples, as would John McDonnell and most people reading this publication. The idea that if you fold on this issue the Board, *Jewish Chronicle*, Tories, and all the rest of them will end their slurs is plainly absurd.

The 'anti-Semitism' controversy, however, helps to expose the sad illusions of the left who think that Labour is more or less a shoo-in for the next election - even though there is no evidence for such a belief. The latest opinion polls show that Labour is only marginally ahead of the Tories, rather than roaring past them, whilst a few actually show a slight Conservative lead (ie, YouGov).<sup>2</sup>

## Excuse

The whole 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' slander campaign gives the perfect excuse for the rightwing PLP

- if Labour emerges as the biggest party or with a majority of some sort - to say that, in all good conscience, they could not back an anti-Semite to become prime minister. How on earth could you accuse someone - to use the words of Margaret Hodge - of being "a fucking anti-Semite and a racist" and then vote for them for them to become prime minister in the House of Commons?

But the British constitution requires any potential prime minister to demonstrate to the monarch that they can command a majority in the House of Commons. Of course, the monarch will be advised by the 600-strong privy council (a job for life) consisting of the John Majors, Tony Blairs and Peter Mandelsons of this world. Needless to say, they will be insisting that Corbyn does not command such a majority - and they will be right. Remember the 172 Labour 'rebels' who signed a no-confidence motion in their leader?

We all know about the fake scandal around Peter Willsman's recent comments on the NEC about how in 50 years he had "never seen any anti-Semitism in the Labour Party" and claiming that some of the people posting "duff information", like some senior rabbis and writers for the *Jewish Chronicle*, were "Trump fanatics" - which is undoubtedly true. For what in a sane world would be regarded as fairly innocuous comments, Willsman has been cast into the outer darkness by the cherubic Owen Jones of *The Guardian* for undermining "the struggle against the disgusting disease of anti-Semitism".<sup>3</sup>

The problem is that former leftwingers like Jones have come to believe such irrational nonsense because they have *internalised* the politics of offence so deeply that it now motivates them on an ideological level: thus the tiresome phenomenon of auto-outrage. You wait to be offended, then display your righteousness as loudly as possible. Peter Willsman has offended the Jewish Labour Movement, therefore his behaviour must be unacceptable - regardless of the truth or facts.

However, I think it is appropriate to end on a slightly more optimistic note. Over recent days there has been

a concerted effort, spearheaded by none other than the *Daily Mail*, to trash Corbyn's reputation concerning his 2014 visit to the Palestinian cemetery in Tunis - where he laid a wreath, along with others, for the many victims (including civilians) of an Israeli air attack on the Palestine Liberation Organisation headquarters in October 1985. Afterwards Corbyn attended a conference on Palestine in Tunis at the invitation of the Tunisian president along with other European parliamentarians, including a Conservative and Liberal Democrat from the UK. But, committed to journalistic integrity as always, the *Mail* has photoshopped and spun the story of the visit in such a way as to give the impression that Corbyn was laying a wreath at the grave of Salah Khalaf (also known as Abu Iyad) - the PLO's second-in-command who was assassinated in Tunis in 1981, and *alleged* to be one of the masterminds behind Black September, responsible for the Munich Olympics attack of 1972. Binyamin Netanyahu instantly joined the character-assassination posse, saying the Corbyn visit "deserves unequivocal condemnation from everyone - left, right and everything in between."

Encouragingly, Corbyn has refused to apologise. Not turning the other cheek this time, he hit back at Netanyahu and the rest by saying that what really "deserves unequivocal condemnation" is the killing of over 160 Palestinian protesters in Gaza by Israeli forces since March and the new, overtly racist nation-state law. This makes Israel not the state of *all* its citizens, but rather "the nation-state of the Jewish people" - in the process downgrading Arabic from an official language to merely one with an ill-defined "special status".

Is Jeremy Corbyn at last developing a backbone? We shall see ●

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## Notes

1. www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism.  
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion\_polling\_for\_the\_next\_United\_Kingdom\_general\_election.  
3. https://twitter.com/OwenJones84/status/1024071260064677889.

## TURKEY

# Nurtured by the state

What lies behind the current crisis? Esen Uslu looks at the peculiar form of capitalist development in Turkey

The downward spiral of the lira has meant that suddenly Turkey is headline news in the international media, as numerous experts clamour to have their say. As the monetary crisis is intertwined with the Erdoğan regime's falling out with the US president, another set of experts are busy commenting on Turkey's international relations.

According to most of them, the growing antagonism between Donald Trump and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is related to the evangelical pastor, Andrew Brunson, who has been detained on 'trumped-up charges' of aiding terrorism. Despite a tacit understanding being reached, he has still not been released. What interests us, however, is the impact of these events on the class struggle and the struggle for democracy.

In Turkey itself the tightly controlled media is full of praise for the valiant struggle of Erdoğan and co to defend us against the attack on our economy led by the evil Trump. This is a national liberation struggle - for some even a jihad. That line is echoed by the president's loyal opposition. The recently formed rightwing İP (Good Party) was first to declare its support for the president in this battle. The İP only managed to get onto the ballot in June's general election thanks to the help of the so-called 'social democrat' CHP (Republican People's Party).

The CHP itself has proposed a 13-point plan to deal with the economic crisis and has stated that, had Erdoğan adopted this plan, his government would have been worthy of full support. The plan includes restructuring the state's bureaucracy, reinstating the independence of the central bank, introducing 'international standards' on tax auditing and pushing for a production-based economy.

The opposition of various 'left' organisations is often based on similar calls - with the addition that the people must not pay for the crisis through increased taxation, reduced wages, further unemployment and factory closures. How it arrived in this position is a matter of dispute, but it is clear that more than 30 years of dirty war waged in Kurdistan has strengthened the so-called 'progressive' aspects of 'Kemalism' in the eyes of the 'left'. This was based on an 'anti-imperialism' distorted by genocide, ethnic cleansing, nationalism and xenophobia, together with a 'statism' that has suffocated democracy - but welcomed as the only way to achieve anything progressive in a country immersed in Muslim reaction.

Against this background it is apparent that today's convulsions have resulted from a financial crisis that has become entwined with a parallel crisis of international relations. To try to disentangle them I would like to examine the historical roots of the Turkish bourgeoisie's foreign debt addiction and what lies behind it.

### Beginnings

In their 'holy national liberation' rhetoric, Erdoğan and co are full of praise for the 'native and national' in every speech they make. But those terms ring a different tune to Turkish ears.

Turkey is a country where capitalist production and a bourgeoisie did not develop organically. That also goes for all today's states that occupy the former Ottoman territory covering almost all the eastern Mediterranean basin and Mesopotamia. Under the Ottoman



Capital and state: interwoven

empire capitalism developed thanks to the direct intervention of the archaic state, which was trying to 'modernise' in order to extend its precarious life. The state saw its task as nurturing a native capitalist class through 'concessions' in order to provide the necessary goods and services. Because of this peculiar relationship, the emerging capitalist class was from its very first breath monopolistic - its interests intertwined with those of the bureaucracy.

This class was protected as far as possible from the competition of the Levantine bourgeoisie: that is, the agents or partners of international trading houses based in the major ports of the Levant, or the eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean. The conflict between Turkish capitalists and the non-Muslim Levantine bourgeoisie wreaked havoc in the early 20th century, when nationalism became the main driving force leading to World War I.

After the formation of the Republic of Turkey, the bourgeoisie and its nationalist partners in the state bureaucracy played an important role in triggering the Armenian genocide during the war and the compulsory 'population exchange' that destroyed the Aegean and Pontic Greek communities, as well as those of the orthodox Christian Turks of central Anatolia. It also drew in a large Muslim population from Greece and the Balkan countries.

Since then nationalism has meant the expropriation of 'foreign' - ie, non-Turkish and non-Muslim - capital and the transfer of such businesses into Turkish-Muslim hands. Until after World War II, this policy of nurturing a native and national bourgeoisie continued - protected from free competition by monopolies and concessions.

After the war, when the economy started to open up to global capital, such protection was regarded as more important still. High tariffs and import bans were enforced, together with subsidies for local industry. While the commodities produced were hardly of a quality acceptable to international markets, they were considered good enough for domestic consumption, and such second-rate goods dominated the national market.

Those years of state protection resulted in the creation of a thin stratum of finance capitalists, of which the Koç and Sabancı groups were the most

well-known. They controlled many subsidiary companies operating in almost every sector of the economy, from manufacturing to retailing and banking.

But by now they were closely linked to international finance capital, which provided retired generals and top civilian bureaucrats seats on their boards. Some of the major industrial companies were formed in partnership with OYAK, the army pension fund, as well as international corporations. They operated in industries considered to be of 'critical importance' by the state.

### Foreign debt

Originally, the Ottoman empire had lacked the resources to support such an ambitious project, and in the mid-19th century it was forced to accept loans - the start of the addiction to foreign debt. The ever-increasing borrowing of the empire eventually led to a major default in 1879.

In 1881, western creditors formed the Ottoman Public Debt Administration to collect taxes and pay the domestic and foreign debt for and on behalf of the Ottoman empire. Almost all major manufacturing, transport and finance within the empire came under the direct control of the OPDA. At its peak before World War I the OPDA employed 9,000 people - more than the staff of the finance ministry.

However, for the nascent bourgeoisie and its counterparts in the military and civilian bureaucracy, OPDA was seen as the principal impediment. It was regarded as a deliberate attempt to create a stronger non-Turkish and non-Muslim bourgeoisie able to control the economy.

Despite achieving part of their aims in forming a Muslim Turkish state following the war, the Kemalists were unable to get rid of OPDA immediately. They had hopes of receiving new credit to assist recovery after the war and it remained fully in place until 1939. No new loans had materialised, and OPDA's tax collection authority was eventually removed - its role now was to distribute repayments to creditors. The 'anti-imperialist' nationalist-statist Kemalist regime was forced to pay the Ottoman debt to the last penny and the final repayment was not made until 1954 - almost a century after the first foreign loan was received.

However, in the late 20s and early 30s the Kemalists had managed to

obtain credit from the Soviet Union to help build up Turkey's manufacturing capacity and, in the 30s, Soviet-style control over the economy and state planning became attractive to the new Turkish regime. That was useful for what they were attempting to achieve - the creation of a national bourgeoisie, which continued to be pursued ruthlessly. The Kemalist hostility to the remnants of non-Turkish, non-Muslim capital did not cease.

In the mid-30s, anti-Jewish pogroms were conducted in eastern Thrace. A decade later, an asset tax was imposed on the Christian community and those who were unable to pay were forced into compulsory labour in concentration camps. In the 50s and 60s the pogrom against Christian communities in Istanbul, and the forced deportation of Greek nationals who had been allowed residence under the Lausanne treaty, were part of the same 'anti-imperialist, progressive political and economic strategy' of the new Turkey.

Despite the fact that such claims found an echo in the policies of sections of the new 'left' born in the mid-60s, such policies did bear fruit - a thin layer of native and nationalist finance capitalists emerged, establishing strong bonds with international finance capital.

Before the 80s, those finance capital corporations created a network of subcontractors and suppliers. While this extended the base of the bourgeoisie, by now it was starting to feel impeded by the constraints of the state bureaucracy that had served it so well in the past.

The financial needs of the 60s and 70s were catered for first by bilateral deals with the US and later through the stand-by agreement with the International Monetary Fund. As the US had ultimate control over IMF loans, Turkey had to toe the line. When it misbehaved, the US did not hesitate to remind it of its subordinate place in the global order. During the Cyprus crisis of the mid-70s US-Turkish relations deteriorated - Turkey refused to accept Washington's dictates and closed US bases. In a situation similar to that of today, the lira tumbled, inflation skyrocketed and the economy ground to a halt.

The result was the military takeover of 1980. Among the junta's first acts were the ending of Turkey's opposition to Greek membership of Nato and the reopening of US bases. On top of that the junta agreed to plans put forward by Turkish 'Americanists'. They actually represented what Turkish finance capital had previously asked for, but now they would be implemented under the iron heel of the junta.

Once more, money started to flow in to quench the insatiable appetite of Turkish finance capital. This period saw deregulation and privatisation, and a drive to export-oriented development. The increasing role of non-Turkish and non-finance capital reached such a level that there was now increased competition for state favours. That was one of the factors behind the growth of AKP (Justice and Development Party).

The so-called 'Anatolian Tigers' - that is, the native and national capitalists, with their Islamist world outlook, based in the secondary cities and towns of Anatolia - started to play an important role. To assist that process the post-junta AKP diverted the benefits of state favours to those groups, winning their political support. AKP also used them to buy the allegiance of the new strata joining the ranks of the working class

through the employment created by public construction projects.

### Showdown looming

The crash of the banking system in 2001 and its reconstruction under an IMF programme had the effect of applying the brakes to the extension of the state umbrella over Islamist capital - the first AKP governments had fully operated such restrictions.

The last stand-by agreement with the IMF coincided with the 2008 crisis, after which the international 'quantitative easing' policy was applied. That provided AKP with ample opportunity to obtain short-term loans on relatively favourable terms and the government started to provide more support to Islamist national capitalists.

With a more favourable international background, Erdoğan and the AKP felt emboldened to challenge the tutelage of the military and civilian bureaucracy, and the prosecution of members of the army top brass followed. However, the bribery and corruption scandal that engulfed the AKP leadership forced Erdoğan to change tack. In this situation negotiations to find a peaceful solution to the 'Kurdish question' were doomed.

The attempted military coup in July 2016 was the culmination of that shift. Erdoğan and co now set their Islamist agenda aside and united with the military and civilian bureaucracy in a new phase of war on the Kurds. They also came together behind the policy of state economic support for newly developed Turkish manufacturing and the export of military supplies.

The reinvigorated war against the Kurds, together with military ventures into Syria and Iraq, required hugely increased spending. The programme of reforms within the military after the coup attempt also required substantial sums. So long as easy credit was available, such spending was viable. However, as the quantitative easing policy gradually ended, the resulting squeeze started to have an impact on state finances.

Despite all that, the government maintained its plans to accelerate growth through public construction and prestige projects, and the effects of the increasing pressure on the lira started to be felt at the beginning of 2017. Erdoğan and co delayed any corrective action, as it went against their Islamist-nationalist dogma and, more importantly, they desperately needed increased spending if they were to win the 2018 election. All this provides the background to the current crisis.

Despite the increased spending and bribes distributed to left and right, the AKP was only able to obtain a majority in parliament with support from the MHP (Nationalist Action Party) - the mainstay of racist nationalism. Erdoğan was 'elected' president, thanks to the overwhelming weight of state institutions.

But now the much anticipated currency crisis has hit home. However, thanks to Islamist pressure, the government has not felt able to talk about the need for a hike in interest rates. Even the Association of Turkish Businessmen and Industrialists, in a recent press release citing their demands, did not openly mention the question.

Having developed under the protection of the state, Turkish finance capital feels unable to speak plainly. It must remain timid and submissive to the whims of Erdoğan - until, that is, some upheaval topples him and all his entourage. I intend to discuss that possibility in a future article ●

## REVIEW

# Past misdemeanours

Simon Hannah *A party with socialists in it: a history of the Labour left* Pluto Press, 2018, pp288, £12.99

Simon Hannah's book on the history of the Labour left is an enjoyable and well-written work that makes the author a rare commodity in the Labour Party. Very few of the activist generation around the organisation since the beginning of Jeremy Corbyn's ascension in summer 2015 (whether they be refugees from the far left, reactivated Labour lefts or political virgins) have been willing to interrogate their history seriously. True, shadow chancellor John McDonnell does offer a foreword, but barely manages to wheeze through a selection of airy platitudes.

Having said that, there are some huge problems with this book. This is due to the remnants of a corrosive culture on the far left, where periods of history are mined in a utilitarian manner as signposts to the future. This is formulated by Hannah in the following manner: "Given the nature of contemporary events [in the Labour Party], it is also a history that is being lived in relation to a future that is not yet determined" (pxiv). The alternative is to think seriously about the specific character of historical periods, actors and forces, which does at least offer the historian a chance to work out what has been transcended and preserved for the future. Hannah does grope towards this method when he says that the 2017 Labour Party manifesto, *For the many not the few*, was a "fully costed, tax-and-spend manifesto depicting a return to a mixed economy and a more equitable form of capitalism - in short, Keynesianism" (p234). Indeed, the rhetoric around an alternative vision of society in the form of a version of socialism traditional to the Labour left - and, indeed, promoted by the party when it has been controlled by the Labour right in years gone by - has been largely absent from the Corbyn leadership. However, despite the fact that it is transparently obvious that the Labour left down the years has had qualitatively different characteristics in different periods, Hannah still manages to lump them all together.

The author says that he approaches "the dynamic at the core of the left-right division in terms of a struggle between *transformative* and *integrative* tendencies. It is an account of those who have fought for Labour to adopt a transformative agenda, through far-reaching economic, social, constitutional and political changes that challenge the existing power relations in society" (pxiv). Therefore, we end up with an absurd method, whereby the communist-organised left in the Labour Party in the 1920s can be partially equated with the modern Labour left around Momentum. Of course, such a methodology ultimately ends up as a consolatory sop to the current Labour left, which does not like being confronted by the actual moderation underneath its radical veneer.

Neither does this schema work in assessing the historical left-right division in Labour. Whatever its assorted faults (and Hannah thankfully does not subscribe to the *Spirit of 45* mythology of recent years), the administration of Clement Attlee was surely at least partly transformative by Hannah's definition; similarly, as suggested before, the Labour Party as a whole has had a transformative ideology for parts of its history.

## CPGB-lite

This methodological error has a major consequence for Hannah's narrative, in that his history can be characterised as 'CPGB-lite', given that the old Communist Party of Great Britain,



**Influence of CPGB on Labour left should not be underestimated**

particularly before World War II, was a major organiser and inspiration of the Labour left. (Even Corbyn's strategy is fundamentally a version of the CPGB's old *British road to socialism*.) Lumped into Hannah's transformative/integrative schema - and negotiating the perils of an over-reliance on secondary literature - we perceive very little of the specific contours of the CPGB-organised left. This makes for a succession of misunderstandings and omissions.

Therefore, when Hannah turns his attention to the National Left Wing Movement (NLWM), set up by the CPGB in 1925-26 to pull the Labour rank and file towards communist politics and, by that token, to build a mass Communist Party, its contours seem dictated by the soft Labour left of this period. Hannah says: "... the NLWM argued that it was not an alternative to Labour, and was trying to be supportive, but it wanted to move the party 'nearer to the heart's desire of the rank and file'" (pp41-42). It would be more correct to state that such views were those of the CPGB 'right' - usually those who had previously been members of the British Socialist Party (and thus members of the Labour Party) prior to the CPGB's foundation.

It was this trend (best represented by the group of Bethnal Green Communists led by councillor Joe Vaughan that initially founded the forerunner of the NLWM in London) that tended to become what is best expressed as communist-Labour activists (the MP, Shapurji Saklatvala, was also part of this trend). These were CPGB/Labour Party members (often with significant local support in their Constituency Labour Parties, trades councils and communities) who exhibited a definite loyalty to Labour and tended to express it through ideas of returning Labour to the legacy of Keir Hardie, rank-and-file control of Labour governments and so on.

But this was not what the NLWM was set up to achieve. The talk in 1925 in CPGB circles was the need to 'crystallise' the Labour left in the direction of a mass Communist Party; and that the communist-influenced left should organise itself for defence against looming expulsions and disaffiliations. Hannah recognises this last point, but not the political reason behind it: that soft Labour left 'stars' such as George Lansbury were not going to help protect the communists inside the Labour Party. Hannah thus moulds the contours of the NLWM to its right, so that it can be inserted into his broader trajectory of

'transformative' Labour left projects. Neither the *Sunday Worker*, the mass-circulation paper established by the CPGB in March 1925, nor the NLWM were conceived of as 'broad left', as we might understand it today; and the actions of Vaughan and others who did display a degree of organic loyalty to the Labour Party were always suspicious to sections of the CPGB.

Further problems arise when Hannah discusses the end of the NLWM. His narrative simply reproduces the standard Trotskyist interpretation that the NLWM was closed down by the CPGB in 1929 because of Comintern's third period, which saw it take a more hostile attitude to social democratic parties such as the Labour Party, in some cases dubbing them as 'social-fascists'. This does not stand up to investigation. The NLWM had been defeated by the campaign of the Labour Party leadership in 1926-28 to disaffiliate its local bodies that refused to expel communists. This changed the NLWM from a body working to influence Labour members to one that attempted to sustain local parties external to the official Labour host. In any case, the NLWM was a shambolic organisation that was not a truly national one beyond London, Birmingham, Manchester and parts of south Wales. Also, the CPGB's leadership and Comintern argued for the continuation of the NLWM before the CPGB's 10th congress in January 1929. Far from the *Sunday Worker* "suddenly" declaring the closure of the NLWM, as Hannah suggests (p43), the CPGB's congress voted down the leadership's preference to keep the organisation going and the National Left Wing Committee followed suit in March.

Again, there is another sleight of hand in Hannah's analysis that subtly shifts the NLWM to the political right. In discussing the third-period line that developed in the Comintern and the CPGB, he says: "The Labour left were considered even worse [than the Labour Party in general], since like a Pied Piper they lulled radical workers into the orbit of fascistic social democracy" (p43). Leaving aside the equation of social democrats with fascists (a lurid fantasy of Comintern's), this notion of the Labour left being Pied Pipers leading radical workers down blind alleys was common to all sections of the CPGB from at least 1925 (ie, long before the third period) after the soft Labour left failed to support its members fighting expulsion or disaffiliation. In some senses, Lansbury and company were even worse than the Labour right:

effectively resigning the Labour Party to the departure of communists, while retaining the badge of 'socialist' and 'left'.

## Icon?

Talking of Lansbury, who eventually became an ineffectual leader of the Labour Party in 1932, there has been a certain move among Alliance for Workers' Liberty supporters to claim Lansbury as a positive icon for the left (mostly through Janine Booth, also notable as the second-worst poet in the AWL).

Unfortunately, Hannah also feeds into some of this mythology. He is an enthusiast for the local politics of 'Poplarism', where mayor Lansbury attempted to divert precepts for the Metropolitan Police and the London County Council into relief programmes for the poor. Such local activism is to the liking of the author, who sees it as an example of vague 'transformative' leftism, adding that "radical struggles like Lansbury's" encouraged people "to flock to Labour" (p26).

This is a significant misreading. The CPGB's Rajani Palme Dutt talked in 1925 of this localist phenomenon:

The leftwing forces [in the Labour Party], however strong separately and locally, have not yet been able to unite in a common bloc or on a common programme. The various groups, tendencies, movements ... are all dispersed. They have no common programme, and not the most rudimentary form of common organisation. In consequence the right wing is able to maintain its power.

In other words, the conduct of these apparently 'transformative' struggles led to the demobilisation of the Labour left. Because Lansbury, along with other Labour left 'stars', refused to defend the CPGB and join the NLWM (Lansbury had previously informed the Greater London Left Wing in June 1926 that, "while he would continue to fight for socialism in the Labour Party, he would abide by 'majority decisions' on the question of communist expulsion"; in other words, he would not fight against it), this disorganised the left nationally and locally.

In 1928, Vaughan looked back on the struggle that Bethnal Green communist-Labour councillors had undertaken to preserve a commitment to a £4 minimum wage in the borough:

At the beginning of the struggle there were associated with us a number of other borough

councils: Woolwich, Bermondsey, Shoreditch, Stepney, Poplar, etc. One by one, as the struggle became more fierce, they have deserted us, and now we find ourselves left alone in the struggle.

What Dutt had sketched out in 1925 had come to pass: an inability to unite on a national level had weakened the NLWM, isolated local struggles and reproduced the domination of the Labour right. Lansbury, who effectively made himself a prisoner of the Labour right in the 1920s (as chairman of the Labour Party he also presided over the disaffiliation of NLWM-supporting local Labour parties in Birmingham, reneging on earlier support for communists such as Dr Robert Dunstan), cannot seriously be judged as a 'transformative' character who upset existing power relations, when his actions are judged contextually against those of the NLWM and the campaign of disaffiliation waged by the right.

## Cul-de-sac

Hannah also inexplicably (since it has appeared in secondary literature, albeit in garbled forms) leaves out the major entry operation that the CPGB/Young Communist League carried out in the Labour League of Youth and the Labour Party from 1934, which ended up with the YCL controlling the LLOY.

The CPGB entered the Labour Party, under the direction of Comintern, in significant numbers (an average of 10% of the membership in the CPGB's main areas) in a largely secretive operation to pull the Labour Party towards the politics of the popular front and, hence, into the orbit of the Soviet Union. Many of these cadres were unceremoniously yanked out of the Labour Party in 1939-40 and presented as new recruits to the CPGB, parroting various Stalinist dogmas. But, while such opposition was certainly subversive (at least as far as the Labour right was concerned), it also does not fit within Hannah's abstract transformative/integrative schema. Indeed, it is difficult to see it as anything other than a conservative enterprise, given that it involved CPGB members clothing themselves in rhetoric sometimes to the right of traditional Labourism, which flipped over into a sectarian wrecking operation.

So, while I would assess that Hannah has made a useful contribution in trying to draw out some of the lessons of the Labour left's history, its misunderstanding of the CPGB is a grievous flaw, particularly in the era of the 1920s and 1930s, when communists were active inside Labour. Hannah's transformative/integrative schema needs to be overthrown, so that the various Labour left oppositions can be more concretely assessed in terms of their specific dynamics and in relation to their opponents of the time. Only then can we truly make judgements as to what is living in such history and what is dead.

However, this vague idea of 'transformative' leftism, which is, at root, an attempt to evade political principles in the cause of being able to bathe in the miserable Keynesian platitudes of the Corbynistas. This leaves Hannah in a cul-de-sac of his own making ●

Lawrence Parker

Lawrence Parker is author of *Communists and Labour - the National Left Wing Movement 1925-1929*, available from lulu.com.

# COMMUNIST UNIVERSITY

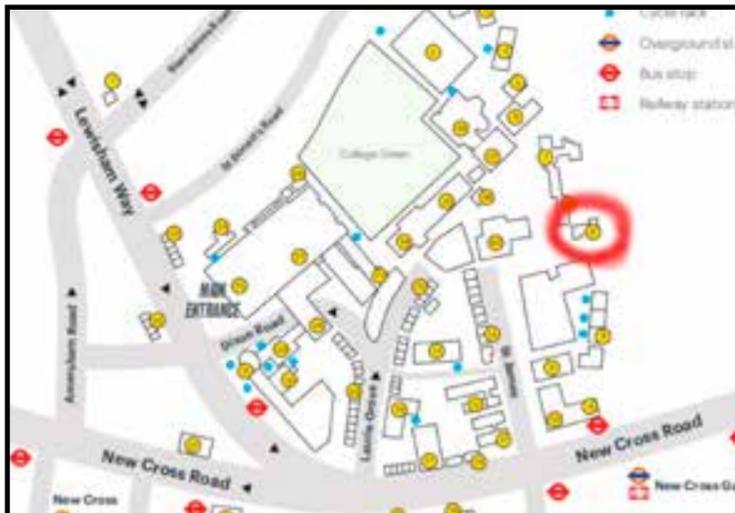
## Who is speaking and when

**C**ommunist University is the annual summer school of the Communist Party of Great Britain and is jointly sponsored by Labour Party Marxists. CU is different from the run-of-the-mill schools put on by other left groups, in that plenty of time is allocated for contributions from the floor. Controversial debate is positively welcomed and, needless to say, there are no one-minute time limits. Moreover, critical thinking is encouraged, as can be seen by our impressive list of speakers.

**Marcel Van der Linden:** Senior researcher at the Institute of Social History in Amsterdam and a member of the editorial board of the *Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA). Renowned for his global approach to working class history, he has written many important books, including *Workers of the world: essays toward a global labor history* (Leiden 2008) and *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union: a survey of critical theories and debates since 1917* (Chicago 2009).

**Moshé Machover:** Born in Tel Aviv in 1936, he has been active in and written extensively on Middle Eastern politics. In 1962 he co-founded the Israeli Socialist Organisation, Matzpen. He was a lecturer in mathematics at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and, having moved to London in 1968, he was reader in mathematical logic at King's College London and then professor of philosophy at the University of London. Together with Shimon Tzabar and others, comrade Machover established the Israeli Revolutionary Action Committee Abroad. In 2017 he was summarily expelled from the Labour Party on false charges of 'anti-Semitism', but was rapidly reinstated following a groundswell of support within the party.

**Hillel Ticktin:** He is emeritus professor of Marxist studies at the University of Glasgow and edited the journal *Critique* for 34 years.



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Originating as a journal of Soviet studies, *Critique's* initial aim was to analyse the empirical reality of Stalinism. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union it has become a more general journal of socialist theory. Comrade Ticktin's articles have featured regularly in the *Weekly Worker*.

**Yassamine Mather:** Acting editor of *Critique*, she is an Iranian socialist who joined the Fedayeen Minority. She worked in Kurdistan, becoming editor of the organisation's student monthly journal *Jahan*. She was on the coordinating committee of Workers Left Unity Iran and has been a central figure in Hands Off the People of Iran. At Glasgow University she was deputy director of the Centre for the Study of Socialist Theory and Movements.

**Chris Knight:** Research fellow at the department of anthropology, University College London, his books include *Blood relations: menstruation and the origins of culture* (Yale 1991). He has developed a ground-breaking theory of human culture. He regularly contributes to the *Weekly Worker*.

**Camilla Power:** A social anthropologist and senior lecturer at the University of East London, she combines Darwinian and behavioural ecology with hunter-gatherer ethnography. Her fieldwork has been with Hadza hunter-gatherers in Tanzania, where she researched gender ritual.

**Michael Roberts:** Working in the City of London as an economist, he has closely observed the machinations of the global financial system from the dragon's den. He regularly discusses this from a Marxist perspective on his blog, *The next recession* (<https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com>).

**Tony Greenstein:** A political activist for all his adult life. His main areas of work have been Palestine solidarity, anti-racism and anti-fascism. Tony is a founding member of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods. Expelled from the Labour Party as a result of the rightwing 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' campaign, he has recently authored *A history of fighting fascism in Brighton and the south coast*. Another regular *Weekly Worker* contributor,

he also features in *The essentials of philosophy and ethics* (London 2006).

**Lawrence Parker:** Author of *The kick inside: revolutionary opposition in the CPGB, 1945-1991* (2007), he specialises in the history of the 'official' CPGB. His latest work, *Communists and Labour: the National Left Wing Movement 1925-1929*, has just been published.

**Jack Conrad:** The founding editor of *The Leninist*, first published in November 1981, he is also a long-standing member of the CPGB Provisional Central Committee. He has contributed numerous articles to the *Weekly Worker* and written a number of books and pamphlets - the latest being the second edition of *Fantastic reality*, a study of Marxism and the politics of religion.

**Mike Macnair:** A member of the CPGB's PCC and author of *Revolutionary strategy* (London 2008), he is currently working on a second edition. Based at the University of Oxford, his political speciality is Marxist theory, its application to understanding law as a social and historical phenomenon, and the 'limits of law'.

**Anne McShane:** Has a long history of involvement in the workers' movement, both in Britain and Ireland. She has stood in a number of elections in Britain, for the CPGB and the Socialist Alliance. Today she is active in Cork, where she continues to struggle for a united revolutionary party in Ireland.

**Peter Manson:** Editor of the *Weekly Worker* and member of the PCC, he has, as a regular visitor to South Africa, specialised in his own articles on the struggles of the working class in that country - in particular, on the South African Communist Party.

**James Harvey:** A Labour Party activist and supporter of Labour Party Marxists, he takes a particular interest in Irish politics. He has written several articles on the current situation in Ireland for the *Weekly Worker*, amongst other important topics ●

### Timetable

	10am-12.30pm	2pm-4.15pm	4.45pm-7pm
<b>Saturday August 18</b>	Registration and access from 12.30pm	Trump, Brexit, Corbyn and communist strategy <b>Jack Conrad</b>	The global crisis of the labour movement <b>Marcel Van der Linden</b>
<b>Sunday August 19</b>	The relevance of Marx's economic theories today <b>Michael Roberts</b>	The Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe (MEGA): a progress report <b>Marcel van der Linden</b>	The first five-year plan and Soviet women <b>Anne McShane</b>
<b>Monday August 20</b>	Gender equality made us human <b>Camilla Power</b>	Through what stage are we passing? <b>Hillel Ticktin</b>	Communists and Labour - the National Left Wing Movement 1925-1929 <b>Lawrence Parker</b>
<b>Tuesday August 21</b>	Russia and the west: what is going on? <b>Hillel Ticktin</b>	Twenty years since the Good Friday Agreement <b>James Harvey</b>	How to lose a debate with Noam Chomsky <b>Chris Knight</b>
<b>Wednesday August 22</b>	Labour theory of value for the 21st century <b>Moshé Machover</b>	Trump and the Middle East <b>Yassamine Mather</b>	The dead end of intersectionality <b>Mike Macnair</b>
<b>Thursday August 23</b>	Populism, nationalism and the new/old politics in Europe <b>James Harvey</b>	Velimir Khlebnikov: prophet and poet of the Russian Revolution <b>Chris Knight</b>	The slow coup against Jeremy Corbyn <b>Tony Greenstein</b>
<b>Friday August 24</b>	South Africa: what next for the SACP? <b>Peter Manson</b>	The Tory interpretation of history <b>Mike Macnair</b>	The new Israeli basic law, 'Nation-state of the Jewish people', and its unintended effects on the US Jewish community <b>Moshé Machover</b>
<b>Saturday August 25</b>	Quantum computing <b>Yassamine Mather</b>	The place of the Soviet Union in history <b>Jack Conrad</b>	3.30pm-4pm Evaluation of Communist University

## What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# weekly worker

**Tory right  
readies its  
challenge to  
May**

## Boris rolls the dice

Boris Johnson's burqa article is not a gaffe, but a political gamble, argues Paul Demarty

Two great dangers await the commentator on the fringes of official politics.

In the one case, we impute to our adversaries superhuman competence - they see everything coming in advance, and apparent setbacks are no more than the chess player's advantageous sacrifice of the occasional pawn. The other is the direct opposite. Our enemies are idiots, perpetually at war amongst themselves, committing the most egregious blunders, and ripe to be toppled, with just one last push, comrades...

Though both are salient, the latter danger is very much the greater, as we turn to Boris Johnson's latest tilt at the headlines. There is certainly the opinion available that what has happened with Boris and his column on the niqab is an uncontrolled reflex of the public school racism that has gotten him into the liberal firing line before, and made his brief career at the foreign office so very... eventful.

In truth, Boris is a rather cannier operator than that. He is not a Donald Trump, firing off tweets faster than his beleaguered staff can explain them away. The niqab episode must be placed in the context of the Tory Party's crisis, the global crisis of neoliberal political legitimacy, and - of course - the man's irrepressible ambitions.

We should begin with a closer look at Johnson's *Sunday Telegraph* article (August 5). It is written in the bluffly humorous manner which preponderates in his journalism, addressing the recent decision of the Danish parliament to ban the burqa and niqab in public places, following several other examples. He teases the Danes for their free-spiritedness - skinny-dipping in the North Sea, permitting large-scale squats in Copenhagen, putting two fingers up to the Maastricht treaty, and so on - and commends that "spirit of liberty" to them, declaring the ban wrongheaded.

It is acceptable to forbid, as Jack Straw famously did, women from wearing the niqab in constituency surgeries, and for teachers and the like. Putting away his Tacitus for a moment, Boris informs us that he was unable to find any scriptural justification for these garments in the *Koran*. But just random women in public? Surely it is no worse than Sofie Gråbøl's sweaters in *The Killing*...

What does it matter that such women are dressed up like letterboxes, or even bank robbers? Telling them not to will amount to much the same as telling your teenage daughter not to get such ostentatious piercings - it will only "stiffen resistance". Far better to tolerate such forms of dress, so far as coercion is not involved, until they go away of their own accord.

On the face of it, this is hardly the stuff of Tommy Robinson. It is a sustained, well-ordered defence of freedom in religious dress (within certain limits...). And so the whole thing looks, equally, like a cock-up - a few glib comments have alienated the very people he presumably meant to court.

Something just does not add up, however. Johnson is not some naive scribbler, but a journalist going back some two or three decades. He chooses his words, and must have expected somebody to take offence at some of his article. Indeed, we detect the signs of a defence laid out well in advance. *You're an Islamophobe!* 'Do I not oppose the burqa ban?' *You mock Islamic dress!* 'And silly piercings, and Danish knitwear - can't you take a joke?'

This is the practice known among internet intersectionalists as 'gaslighting', after the 1944 film *Gaslight*, in which a husband plays subtle tricks on his wife's mind in order to drive her mad. Eventually the victim will lash out, even if the immediate proximate cause seems hardly to deserve such drama. So it proved: a storm of criticism followed. Liberal media outlets excoriated him. He was shopped into the Tories' disciplinary committee, where he will be investigated, on pain of suspension or - worse - diversity awareness training. The Muslim Council of Britain, the largest and most 'official' lobby group for British Muslims, accused Johnson of using "far-right memes" and claimed that a spate of attacks on 'visibly Muslim' women had followed his article.

### Response

We must assume that Johnson has gotten exactly the response he wanted, from imams and snowflakes alike. He has responded to the furore not with the enraged defensiveness of somebody surprised by a negative reaction, nor with the grovelling apologies we have come - alas! - to associate with the Labour front bench. Radio silence is carefully maintained. This, too, is clever; for there is no shortage of white knights waiting to ride to fair Boris's rescue.

Some are relatively innocuous: Rowan Atkinson - who made a stirring attack on the Religious Hatred Bill in 2005, in defence of the comedian's right to mock and pillory without legislative restraint - has popped up on largely the same lines now. Fair enough - except that Boris is not a comedian, nor even strictly a journalist, but a politician, for whom standards are surely different.

More significant - and typical - are the backbench Tory voices demanding that the investigation into Boris's comments is abandoned forthwith



Symbolic target

and decrying, once more, the "liberal thought police". Jacob Rees-Mogg, to nobody's surprise, is leading the charge again. Firmly in that corner, also, is the gutter press - *The Sun* will die for the right to make puerile jibes at the funny clothes of any ethnic minority you like, while the *Daily Mail* printed a full two pages of readers' letters in defence of the beleaguered toff.

This leaves Theresa May in something of a pickle - as usual. She cannot very well not censure Boris for his misdemeanour, with a host of grandees demanding his head and her own history of bringing the Tories on board with the modern official doctrines of diversity, equality of opportunity and so on. It would also be, on the face of it, *ultra vires* - it is not the leader's job to conduct disciplinary hearings, or dispense with them. Yet, if Boris is expelled or suspended, there will be quite an uproar. There are clearly a good number of Tories prepared to die on that particular hill. If he is forced to go to diversity training, he has indicated he will refuse... which gets us to the same showdown by a different route. There is no guarantee that May will be able to stand in his way.

There are also, naturally, friends to be found further afield. Gareth Bennett, Ukip's leader in the Welsh assembly, took the opportunity to pile in on the awfulness of seeing women in niqabs - "It feels like I'm in Saudi Arabia" - and looked forward to the end of "these apparitions, which seem

to be of some kind of pre-medieval culture" (no mean feat for a religion not founded until the middle ages...). More ominously for a tetchy establishment overly in love with its bogeymen is the appearance - right on cue - of American alt-right blowhard Steve Bannon to voice his support and echo the comments of his erstwhile boss, Donald Trump, to the effect that Johnson would make a fine prime minister. As the far right of the early 20th century viewed the Jew - pulling the world's strings for his own inscrutable purposes - so does the political class seem to view Bannon, country after country falling into his clammy palms.

The power thereby imputed to this charlatan is illusory, but the phenomenon thus 'explained' is certainly not. This is the second layer to Johnson's little gambit. This most opportunistic of politicians is quite aware of the rise of the far right in many countries - international chauvinism, you might call it - and of his own role in the British episode of the drama. Though in reality a fairly run-of-the-mill, Thatcherite careerist, he is excluded from taking up with Tory moderates by the times - some people have populism thrust upon them. Playing the snowflake-baiting hard-Brexiteer is the best chance he has to destabilise May's government and thereby - perhaps - replace her in number 10.

We are perhaps teetering on the brink of our other danger - of imputing

diabolical genius to the honourable member for Uxbridge. Indeed, this was not guaranteed to work - it might have triggered no more censure than, say, the Rudyard Kipling incident, which blew over within days, in spite of potentially greater consequences. In the event, the silly season has catapulted Boris to the front pages, and reminded us all that Boris, unsackable from the cabinet he resigned from, is now probably unexpellable from the party he continues to represent in parliament.

Watching this whole thing has been a rather depressing business. There cannot have been so many political scandals that have been about as little as this one. A couple of snide, childish sentences in Johnson's article are really something we on the left, at least, should have learned to keep in perspective (there is little enough of substance to actually disagree with in the piece - except the idea that MPs ought to be able to demand their constituents change their dress in order to talk to them, which smacks, as it did in Jack Straw's day, of careerist entitlement). Even the MCB's allegations of increased attacks - probably true - are not really caused by Johnson's comments, but are a poisonous result of the imperialist war on terror and its grimmer consequences (mass war deaths, displacement of populations, 'blowback' attacks in the west, etc).

So if Johnson is ejected from the Tory benches by this disciplinary investigation, are we really to suppose that this will improve the position of Muslim women in this country one iota? All that is at issue is Johnson's cheap career - and he should be denounced for exactly this emptiness, the shabby mind games in service only to the quest of adding one more buffoonish leader with absurd hair to the world stage.

The only further significance of it all is that it reinforces the picture of a world spiralling downwards; in the battle between right-on (neo-)liberals and the overtly national chauvinist right, there is no doubt who is winning, and the left is wholly disarmed by its effective unity with the former in these synthetic controversies. Nothing less is at risk than a fresh slide into barbarism. Averting that sort of catastrophe will mean something other than repeating, endlessly, the same mistakes ●

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