

weekly
worker



Keynesianism is no alternative, says Michael Roberts: Labour take note

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Liverpool conference

THERE ARE BIG BARRIERS TO OVERCOME



LETTERS



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

Responsibility

Mike Macnair made a curious (and personal) comment when he stated: "the fall of the (socialist) regimes (of the USSR and central and eastern Europe) ... should stand as a clear rebuke to 'official' communists like Andrew Northall ... who fail to see that 'official' communists ... have to take responsibility for the utter demoralisation of Soviet and eastern European workers ... and their inability to even contemplate resistance to the restoration of capitalism" ('Irrational optimism', July 12).

On the contrary, 'official' communists like myself never had the slightest difficulty in accepting our fair share of the responsibility for what happened; it is written into successive Communist Party congress resolutions and into the party's programme.

The great majority of 'official' communists agree that the models of socialism which developed in the USSR and were imposed in the socialist countries of central and eastern Europe were authoritarian, top-down, 'command and administer' systems of government, economy and society, and badly lacked democracy in the fullest sense of genuine mass working people's participation and control over those governments, economies and societies.

We understand and accept the reasons how and why socialism developed in the Soviet Union under conditions of extreme internal and external class struggles, triumphing and becoming dominant following mass collectivisation and rapid industrialisation in the late 1920s and early 30s.

There is some debate as to whether by the 17th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1934, socialism had become so dominant that the Soviet Union could have then entered a period of calm, consolidation and democratisation.

That was essentially the line of the young, dynamic and extremely popular Leningrad party leader, SM Kirov, and supported by other key leaders, such as Ordzhonikidze, Kuibyshev, Kossior and Kalinin. Totally supportive of the line, progress and achievements to date. Stalin, with only the real support of Kaganovich and Yezhov, backed more radical action and an "intensification of the class struggle" and more repressive measures. The first line appeared to have obtained majority support at the 17th Congress, and Stalin was subsequently demoted from general secretary to be one of four secretaries to the new central committee.

Some speculate that the assassination of Kirov at the end of 1934 and the subsequent Great Purge, which included the shocking execution of a majority of delegates to that congress, was a working out of this central division within the Communist Party.

In contrast, Slava Katamidze in his book *Loyal comrades, ruthless killers* (pp52-53) points to a really massive international and internal conspiracy against the Soviet regime, to which the Great Purge was a devastatingly effective response. He violently objects to describing the victims of the Great Purge as "innocent", as that "insults their memory and their massive underground movement ... which believed that the Soviet regime could only be overthrown by violent means." "Anti-communists over a wide spectrum, including the left and right oppositions, generals

dreaming of power, technocrats, engineers and other professionals, had created shadowy and deadly effective sabotage organisations, were all starting to act in concert to overthrow the Bolshevik regime by force."

I think there are elements of truth in the first version and also that the second was clearly the case, but would add, 'massively supported, stimulated, directed and supplied by Nazi Germany and militarist Japan'. I am not sure the Soviet regime had any real alternative but to root out and systematically destroy this massive, coordinated subversion and conspiracy. Around one and half million were arrested and detained, up to 800,000 were shot. Note: not tens of millions.

Modern-day adherents of Trotsky really do have to reflect on his accommodation in the United States and his supporters working closely with Nazi, fascist and terrorist groupings to attack and subvert the Soviet Union, with a view to its violent overthrow, and its replacement by a pro-capitalist, pro-western 'coalition government'.

The "results of World War II" (to use a post-war Soviet phrase) meant that the feudal, capitalist and in some cases fascist regimes in central and eastern Europe had been smashed and were under Red Army domination.

It was obvious that the USSR would use these countries as a *cordon sanitaire* to protect the Soviet motherland from future existential threats, as represented by Nazism, fascism and capitalism.

Stalin and the Soviets were initially extremely open as to the nature of the regimes they wished to see. The 'people's democracy' concept provided a genuine opportunity for pluralistic, democratic, participatory models for progressive social and economic advance in these countries. Martin Myant has discussed this in careful and thoughtful detail in his *Socialism and democracy in Czechoslovakia 1945-48* and *The crisis of Polish socialism*, as has also Donald Sassoon in his *The strategy of the Italian Communist Party*.

There was, of course, Churchill's 'iron curtain' speech and the Truman administration, with its aggressive policies, was extremely keen to use its then nuclear monopoly to threaten the Soviet Union with total extermination, having tested out its new nuclear weaponry on Japan. Genuinely popular communist parties in Italy and France - which had played absolutely key roles in the resistance to Nazi and fascist occupations - were systematically blackmailed out of government.

The inevitable reaction, response and consequences in central and eastern Europe was a tightening of the communist-influenced regimes there - specifically to resist massive subversions being attempted by the US and British powers. This resulted in what became the authoritarian regimes which lasted until 1989, what I would call the national security states. The astounding recovery of the Soviet economy after the war could only have been achieved through its underlying basic socialist character and the fact the masses believed they had a real commitment and stake in it.

Monty Johnstone in his 'Back in the USSR' article in the March 1985 *Marxism Today* quoted Isaac Deutscher (Trotsky's supportive biographer) and was so right to say:

"Stalinism had been undermined by its very success in carrying through a major industrial and cultural revolution. The needs and aspirations of a great industrial state with an

expanding planned economy, an increasingly educated population and an avowed commitment to Marxism conflicted with despotism, arbitrary mass terror and the 'primitive magic' of Stalinist ideology.

"Deutscher's prediction ... that this would set in motion a process of deStalinisation was amply borne out in the period from 1953, with the restoration of socialist legality, the dismantling of the apparatus of terror and the return of vast numbers of political prisoners from Stalin's labour camps. It also involved the replacement of Stalin's one-man rule by a collective leadership, which showed itself more responsive to the needs of the people."

In my opinion, the policies set out by the 20th, 21st and 22nd congresses of the CPSU - and specifically in the 1961 party programme - set out the economic, social and democratic basis for moving decisively to the next stage: "creating the material and technical basis of communism".

We all know that, unfortunately, Khrushchev was removed from office in 1964. We know the reasons for that and the fact that the new Brezhnev-Podgorny-Kosygin leadership were essentially from the Khrushchev faction or tradition (as opposed to any residual Stalinist groupings), but were specifically keen to impose greater calm, stability and consolidation in the party and in the country. Good in themselves, but ultimately at the expense of the required pace and scale of progress set out in 1961.

The objectives and targets of the 1961 programme were not systematically implemented. The Soviet Union was characterised as "fully developed socialism" - true in a basic sense - but that led to complacency and of the need to constantly revolutionise and transform the economy and society.

The achievement of strategic nuclear and military parity by the USSR with western imperialism in the mid-1970s offered perhaps a final opportunity to consolidate and structurally reform the existing models of socialism, but this was not taken up. There were interesting rumours in the western press that Brezhnev might have been replaced by Yuri Andropov at the 1976 party congress, but an unexpectedly energetic performance by Brezhnev apparently put paid to that.

Despite the "period of stagnation", the 1977 USSR constitution did specifically recognise and support emerging forms and the gradual evolution towards new forms of communist, public self-government, which would ultimately replace the formal coercive aspects of the state apparatus.

If Andropov had been elected general secretary in 1976 rather than 1982, would that have made a major difference? I don't agree with the central thesis of Keenan and Kenny in their *Socialism betrayed* that the "Andropov programme" provided a genuinely viable option for Soviet socialism. I think the Andropov reforms created something of a "dead cat's bounce", but not the genuinely transformative programme required.

However, I do think Andropov was genuinely interested in identifying and promoting new talent and in rejuvenating the party machine and leadership. If he had assumed the general secretaryship in 1976, one might reasonably have expected there would have been a wider, newer, younger cohort of leadership material to choose from if and when he had to stand down, as opposed to between simply Gorbachev, Grishin or Romanov in 1985.

I vividly recall how I was shocked and appalled by the rolling collapse of socialism in eastern Europe in 1989. I thought at first this may be a move from the old 'command and administer' model of socialism to more democratic, pluralistic, participatory ones. I thought the mass resignations of government and party leaderships was a front behind which 'second 11' leaders would take over. After the first number of months, I thought that it was clear I was wrong. Subsequently, and especially with the example of Romania, I wondered if I was right after all.

In conclusion, comrade Macnair, 'official' communists have never had any difficulty whatsoever in taking responsibility, learning hard lessons and reflecting them in our current political practice. Yes, we did (and do) regard the ruling communist parties in the USSR and in central and eastern Europe as our brothers and sisters in class struggle.

We never have any difficulty in identifying with ruling parties which presided over economies and societies with zero unemployment, universal and high levels of healthcare, education and welfare provision, and which helped create highly advanced, cultured and internationalist-minded populations.

Our position is clear, straightforward and principled. We, of course, recognised and supported the regimes of the USSR and eastern Europe as socialist. We were equally clear that our vision of socialism for Britain was always fundamentally democratic, emancipatory, participatory and pluralistic. We will almost certainly achieve socialism through different paths and those will themselves influence the content and nature of socialism in Britain.

Andrew Northall

Kettering

IHRA misuse

Free speech on Palestine is under attack. The director of public affairs of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and Labour Party member Philip Rosenberg is attempting to use his position of influence to ban a public meeting organised by London Revolutionary Communist Group and *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* in support of the Palestinian people. This follows the recent adoption by the Labour Party of the full International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of anti-Semitism.

The meeting - entitled 'Labour, Corbyn and anti-Semitism: why is solidarity with Palestine under attack?' - is scheduled to take place at Chadswell Healthy Living Centre, near King's Cross. The venue is a community centre we have used many times before, run by the King's Cross Brunswick Neighbourhood Association (KCBNA), and was booked for Friday September 21 several weeks in advance. Just three days before the meeting was due to take place, the RCG received a call from the chief executive of the KCBNA, Nasim Ali, who is also Labour councillor for Regents Park and former mayor of Camden. Mr Ali explained that Phillip Rosenberg, who is a member of Hampstead and Kilburn Labour Party and former Labour councillor, as well as a leader of the Board of Deputies, had contacted the KCBNA to claim, without any evidence, that our meeting will be anti-Semitic and must be cancelled. Rosenberg warned that he would be launching a campaign calling on all members and supporters of the Board of Deputies to call and email the KCBNA to complain about the meeting. The association is considering cancelling it.

This move, if it goes ahead, would have no basis in the KCBNA's policy documentation, and assumes that attendees of the meeting would be guilty of being anti-Semitic without evidence. Our meeting carries an explicitly anti-racist message, with promotional materials stating clearly that Zionism is a racist ideology and that the conflation of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism is a deliberate attempt to criminalise support for Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation. The purpose of the public meeting is to discuss openly how we can challenge this conflation and build a movement for Palestine.

The attempt to ban this meeting is a sign of the chilling climate that Palestine supporters now face in Britain, where the main opposition party has relented to pressure from a concerted Zionist campaign of disinformation and smears to end freedom of speech. This is a clear indication of how the IHRA definition will be used: to silence the left, close off public spaces and enforce censorship.

Revolutionary Communist Group email

Venezuela

Recent weeks have seen an intensification of US hostility to Venezuela, with Republican senator Marco Rubio openly calling for US military intervention, the US excluding three Caribbean countries from a visa waiver scheme because of their good relations with Venezuela and it being exposed that US officials secretly met with Venezuelan military officers plotting a coup against the elected president. Meanwhile, secretary-general of the Organization of American States (and long-term supporter of Trump's 'regime change' agenda) Luis Almagro has said that a "military intervention aimed at overthrowing the regime of Nicolás Maduro" should not be "excluded".

But the Trump administration is not getting all its own way on the international stage in terms of gaining support for its agenda, with former Spanish prime minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero joining the growing global chorus of voices against US sanctions, saying that "the intensification of the growth in emigration [from Venezuela] these past months has much to do with the economic sanctions imposed by the US". He has been joined by ex-president of Uruguay José 'Pepe' Mujica, who said the sanctions "only achieve a worsening of conditions for the weakest in society".

Now is the time to get active! As Evo Morales said to Marco Rubio, the US is the real global threat, not Venezuela! You can show your opposition to US sanctions and threats by:

- Signing our petition on the VSC website.
 - Sharing Francisco Dominguez's video on Facebook.
 - Joining the Venezuela Solidarity Campaign/Cuba Solidarity Campaign fringe at Labour conference on Monday at 5.30pm, with speakers including Chris Williamson MP.
 - Chipping in £20 or what you can afford to our special appeal on our website.
 - Joining us at our AGM on October 13 (Unite House, 128 Theobalds Road, London WC1) to discuss how we stand up to Trump's interventions in Latin America, with speakers from Nicaragua, Venezuela, Cuba and more.
- Venezuela Solidarity Campaign email

ZIONISM

United with far right

Tony Greenstein reports on a demonstration against 'anti-Semitism' that brought together the English Defence League and Jewish Labour Movement



Out in Manchester - but not in force

You couldn't make it up. Board of Deputies President Marie Van der Zyl, the Jewish Labour Movement's Louise Ellman MP, chief rabbi Ephraim Mervis and Blairite former home office minister Beverly Hughes - known for her hatred of asylum-seekers - all voiced their support for a demonstration against 'anti-Semitism' in Manchester on September 16. It was organised by a group that is friends of the British far right, including the English Defence League and Football Lads Alliance. Step forward the North West Friends of Israel.

This demonstration had nothing to do with anti-Semitism and everything to do with supporting Israeli apartheid. Those organising it stood squarely behind a racist 'Jewish' supremacist state that bars Palestinians from hundreds of Jewish-only communities.

Should anyone need any reminding, the EDL - formed by Tommy Robinson, aka Stephen Yaxley-Lennon - is an organisation of Islamophobic and racist bigots, which manages to combine support for Israel with Hitler salutes. Tommy Robinson himself is popular with Zionists these days and earlier this year completed a tour of Israel.¹

That North West Friends of Israel welcomed the EDL on its demonstrations is not in dispute.² In its opposition to Palestine solidarity demonstrations outside the Israeli Kedem shop protest in Manchester in 2014, NWFOI worked with the EDL.³ As a report at the time observed, "NWFOI warmly welcome the English Defence League to their demonstrations."⁴ The accompanying commentary by Natan Levinson of NWFOI, explained: "The enemy of my enemy is my friend."

It is probably worth pointing out that these days support for Tommy Robinson and various neo-Nazis extends to the office of the prime minister of Israel. No less than Hananya Naftali, Binyamin Netanyahu's deputy social media advisor, recently tweeted, "Free Tommy Robinson!"⁵ And why, you might ask, shouldn't he? Steve Bannon - another great supporter of Israel and a 24-carat anti-Semite - is

also a supporter of Tommy Robinson. And Netanyahu, as is well known, counts amongst his best friends people like the anti-Semitic prime minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán, and Poland's equally anti-Semitic government.⁶

But it gets worse, much worse. Robert Festenheim of RF Solicitors is also active in NWFOI and Festenheim is a very busy fellow, who formed Jewish Human Rights Watch (JHRW) in 2015.⁷ In case you get the wrong idea, rest assured that it has nothing to do with human rights - and it is not even a Jewish organisation. It just watches over groups that are concerned with human rights, especially Palestinian human rights (which it opposes). Suffice to say, Festenheim works closely with another far-right group, the 'charity', Campaign Against Anti-Semitism (CAA).⁸

JHRW was particularly active a year ago, campaigning with the CAA against Palestine Expo 2017,⁹ a two-day festival of Palestinian culture, politics, art and history held at London's Queen Elizabeth II Centre. JHRW opposed what it termed a "Jew hate event".¹⁰

However, there are some 'Jew-haters' that Festenheim is quite at ease with. Take Tommy Robinson. Festenheim appeared in a promotion film with Robinson about a shopkeeper who had been told by the police to take down an Islamophobic poster.¹¹ Festenheim was pictured laughing and joking with Robinson.

Reports simultaneously emerged of a meeting in Manchester between a dozen members of the local Jewish community and Robinson.¹² A Board of Deputies spokesperson was quoted in the *Jewish Chronicle* as saying: "Tommy Robinson's record of anti-Muslim provocation means that he could never be a partner of a respectable or mainstream Jewish organisation."

Which is, of course, a lie because the Board of Deputies put out a press statement, after Israeli snipers had murdered over 50 unarmed demonstrators in Gaza, supporting the action.¹³ They justified it because they were supposedly supporters of a

Muslim group: ie, Hamas.

The strange thing is that Festenheim represents Prestwich Hebrew Congregation on the Board of Deputies, yet it has taken no action against him. Antony Dennison of NWFOI denied that the organisation had been amongst those meeting with Tommy Robinson, but that is not our understanding. NWFOI is up to its ears in support for Robinson and his new organisation, the Football Lads Alliance.

Antony Dennison of NWFOI is also an interesting character. He is a former solicitor struck off by the high court for having defrauded his former partner. All in all, quite a suitable person to chair this far-right Zionist group.

As I have said, the demonstration called by NWFOI had nothing to do with anti-Semitism and everything to do with support for Israel and opposition to Palestinian rights. The fact that Festenheim and his colleagues do not even recognise the Palestinians as a people should tell you something about their motives.

However, despite all the claims that this was to be a mass demonstration against the evil of anti-Semitism, only a few hundred turned up, while about 250 counter-demonstrators showed up too ●

Notes

1. See www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-israeli-fanboys-boost-a-uk-far-right-anti-muslim-activist-s-campaign-1.6132882.
2. See, for example, www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmCmCt-W4fI.
3. www.haaretz.com/opinion/why-the-u-k-s-neo-nazis-are-posing-with-israeli-flags-1.5439928.
4. <https://bookburnersrus.wordpress.com/north-west-friends-of-israel>.
5. www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/tommy-robinson-arrested-hananya-naftali-israeli-prime-minister-1.464686.
6. www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/netanyahu-orb-n-israel-welcome-hungary-prime-minister-antisemitism-a8454866.html.
7. www.jhrw.com.
8. <https://antisemitism.uk/?s=kaufman>.
9. www.facebook.com/events/1708163192815984.
10. www.jhrw.com/single-post/2017/05/03/PRESS-RELEASE-JHRW-Call-Upon-Queen-Elizabeth-II-Centre-To-Cancel-Jew-Hate-Event.
11. www.youtube.com/watch?v=E17i90ytSWg.
12. www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/tommy-robinson-is-not-my-client-says-manchester-jewish-lawyer-1.440997.
13. www.bod.org.uk/board-of-deputies-reacts-to-violent-scenes-and-loss-of-life-at-israel-gaza-border.

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday September 23, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group: study of August Nimtz's *Lenin's electoral strategy from 1907 to the October Revolution of 1917*. This meeting: 'Legal and illegal work' (continued). Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1.

Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk; and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday September 25, 6.30pm: Series of talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1. This meeting: 'Did matriarchy ever exist?'. Speaker: Chris Knight.

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: <http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

For mandatory reselection

Saturday September 22, 3.30pm: Labour Party conference fringe meeting, Quaker Meeting House, 22 School Lane, Liverpool L1. Speakers include: Paul Mason, Chris Williamson MP and Tosh McDonald (Aslef).

Organised by Labour Open Selection: www.labour-open-selection.org.uk/openselectionfringeevent

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>.

Welcome to Liverpool

Saturday September 22, 6.30pm: Fringe meeting, Friends Meeting House, 22 School Lane, Liverpool L1. Speakers include Diane Abbott MP, Dave Ward (CWU), Mick Whelan (Aslef), Daniel Blaney

Organised by Campaign for Labour Party Democracy: www.clpd.org.uk.

Labour Against the Witchhunt

Sunday September 23, 7pm: Fringe event at Labour Party conference, Roddick Rooms, 54 St James Street, Liverpool L1. Speakers include Chris Williamson MP, Jo Bird (Jewish Voice for Labour), Alexei Sayle, Tony Mulhearn (Liverpool 47). Organised by Labour Against the Witchhunt: www.labouragainstthewitchhunt.org/events.

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.

Briefing for delegates

Monday September 24, 6.30pm: Round table, Friends Meeting House, 22 School Lane, Liverpool L1. Speakers include Jean Crocker and Teresa Clarke (women's conference CAC).

Organised by Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance: www.clga.org.uk.

Failure or success?

Tuesday September 25, 6.30pm: Review of conference, Friends Meeting House, 22 School Lane, Liverpool L1. Speakers include Emma Hardy MP, Diana Holland (Unite), Kate Osamor MP.

Organised by Campaign for Labour Party Democracy: www.clpd.org.uk.

Remember Tommy Hepburn

Saturday September 29, 9am: Memorial march. Assemble Wardley Colliery, 'miner's lamp', Wardley Lane, Gateshead NE10 for march to St Mary's Church, Shields Road, Heworth, NE8. Service commencing 11 am, followed by reception at Wardley Club, Sunderland Road, Gateshead NE10. Organised by Durham Miners Association: www.durhamminers.org.

End austerity

Saturday September 29, 12 noon: Demonstration, Conservative Party conference. Assemble Victoria Square, Birmingham B1.

Organised by People's Assembly: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Pinter's Nobel lecture

Tuesday October 2, 6pm and Thursday October 4, 6pm: Performance of *Art, truth and politics*, Harold Pinter theatre, Panton Street, London SW1. Starring Mark Rylance, in aid of Stop the War Coalition. Organised by Harold Pinter theatre.

Windrush 70

Tuesday October 9, 7pm: Lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Speaker: Wilf Sullivan, TUC race equality officer, to mark Black History Month on the 70th anniversary of the arrival of the Windrush.

Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.

The long 1960s

Tuesday October 9, 6.30pm: Discussion, Marchmont Community Centre, 62 Marchmont Street, London WC1. 'The French 60s and the refusal of work'. Speaker: Michael Seidman. Organised by Social Histories of Revolution: <https://socialhistories.wordpress.com>.

Critique conference

Saturday October 13, 9.30am to 5pm: Conference, room 32L.LG.0, London School of Economics, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London WC2.

Speakers include: Peter Nolan, Hillel Ticktin, Mick Cox, Savas Matsas. Organised by Critique journal: www.critiquejournal.net/newsletter/conference2018.html.

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.

ORGANISATION

A new beginning?

Marcel van der Linden examines the state of the global labour movement



Workers in India: millions more have joined the global workforce in the last two decades

Traditional labour movements are in trouble almost everywhere. They have been severely enfeebled by the political and economic changes of the last 40 years. Their core consists of three forms of social movement organisations: cooperatives, trade unions, and workers' parties. All three organisational types are in decline, though this is an uneven development, with vast differences between countries and regions. We are living through a transitional stage in which old organisational structures no longer seem to work well, while new structures are still in their early stages.

Consumer cooperatives

Since the 1940s or 50s, the consumer cooperatives, like all businesses under capitalism, were increasingly forced to centralise and to concentrate capital, due to improved transportation facilities and new retail forms. This trend manifested itself partly in the declining number of cooperatives, and in the increasing membership strength per cooperative unit.¹ Often the average age of members rose, as elderly members remained loyal to their cooperatives, and younger ones failed to materialise.

Generally, consumer cooperatives were doomed by inhibitions arising from their pioneering role. Established in an era when small shop-owners controlled retailing, they were initially at an advantage. Their larger operations were more economically rational and offered advantages of scale. As a response shopkeepers joined forces in chain stores, central purchasing organisations, etc. However, new sales systems - including self-service stores, supermarkets, shopping centres and the like - were invented. These new types of businesses featured brand names, systems of accumulated redeemable credits, low prices, and enticing advertisements. As a result,

the competitive advantage of the consumer cooperatives deteriorated visibly. The surplus base (surplus divided by sales) decreased, along with the dividends for members and the opportunities for innovation and investment.

Many consumer cooperatives encountered financial difficulties and faced a serious dilemma in their effort to avoid bankruptcy: either they could merge with a regular capitalist business, become a limited-liability company, or borrow substantial amounts from banks - in each case, they ceased to be autonomous cooperatives; or they could counter the rising competition through modernisation and operational expansion - thereby increasing the considerable social distance between members and administrators, as well as further reducing involvement among the members and thereby undermining the organisation's cooperative nature.

Trade unions

Independent mass trade unions had their origin in the 19th century, and exist today in large parts of the world - although there are also major regions where they have almost no influence. The most striking example of a fast growing capitalist economy without independent trade unions is the People's Republic of China. It hosts the world's largest workers' organisation, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), with more than 280 million members; but this is not an independent union, but rather a transmission belt for the Chinese Communist Party. Most of the numerous labour conflicts in the People's Republic take place without the support of the ACFTU.²

In countries with independent workers' organisations union density (members as a percentage of the total labour force) has generally been declining. On a global scale union density is almost insignificant. Independent trade unions organise

only a small percentage of their target group worldwide, and the majority of them are found in the relatively wealthy North Atlantic region.

By far the most important global umbrella organisation is the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), founded in 2006 as a merger of two older organisations: the secular reform-oriented International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU); and the Christian World Confederation of Labour (WCL). In 2014 the ITUC estimated that about 200 million workers worldwide belong to trade unions (excluding those of China's), and that 176 million of these are organised in the ITUC.³ The ITUC also estimates that the total number of workers is roughly 2.9 billion (of whom 1.2 billion are in the informal economy). Therefore, global union density currently amounts to no more than seven percent (200 million as a percentage of 2.9 billion)!⁴

There are many factors that have contributed to the weakness of unions. Firstly, the composition of the working class is changing. Unions find it difficult to organise employees in the service or financial sector. The rapidly growing informal economy is complicating things further, since workers are provided with short contracts and they tend to change jobs frequently to earn their income under often very precarious conditions. Another important factor is what labour economist Richard Freeman has called the "labour supply shock", which has manifested itself since the early 1990s. Through the entry of Chinese, Indian, Russian and other workers into the global economy, there has been an effective doubling of the number of workers producing for international markets over the past two decades:

A decline in the global capital/labour ratio shifts the balance of power in markets away from wages paid to workers and toward

capital, as more workers compete for working with that capital ... Even considering the high savings rate in the new entrants - the World Bank estimates that China has a savings rate of 40% of GDP - it will take 30 or so years for the world to re-attain the capital/labour ratio among the countries that had previously made up the global economy. Having twice as many workers and nearly the same amount of capital places great pressure on labour markets throughout the world. This pressure will affect workers in the developing countries who had traditionally participated in the global economy, as well as workers in advanced countries.⁵

Secondly, significant economic shifts have taken place. The growth of foreign direct investment in the core countries and the semi-periphery of the world economy has been significant, and transnational corporations (TNCs) and multi-state trading blocs (EU, Nafta, Mercosur, etc.) have multiplied, thus increasing outsourcing and relocation of production. Brazil, India, and especially China are important new players who change the rules of the game. This is accompanied by new supranational institutions, such as the World Trade Organisation, established in 1995.

And, thirdly, in many countries there has been a strong neoliberal offensive against the old-style unions and their *modus operandi*: the dominant practice of collective bargaining has increasingly become decentralised, and individualised labour contracts have become much more widespread than before. There have also been very direct attacks on unions, notably in the countries that experienced neoliberal regime shifts like the US and UK.

Weakened trade unions have to face more and more competition from alternative structures that are better adapted to the new style labour

relations. In Brazil, South Africa, the Philippines, and South Korea militant workers' movements (social movement unions) have emerged.⁶

New forms of rank-and-file trade unionism outside the established channels have appeared since the 1970s, with international connections at the shop-floor level "bypassing altogether the secretariats, which they see as too often beholden to the bureaucracies of their various national affiliates."⁷ A well-known example is the Transnationals Information Exchange (TIE), a centre in which a substantial number of research and activist labour groups exchange information on TNCs. The ineffectiveness of old-style unions is underlined by the growing tendency on the part of international trade secretariats (now called global unions) to engage in the direct recruitment of members in the periphery. We may think, for example, of the activities of the Union Network International (the global union for the service sector), which started recruiting IT specialists in India directly, thus bypassing local unions.

Workers' parties

Labour, social democratic, and communist parties are generally considered to be political representatives of the working class. The oldest parties, the social democratic and labour parties, are not doing very well electorally - most reached their apex between 1940 and 1989. More important, though, is that this family of parties is struggling with a fundamental identity problem. Social democratic and labour policies have since the 1930s-40s been based on two pillars: social Keynesianism and a specific 'red' party subculture with its own sports associations, women's clubs, organisations for nature-lovers, consumer cooperatives, newspapers, theatre groups, and the like.

The sociocultural and economic reversal since the 1960s-70s

toppled both 'pillars' of the social Keynesian stage, as the parties' subcultural networks fell to pieces and social Keynesianism became less feasible due to economic crises and globalisation. A great many challenges had to be met more or less simultaneously. Traditional centralism had to be reconciled with grassroots movements and feminism with the conventional androcentric culture. Moreover, the environmental movement needed to be taken seriously without abandoning the pursuit of economic growth (the condition for social redistribution in a capitalist context). Generalised confusion resulted in a tremendous increase of floating voters; ageing and decreasing membership numbers; and the virtual disappearance of active proletarian members, thus weakening the social ties with trade unions.

Communist parties are the second major political form. The large majority of them were born or grew significantly in three waves: during the five years from mid-1918 to 1923, in the aftermath of the October revolution; in the 1930s, as a response to the economic depression; and during and immediately after World War II. Some parties still have a rather solid - be it often small - base, such as the ones in Portugal, Spain and Greece. These parties all developed under rightwing dictatorships and are characterised by their intransigence. Similarly, the South African Communist Party seems still to have a significant influence on African National Congress politics.

But for most the high point was in the 1940s. Now, many communist parties are having a hard time. In quite a few countries they have been dissolved after electoral decline, splits or financial bankruptcy. This has, for example, been the case in Britain (dissolved 1991), Italy (disbanded 1991), Finland (bankrupt 1992), Brazil (internal coup and split, 1992). Other parties have gone through mergers: eg, in Mexico (founding of the Unified Socialist Party, 1981), Denmark (formation of the Red-Green Alliance in 1989) and the Netherlands (founding of the Green Left Party in 1989). Even the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in West Bengal, which received a majority of the votes in a whole series of elections from the 1970s until 2011, has now been reduced to a minor player (only two out of 42 seats) because of its violently neoliberal policies.

All in all, the foregoing seems to suggest three things: on a world scale, consumer cooperatives have either not been doing well or they have morphed into retail industries without members democratically controlling the business. Trade unions are not only a weak force, but their power is also decreasing; and in many countries trade unions have lost their allies - the workers' parties - either because these parties have disappeared or because they have adopted a variant of neoliberalism. As a consequence, INGOs and NGOs have partly shouldered activities that traditionally would have been the responsibility of the international trade union movement, such as the struggle to regulate and abolish child labour. The downturn of labour movements seems to be almost all-embracing.

Signs of renewal

What are the prospects for workers' movements? In the long run things may not be as gloomy as they seem today.

First, class conflicts will not diminish and workers all over the world will continue to feel the ever-present need for effective organisation and forms of struggle. Indirect support for this assertion comes from the religious and nationalist movements, which partly

fill the currently existing social void by deflecting class conflicts. They offer their supporters elementary forms of social security and trust networks, as well as self-esteem and clear life goals. Many poor people are drawn into such movements, in all their variants - from the Pentecostalist movements of Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, to Salafism in north Africa, the middle east and central Asia. Precarious youth in capitalist industrial cities likewise appear sometimes to be attracted to groups offering a new religious certainty.

Historian Sabyasachi Bhattacharya has called this trend the "vernacularisation of labour politics"; it creates

solidarity of people with a common cause, which may be social or cultural or sometimes regressively religious; the solidarity thus obtained can be and is used to pursue an agenda that runs parallel with or replaces the trade unions' agenda.⁸

A clear rightwing example is the Hindu-fascist Shiv Sena movement, which gained influence after the defeat of the big textile workers strike in Bombay in 1980-81. The social plagues of casualisation, immiseration, increasing petty crime and trafficking made the *Shiv Sainiks* popular very fast. They promised the poor not only honour, status and self-respect, but also cooperated with yellow 'trade unions', which offered some protection.⁹

Second, the global labour force is larger than ever before. A recent ILO study revealed that in the period 1980-2005 the labour force in the middle east and north Africa had grown by 149%. In sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean it had roughly doubled, in south Asia it had increased by 73%, and in east and south-east Asia by 60%.¹⁰ Simultaneously, enormous shifts are taking place *within* separate regions. A historic migration from the countryside to swelling mega-cities is underway. In 2000, the National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China estimated that there were 113 million rural migrant workers in the country. Ten years later that number had more than doubled to 240 million, including 150 million working outside their home areas. Of those 150 million about 72% were employed in manufacturing, construction, food and beverage, wholesale and retail industries, and hospitality.¹¹ In India, internal labour migration has exploded since the 1990s, the temporary and seasonal migration rate being highest in poor regions like Nagaland and Madhya Pradesh.¹²

Third, such shifts are often accompanied by an intensification of social struggles. The Konfederasi Serikat Pekerja Indonesia (Indonesian Trade Union Confederation) organised a national strike in October 2012, and a second one - demanding a 50% increase of the minimum wage - in October and November 2013. These were not truly general strikes, but they nevertheless were joined by hundreds of thousands of workers, especially in the Jakarta region. In India, in February 2013, over one hundred million workers across the country struck for a list of demands, including a living wage indexed to inflation, universal food security and equal pay for equal work. In China, the labour shortages that began to emerge from 2004 led to a rapid growth of workers' protests, which have "not only increased in number, but have shifted focus from a reactive response to labour rights violations towards more proactive demands for higher wages and improved working conditions".¹³ The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences reported that there were more than 60,000 so-called "mass incidents" (popular protests by waged workers *and* others, such as

peasants and the quasi-religious group Falun Gong) in 2006 and over 80,000 in 2007 (the specific breakdown was not released by the public security). Official figures of "mass incidents" have not been published since, but experts believe that in recent years the number has further increased.¹⁴

Since the beginning of the economic crisis more than 30 national strikes have occurred in Greece, while Spain and Portugal have seen several general strikes, including multinational ones. The dramatic overthrow of the Mubarak dictatorship in Egypt in 2011 could not have happened without the labour movement's strong support. And in South Africa massive and often violent strikes follow one another rapidly. There is, therefore, a lot of militancy, but this is not matched by the strength of labour organisations.

Fourth, during the last decade social protests have grown in all regions of the world. Several research reports confirm that,

despite the absence of exactitude in measurement, data from the past several decades do point to a fairly clear pattern of increasing frequency. Major protests multiplied in the second half of the 1980s and early 1990s, coinciding with what is commonly called the third wave of democracy, but then decreased significantly throughout the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s. Protests began to accelerate again in the second half of the 2000s and have reached a peak in the past five years [ie, 2011-15].¹⁵

The large majority of protest events address their grievances to their own national governments, and demand that these governments develop economic, social and environmental policies that are in the interest of the population at large, and not of only the wealthy and powerful. The demands put forward by protestors are generally sundry, and the forms protests take are heterogeneous. They may be opposing the withdrawal of food and fuel subsidies; wage cuts; VAT increases on basic goods and services; the emaciation of social security; the 'reform' of pension and health care systems; the flexibilisation of labour; but also pollution, war, rape and corporate influence. The lack of 'real democracy' is a regular issue. Protests are more frequent in high-income countries, and turn more often violent in low-income countries. Most protests fail, at least in the short run, to achieve an alleviation of their grievances.¹⁶

Fifth, there are also explicit signs of a renewal. Organising drives for previously unorganised workers in hospitals and the care sector in general have been increasing over the past few years. The rise of the International Domestic Workers Network since 2009, and its campaign resulting in ILO convention 189 on 'Decent Work for Domestic Workers' (2011) has been an inspiration for many. The current strike wave of incarcerated workers in the United States reveals that new segments of the working class are beginning to be mobilised. In many countries trade unions are trying to open up to 'informal' and 'illegal' workers. Quite spectacular is India's New Trade Union Initiative, founded in 2006, which recognises the importance of both paid and unpaid women's work; it attempts to organise not only the 'formal' sector, but also contract workers, casual workers, household workers, the self-employed and the urban and rural poor; and tries to restructure collective bargaining frameworks accordingly.

Prospects

There is an important obstacle to the renewal of labour movements, which makes successes difficult to

effectuate: during the last four of five decades, national states have lost much of their sovereignty, but this loss of power has not been compensated by supranational authorities. We live in a transitional period, in which many challenges can *no longer* be dealt with by national authorities, and *not yet* (if ever) by supranational (or world) authorities:

In the contemporary global world there is no equivalent of the nation-state at the world level that could implement fiscal and welfare policies, anti-trust controls, labour and environmental laws aimed at regulating markets and at correcting market failures. Nor is there a world independent judiciary which can control and sanction illegal behaviour. Nor is there a democratic polity at the world level...¹⁷

This helps to explain the 'negative' attitude of many social movements that say no to certain developments and have no positive alternative, because this would require a world authority. Nevertheless, transnational action focused on states is even possible under these adverse circumstances - either by pressing national governments to coordinate policies across borders, or by exemplary local activities that can inspire movements in other parts of the world.

A new labour movement will have to find an internationalist approach that is based on cross-border solidarity, even under these adverse circumstances. It can partly find its foundations in the old labour movements, but these will have to change considerably. The contours of the new international trade unionism still remain vague, but several minimum conditions are already clearly apparent.

- The target group has to be demarcated anew. The first-phase demarcation of the working classes in the 19th century was extremely narrow and Eurocentric, and needs to be revised and expanded. A considerable number of trade unions in the periphery and semi-periphery have now abandoned the old demarcation, and recruit all kinds of subaltern workers.

- There can be no doubt that the newly-defined target group will no longer be dominated by white, male workers in the north Atlantic region, but by women and people of colour, many in forms of self-employment, precarious jobs, or debt bondage. Trade unions will need to effect a drastic change in their operational systems, in order to assist these 'new' workers to further their interests effectively. This also implies ending the centrality of collective bargaining strategies.

- The dual structure of the international trade union movement - collaboration of national confederations in the ITUC plus global union federations - is a problematic relic of the past and likely to be discarded. Probably the best option would be a new unitary structure facilitating the inclusion of the 'new' target groups in the global unions.

- The somewhat autocratic approach prevailing in the present-day international trade union movement will need to be replaced by a democratic approach, and greater participation of the rank-and-file workers. The possibilities offered by the internet could perhaps make a positive contribution to a renewed structure of this kind.

- While lobbying governments and transnational organisations has to date been the principal activity of the international trade union movement (with the notable exception of the anti-apartheid campaign of the

1980s), and efforts are made to cultivate the good will of states, effective action requires much greater effort in active measures, such as boycotts, strikes and so on, which in turn demands a substantial strengthening of the internal structures.

The question is whether the existing international trade union movement can meet these challenges. It is likely that the formation of new movements will be a difficult process, interspersed with failed experiments and moments of deep crisis. Organisational structures and patterns of behaviour that have existed for over a century are not easily changed. Moreover, it is highly unlikely that new structures and patterns will be shaped through reforms from above, through the central leaderships.

If there is one thing that history has taught us, it is that trade union structures almost never develop smoothly by means of piecemeal engineering. They are generally the outcome of conflicts and risky experiments. Pressure from below (through competitive networks, alternative action models, etc) will be a highly important factor in deciding that outcome ●

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Notes

1. See P Gurney, *Cooperative culture and the politics of consumption in England, 1870-1930* Manchester 1996, p242; and V Pestoff *Between markets and politics: cooperatives in Sweden* Frankfurt 1991, p234.
2. Bai Ruixue, 'The role of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions: implications for workers today' in Au Loong Yu et al, *China's rise: strength and fragility* London 2012, pp199-224.
3. This calculation is probably misleading. A significant, but unknown, part of the union membership consists of pensioners. It is therefore likely that the number of employed or employable members is lower.
4. ITUC *Building workers' power: congress statement* Berlin 2014.
5. R Freeman, 'What really ails Europe (and America): the doubling of the global labor force' *The Globalist* March 5 2010.
6. K Scipes, 'Building global labor solidarity today: learning from the KMU of the Philippines' *Class, Race and Corporate Power* 3/1, 2014.
7. A Herod, 'Labor as an agent of globalization and as a global agent', in KR Cox (ed) *Spaces of globalization: reasserting the power of the local* New York 1997, pp167-200.
8. 'Introduction', S Bhattacharya and RP Behal (eds) *The vernacularization of labour politics* New Delhi 2016, pp1-21.
9. G Heuzé-Brigant, 'Populism and the workers' movement: Shiv Sena and labour in Mumbai' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 22, 2 (December 1999), pp119-48.
10. S Kapsos *World and regional trends in labour force participation: methodologies and key results* Geneva 2007.
11. *China Labour Bulletin* 'A decade of change: the workers' movement in China', 2000-2010 research report, March 2012, p4.
12. RB Bhagat and S Mohanty, 'Emerging pattern of urbanization and the contribution of migration in urban growth in India' *Asian Population Studies*, 5/1, 2009, pp5-20.
13. *China Labour Bulletin* 'A decade of change: the workers' movement in China', 2000-2010 research report, March 2012, p5
14. *Ibid* p9.
15. T Carothers and R Youngs *The complexities of global protests* New York 2015; see also I Ortiz, S Burke, M Berrada and H Cortés *World protests 2006-2013* New York 2013; and 'Rebels without a cause: what the upsurge in protest movements means for global politics': www.eiu.com/ProtestUpsurge.
16. I Ortiz, S Burke, M Berrada and H Cortés *op cit* p34.
17. A Martinelli, 'From world system to world society?' *Journal of World-Systems Research* 11, 2, December 2005, pp241-60.

LABOUR

There are big barriers



Now the left has the chance to radically democratise Labour's constitution

Jim Grant of Labour Party Marxists looks forward to the Liverpool conference

Whatever else may turn out to be the legacy of the Labour Party's Corbynite leadership, it has at least made conferences interesting again.

Though Labour's annual gatherings early on lost even the nominal power to discipline the parliamentary party, they remained dramatic pieces of theatre, with cabinet ministers booed and complicated machinations between the union barons and party bosses, not to say the occasional leftwing rebellion. Plenty of policy could get through from the floor, against the wishes of the leadership - the latter would act in contempt, sometimes open contempt, of such insolence. The Blair years saw no end of attacks on conference, however, until it was reduced to the sort of tedious media circus more

associated with the Tories - with all the interest, such as it was, taking place in fringe events.

That was the situation down to 2015 - and how long ago it all seems! This year's event looks set to see fierce controversy, in the hall and the hallways. It is now the job of an outsider-left leadership to keep the whole show on the road.

This is no small matter. Even allowing for the fact that the standard method for the right to roll back the gains of the left in this period is to keep the atmosphere at a perpetual level of crisis, it is a particularly fraught moment for a conference. Many contradictions are coming to a head, and it is to be hoped that the decisive questions will make it to the agenda, with the true fault lines laid out for all to see.

The conference comes hot on the heels of the national executive committee's disastrous decision to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of anti-Semitism, together with all its 'examples', in the hope presumably that it would make the confected hoo-ha about 'anti-Semitism' in the Labour Party go away - and in the knowledge, of course, that the support was not there in the main affiliated unions to make a fight of it. No doubt there will be contemporary motions on the agenda on the subject; whether any will make it to a vote is a very different matter.

Review

Less dramatic, but no less important, is the fate of the 'democracy review', headed by

Katy Clark. Submissions were collected in the spring, and the final proposals were discussed at this week's NEC meeting. According to NEC member Darren Williams, a number of small changes were accepted, but most of the more radical proposals (like the abolition of the three-year rule, which means that a subject voted upon at conference cannot be revisited for another three years, even if it just deals with the issue tangentially) were "either kicked into the long grass or killed off altogether", as he laments on Facebook. "I'm sorry to say that the majority of the NEC - including much of the so-called left - has proven itself too cautious and conservative to grasp the opportunity that the democracy review presented." Two of the key

issues will be revisited once more by the NEC before conference on September 22, writes comrade Williams: namely the "leadership nomination rules and the NEC's "position on parliamentary selection procedures".

How we got from the submissions to the final shape of things - which amount to extremely modest changes for the better, and (according, at least, to Momentum), significant changes for the worse made to placate union tops by giving the largest unions an effective veto on candidates - is an important matter. An anonymous source described the change regarding future leadership elections to *The Guardian* as a "purge of the Chrises" - Williamson and Leslie, leftwing and rightwing troublemakers

riers to overcome

respectively - and the same paper described a last-minute flurry of negotiations between the leader's office and various union headquarters, which has led to a suggested compromise, where 10% of individual party members plus 5% of MPs/MEPs plus 5% of union affiliates would be needed to get a candidate on the ballot. Currently, 10% of MPs/MEPs are needed and party members and affiliates play no role. (Funnily enough, it seems the conference arrangements committee is happy to ignore the three-year rule for this issue - after all, the threshold was reduced from 15% to 10% only last year). This new proposal makes it slightly easier for a leftwinger to get on the ballot, but, of course, it is still hugely difficult. In our view, there should not be a barrier at all - it should be up to members to decide.

It is partly in this context that we should frame the recent rumours of a plot to replace Jeremy Corbyn with John McDonnell, in what would truly be an act of treachery to remember. *The Sunday Times* (September 16) took it upon itself to interpret McDonnell's excruciating acts of accommodation to rightwing MPs as evidence of an Ides of March situation brewing in the shadows. Rather hopeful-sounding anonymous MPs reacted to the later leak of a proposal to make an acting leader answerable to the NEC in the event of the sudden indisposition of the leader with the thought that the current leader might, indeed, himself become indisposed. We cannot know either way, but frankly we doubt it. The horse-trading is to secure the leadership, and nothing else.

That is not to say that the leadership camp - or, at least, the leadership camp as it was constituted a year ago - has no divisions. Particularly obvious is the cooling of relations between the leader's office and Momentum, with the outlines of a sharp disagreement discernible during the fiasco of John Lansman's abortive tilt at the general secretary's job. That in the end went to Jennie Formby, a Unite official and an ally of Len McCluskey, as they seek to get a firmer grip on the head office. Thus, in the current context, Momentum has donned its tribune-of-the-membership costume. The higher leadership threshold is vigorously opposed - clicktivists were urged, on September 18, to lobby the NEC to drop it.

Lansman has also rediscovered his interest in mandatory reselection, which had previously been achieved, but overturned by Neil Kinnock; and deemed impolitic by the Corbyn leadership, as it sought, with boundless appetite for futility, to placate its opponents in the

Parliamentary Labour Party. Lansman and Momentum have evidently lost patience with all this, leading to Chuka Umunna's hissy fit about "attack dogs" and suchlike.

The NEC seems to be taking a middle road - proposing, according to the usually well-informed Skwawkbox, to hold two trigger ballots - one for affiliates and one for lay members - rather than just the one. The threshold would be reduced from the current 50% to 30%. In effect, even if the locally affiliated union branches vote *in favour* of the sitting MP, 30% of voting members in branches could vote 'no' and thereby trigger a full selection process (and vice versa, of course). In practice, this would likely threaten several rightwing MPs and would ruin the campaign by a number of rightwing unions and affiliated organisations to rig this process by affiliating to as many branches as possible in order to prop up rightwing MPs. Apparently, this "affirmative ballot" is one Jeremy Corbyn himself favours. But is clearly a far more modest measure than the mandatory reselection proposed by International Labour. It still favours sitting MPs, in that it requires a challenge before there is a chance of any change. It would be much more democratic to have a level playing field between all candidates.

We do not know yet how the discussion and voting around these proposals will be structured at conference. What we know is that on Sunday, 'Party democracy' will be debated, but it is unclear if conference will also vote on any of the recommendations at this stage. On Tuesday, the CAC has allocated a whopping 40 minutes to hear "NEC and CLP constitutional amendments" ... and there are 33 coming from the CLPs alone.¹ As democrats we would favour an open discussion, with a vote between competing proposals. In such a scenario, mandatory reselection might actually have a chance (it all depends on

what system Len McCluskey is supporting). If there is a vote on Sunday, however, we fear the rule change by International Labour (as many others) will be removed from the agenda, as it will have been superseded by Sunday's decisions.

In any case, renewed talk of a 'new centre party' seems to be blackmail aimed at circumventing either of the proposals. The election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader opened up a particular contradiction. On the one hand, the Labour left had long been characterised by - among other things - a vigorous dedication to improving the democratic norms of the party. One of its core organisations was, and is, the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy. The democratic self-image of the left found a very convincing foil in the obvious hatred of the right for control from below. There were ruling parties in the Soviet-led 'eastern bloc' with more room for dissent than Blair's Labour. The 'big idea' behind the 2014-15 reforms to the leadership election process, meanwhile - the cheapo 'registered supporters' and all the rest - was that appealing to atomised reactionaries 'out there' would further reduce the leader's accountability to lay members of the party.

So the democratising left's candidate for leader was elected under the most Bonapartist system in Labour's history. This gives a peculiar structure to the left's power in the party. There is a very small number of people in the PLP who may be considered genuine lefts; there is a very even split on the NEC; and there is a large base of rank-and-file support. Protecting the current leadership is therefore paramount - but the leadership institution is odious, certainly in its current form.

Complicating matters further is the inherent political weakness of the Labour left - its nationalism and its constitutionalism (or rather its inability to break with those who will not countenance radical restructuring of political power). If, as hardly seems unlikely, there is a general election in the short term, and if Labour wins a majority in parliament - and if the queen appoints Corbyn prime minister - he will in reality be leading a minority government, twice over. Britain's undemocratic electoral system will have given him more votes than his numerical share will deserve, and in any case he will not enjoy the enthusiastic support of his parliamentary colleagues. The ultimate result is that politics could be reduced once more to horse-trading, and a consequence would be the necessity of keeping one's own side tightly under control.

Lansman, by ensuring Momentum developed merely into a factional machine under his own

tight control, played this role in an earlier phase - a small matter which rather puts his sudden democratism in perspective. Yet his internet irregulars are small fry compared to the institutional power of the major unions, so Corbyn has good reason to shelter with them instead, if shelter is forthcoming. So much the worse for the rest of us.

Sticking points

It seems almost churlish, at this point, to mention that there are points of serious contention about general politics to deal with, which will be discussed at conference. All eyes, in this regard, are on Brexit - with the trade unions gesturing in favour of a second referendum, and Sadiq Khan surprising only the terminally unflappable by openly calling for one, it seems that attention will certainly alight on the issue. The leadership has the trump card, for once: with a general election probably looming, it is most prudent to *wait* before sticking a middle finger up to (by serious accounts) about a third of your voters at the last time of asking.

It is worth noting how odd a view of matters this is - that the electoral optics should supervene over whatever matters of political principle are at issue. Yet we must insist that this is what is going on. The anti-Brexit Labour right mutters that Corbyn is a closet 'leaver', as if that is an explanation; in reality, they are either deluded or are loyal to British state interests over and above Labour's electoral returns. They really ought to know better, as this sort of genuflecting before psephological conjectures was brought to its purest expression by one Tony Blair. The corollary of dealing with this issue - or any other à la Blair - is that the massed ranks of the labour movement are excluded from mastering the issue, in both the epistemological and political senses. As with the matter of

party democracy, our policy must apparently reflect merely the line of ceasefire, not the way forward for the working class - or even, should the Blairites emerge victorious, the way forward for the bourgeoisie.

The bottom line is that the struggle for the transformation of the Labour Party must escape the shackles of unconditional Corbyn-loyalism. We must remind people that Harold Wilson was a Bevanite, and Kinnock a leftwinger too - until they were not any more. A good Labour conference, within the bounds of the current arrangements, would see the rejection of the IHRA examples, mandatory reselection passed and substantial democratic change. That would be a tall order - but a tall order precisely because of the political weakness of the left.

It would still not be good enough, however, and a far more ambitious programme of democratisation - including the total subordination of the PLP to leading party bodies, the concomitant democratisation of the trade unions and other labour movement forces, and the abolition of the post of leader altogether - is needed to seriously guard against the danger of a return to rightwing control.

Under such a regime, high politics would not be subordinated to low politics - that is, the chattering of statistics in a party headquarters basement. Truly transformative political programmes - not least the programme of Marxism - would demand answers from their opponents, and defence from their advocates. That, well above any short-term change in parliamentary arithmetic, is the goal. No vote contrary to it at this year's conference can be considered a victory ●

Notes

1. <http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk/rule-changes-2018>.

Fighting fund

Unlikely

Thanks mainly to some more than useful standing orders, our September fighting fund has been boosted by £552, taking our running total up to £1,272. Since the monthly target is £1,750, we now have 10 days left to raise the remaining £478.

Those standing orders, from just six comrades this week, totalled a brilliant £495 - thank you, comrades BK, TR, MM, DG, KB and TB, for your commitment to our paper.

In addition, comrades MN (£25) and TV (£10) clicked on our PayPal button, while comrade LR added £20 to her subscription cheque. She writes: "I've been meaning to donate for some time, but, now I've decided to take the paper each week, how could I miss the opportunity?" Like so many others, she has been particularly pleased by our coverage of the fake 'anti-Semitism' campaign directed against Jeremy Corbyn.

Finally there is another cheque that's worth a mention. It came without any covering note and was for just £2. But what was notable about it was the sender's initials - IDS. Personally I don't think it's *that* IDS - surely he could have spared more than a couple of quid? And I don't think his politics are quite the same as ours in any case. Anyway, having puzzled over this, I decided to look at the name on the cheque for myself. No surprise - it wasn't from the former Tory leader!

If we ever do get a donation from such an unlikely figure, I promise to let you know. But, in the meantime, please do your best to help get us over the line by September 30. ●

Robbie Rix

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



Escape the shackles of unconditional Corbyn loyalism

FAKE NEWS

Spies who came in from the slush

Stories about Russian spies are being used to stoke up tensions and undermine Labour, writes **Eddie Ford**

You do have to ask yourself at times why certain stories pop up when they do, and it does not necessarily make you a conspiracy theorist to suspect that it might not always be purely coincidental. Hence last week we had the rather odd story in *The Times* about Michael Foot, the former Labour leader, being a “Soviet asset” operating under the codename of ‘Boot’ - paid to put out pro-Soviet propaganda.

Of course, this is an old story resurrected. Foot sued the same paper 23 years ago when they made the same allegations against him - winning substantial damages. This time round there does not appear to be any substantive new evidence or proof to make such an outlandish claim: rather it is merely repeated in a new book, *The spy and the traitor*, by Ben Macintyre - the author of bestselling works about spying and espionage, including *Agent Zigzag*, *Operation Mincemeat* and the quite interesting, *A spy among friends: Kim Philby and the great betrayal*.

What needs to be immediately noted is that the original allegations against Foot were made by a Soviet defector and MI6 double agent called Oleg Gordievsky - notorious for mixing up accurate and inaccurate information, peppered with personal grudges and all manner of resentments. Macintyre’s new book, rather unsensationally, states that MI6 agents had been told about Gordievsky’s claims in the summer of 1982, but they concluded that the Labour leader had not been a “spy or conscious agent” - instead, apparently, he had been used for “disinformation purposes” and received the equivalent of £37,000 in today’s money. We also discover - at least if we believe Macintyre - that MI6 had been concerned about the “constitutional implications” of a “politician with a KGB history” becoming prime minister.

Frankly, the allegation against Foot is risible. He might have been a left reformist manoeuvrer and creature of the Labourite bureaucracy, but he was certainly no friend of the Soviet Union - quite the opposite, in fact, given his patriotic pro-imperialism. John Foot, a great nephew of the former Labour leader, tweeted angrily that his great uncle was a “lifelong anti-Stalinist” and “friend of Orwell” - whilst Jeremy Corbyn declared that Michael Foot “loved this country”, which is “why he wanted to make it better for everyone”.

Perhaps even more ludicrous is the idea that Foot was *paid* by the Soviet Union - or by anybody else, for that matter. Foot came from a wealthy family of Liberal politicians and top colonial administrators. He studied philosophy, politics and economics (what else?) at Oxford University. But, as noted by many, he lived a very modest lifestyle - no fancy cars or jet-setting, no elite restaurants or clubs, no high-class hookers, or bubbly for breakfast. Hence the famous incident of the donkey jacket that wasn’t at the Cenotaph in 1981, which provoked one Labour MP to liken the Labour leader to an “out-of-work navvy”. In fact it was a relatively expensive duffle coat - the queen mother apparently told him that it was “a smart, sensible coat for a day like this” (Foot later donated the coat to the People’s History Museum in Manchester). In other words, he did not need or want Soviet money. Genuine friends of the Soviet Union did it for nothing.



Ben Macintyre himself writes that Michael Foot was not a Soviet spy, but does view him as “stunningly naive” - without presenting a proper explanation as to why he thinks that.¹ So we have to go back to our original point: why is *The Times* running this bit of nonsense *now*? Perhaps the paper is softening us up for *future* stories about Jeremy Corbyn and other leading Labour figures, especially if there is a snap election at the end of the year. After all, this has already been tried before, albeit unsuccessfully. Back in February the rightwing press ran with lurid stories about the Labour leader being an agent for the Czechoslovakian secret service, the StB - with *The Sun* splashing the headline, “Corbyn and the commie spy”.

Of course, it was all total baloney. The boring reality is that after Jeremy Corbyn toured Czechoslovakia on a motorbike holiday in August 1977, he warranted a brief mention in state security records and then in 1986 met a Czech diplomat, Ján Sarkocy, in the House of Commons - who later turned out to be a StB officer. Talk about underwhelming. Using this criteria, just about every MP in parliament must be a spy of some sort. But that did not prevent excitable Tory MPs and others demanding that Jeremy Corbyn release his Stasi file, as he once went on a similar holiday to East Germany with Diane Abbott - alas for his critics, the Stasi records agency found absolutely no documents on Corbyn. In the end, Jeremy Corbyn threatened legal action, while a Tory MP, Ben Bradley, was forced to issue an apology for his defamatory allegations against the Labour leader and made a “substantial” donation to charity to make up for his sins.

But we can expect far more stories like this, and far worse, if Corbyn manages to hang on as leader despite the ‘anti-Semitic’ smear campaign and the treachery of the Parliamentary Labour Party. All means necessary must be used to depose him and bring the party safely back under the control of the right.

Slush

Then we had the undeniably entertaining stories concerning two Russian nationals, Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov (assuming for now that they are their real names, seeing how there are no known records of their existence before 2009) - both believed to be members of Russian

Michael Foot sued *The Times* 23 years ago over the claim that he was a paid asset of the Soviet Union

Why has this stupid story been resurrected? Could it be because more plans are afoot to besmirch Labour in general and Jeremy Corbyn in particular?



military intelligence (GRU). Last week the British authorities formally charged them with conspiracy to murder Sergei and Yulia Skripal and detective sergeant Nick Bailey in Salisbury - the former Russian spy and his daughter were found collapsed on March 4; Bailey becoming ill after trying to help them. They were apparent victims of some form of poisoning.

The subsequent investigation involved 250 specialist counter-terrorism officers and about 180 military personnel, who were hastily deployed to Salisbury to help remove vehicles and objects that may have been contaminated. The chief medical officer for England, professor Dame Sally Davies, went on to the airwaves to inform us that the risk to public safety was “low”, but there was “some concern” that prolonged exposure could cause health problems. Personnel from the nearby Porton Down military research centre identified the nerve agent used in the attempted murder as Novichok - which we were told could only have been deployed by a “state actor”. Suspicion immediately fell upon Russia. Adding to the drama, on June 30 a similar poisoning appeared to have happened in Amesbury, seven miles from Salisbury - with a man finding the nerve agent in a fake perfume bottle and giving it to his girlfriend, Dawn Sturgess. She sprayed it on her wrist, it seems, and quickly fell ill, dying on July 8 (the man survived). According to the police, this was not a targeted attack, but a result of the way the nerve agent was disposed of after the poisoning in Salisbury.

In a grimly humorous postscript, showing that nerves are still on edge in Salisbury, on September 16 two people fell ill at a restaurant 300 metres away from the location where the Skripals had eaten before collapsing - causing the restaurant, a nearby pub, and surrounding streets to be cordoned off, with some customers and residents under observation or prevented from leaving the area. Police later said there was “nothing to suggest that Novichok” was the cause of the two people falling ill. Needless to say, the Salisbury poisonings were immediately used by Tory MPs and the rightwing press to bash Jeremy Corbyn for his supposed pro-Russian sympathies.

Now, as we have commented upon before in this publication, when confronted by incidents like this, the only rational approach is to apply Occam’s razor - the most likely or simpler explanation is nearly always the correct one. Unlike a lot of crime

fiction and movies, where the most esoteric theory seems to come first - normally a serial killer with a fixation on re-enacting parts of the Bible or collecting human body parts. But real police officers know that most women are murdered by their husbands or partners - look no further. Similarly, why would MI5 - as some insist - want to murder Sergei Skripal, a man who sold out 600 Russian intelligence agents to the British? There might possibly be another, far more obvious explanation. If MI5 for whatever bizarre reason was responsible for the attempted murder, then people in and around the agency would quickly talk about such a monstrous action - information would leak out, then all hell would break loose. You just cannot keep things like that secret for long.

If anything, the September 13 ‘interview’ with Petrov and Boshirov on Russian TV just underlines their complicity - though it could certainly be nominated for a comedy award. Showing an impressive command of Wikipedia, our comic double act (claiming to be innocent sports nutritionists) told us that their friends in Russia had been saying to them for ages that they should visit the “wonderful” city of Salisbury and its “famous” cathedral - which, apparently, is “famous not only in Europe but in the whole world for its 123-metre spire and for its clock, one of the first created in the world”.² Strangely, their friends had never implored them to visit St Paul’s Cathedral or Westminster Abbey.

The pair’s initial plan, they said, had been to make it a day trip - hoping to visit not only the cathedral, but Stonehenge and the ancient settlement of Old Sarum, north of the city centre. But the poor things had not been prepared for the intense cold of a Wiltshire spring, which must have come as a bit of a shock after the blazing heat of a Moscow winter: “We couldn’t do it because there was muddy slush everywhere” - meaning “we got wet”, getting “drenched up to our knees”. Therefore, defeated, they got the next train back to London. The following day, no longer obstructed by the dreadful slush, they headed back to Salisbury, enjoying at last the cathedral’s glorious spire - and “maybe approached Skripal’s house” - but, of course, they “didn’t know where it was located”. Fair enough. They denied using Novichok, because it would be “silly for decent lads to have women’s perfume” - obviously proper Russian men. Sadly, they never got to visit Stonehenge.

Well, if you believe that, then you will believe anything. Stories circulated in various newspapers that there are differences within the Russian securocracy between the FSB and the GRU - the pair being put on TV to punish them for a botched operation. Then again, that could be complete nonsense as well. Whilst, as mentioned earlier, I do not believe for a minute that MI5 was responsible for the Salisbury poisonings, it certainly has an interest in *stoking it up* - rather than suppressing it, as it has done before. This could be partially due to the ongoing geopolitical tussle with Russia and general spy-mania - but perhaps also, as with the Michael Foot allegations, to keep stirring the anti-red pot, for a time when it might become useful again ●

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Notes

1. www.theguardian.com/books/2018/sep/19/the-spy-and-the-traitor-by-ben-macintyre-review.
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salisbury_Cathedral.

ECONOMY

Keynesianism is no alternative

Michael Roberts reports on the range of illusions on display at a recent international conference

This year's conference (September 12-14) of the International Initiative for the Promotion of Political Economy (IIPPE) in Pula, Croatia had the theme of "The state of capitalism and the state of political economy".¹ Most submissions concentrated on the first theme, although the plenary presentations aimed at both.

I was struck by the number of papers on the situation in Brazil, China and Turkey² - a sign of the times - but also by the relative youth of the attendees, particularly from Asia and the 'global south'. The familiar faces of the 'baby boomer' generation of Marxist and heterodox economists (my own demographic) were less in evidence.

Obviously I could not attend all simultaneous sessions, so I concentrated on the macroeconomics of advanced capitalist economies. Actually my own session was among the first of the conference. Under the title of 'The limits to economic policy management in the era of financialisation', I presented a paper on 'The limits of fiscal policy'.

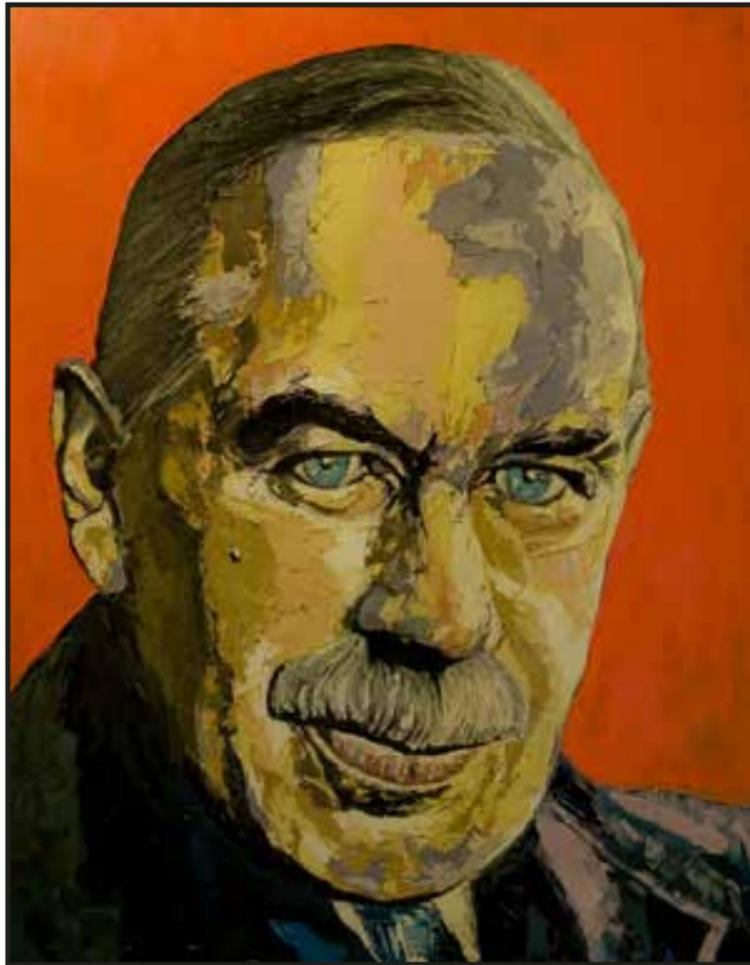
I argued that, during the great depression of the 1930s, Keynes had recognised that monetary policy would not work in getting depressed economies out of a slump, whether monetary policy was 'conventional' (changing the interest rate for borrowing) or 'unconventional' (central banks buying financial assets by 'printing' money). In the end, Keynes opted for fiscal stimulus as the only way for governments to get the capitalist economy going.

In the current long depression, now 10 years old,³ both conventional (zero interest rates) and unconventional (quantitative easing) monetary policy have again proved to be ineffective. Monetary easing had instead only restored bank liquidity (saved the banks) and fuelled a stock and bond market bonanza. The 'real' or productive economy had languished with low real GDP growth, investment and wage incomes.

Maria Ivanova of Goldsmiths University of London also made a presentation in the same session as me⁴ and she showed clearly that both conventional and unconventional monetary policies adopted by the US Fed had done little to help growth or investment and had only led to a new boom in financial assets and a sharp rise in corporate debt - now likely to be the weak link in the circulation of capital in the next slump.

Keynesian-style fiscal stimulus has hardly been tried in the last 10 years (instead 'austerity' in government spending and budgets was generally the order of the day). Keynesians thus continue to claim that fiscal spending could have turned things around. Indeed, Paul Krugman was arguing just that in the *New York Times*⁵ as the IIPPE conference took place.

But in my paper, I refer to Krugman's evidence for this and show that in the past government spending and/or running budget deficits have had little effect in boosting growth or investment. That is because, under a capitalist economy, where 80%-90% of all productive investment is made by private corporations producing for profit, it is the level of profitability of capital that is the decisive factor for growth, not government spending boosting 'aggregate demand'. In the last 10 years since the great recession, while profits have risen for some large corporations, average profitability on capital employed has remained low and below pre-crash levels.⁶ At the



John Maynard Keynes: never really understood capitalism

same time, corporate debt has jumped up, as large corporations borrow at near zero rates to buy their own shares (to boost prices) and/or make increased payouts to shareholders.

Government spending on welfare benefits and public services - along with tax cuts to boost 'consumer demand' - is what most modern Keynesians assume is the right policy. But it would not solve the problem (and Keynes thought so too in the 1940s). Indeed, what is required is a massive shift to the "socialisation of investment", to use Keynes' term: ie, the government should resume responsibility for the bulk of investment and its direction. During the 1940s, Keynes actually advocated that up to 75% of all investment in an economy should be made by the state, reducing the role of the capitalist sector to the minimum.⁷

Of course, such a policy has only happened under a war economy and was dropped in 'peace time'. It would be quickly opposed because it would threaten the very existence of capitalist accumulation, as Michal Kalecki pointed out in his 1943 paper.⁸

Corbynism

Now, in 2018, the Labour Party wants to set up a 'Keynesian-style' National Investment Bank, which would invest in infrastructure, etc - alongside the big five UK banks, which will continue to conduct 'business as usual' (ie, mortgages and financial speculation). Under these Labour proposals (even if implemented in full), government investment would rise to only 3.5% of GDP, less than 20% of total investment in the economy - hardly "socialisation" à la Keynes at his most radical.

But perhaps president Trump's version of Keynesian fiscal stimulus (huge tax cuts for the rich and corporations, driving up the budget deficit) will do the trick. It is an irony that it is Trump that has adopted Keynesian policy.⁹ He certainly thinks it is working - with the US economy growing at a 4% annual rate right

in the US did not rise in the post-war period and so cannot be the cause of any fall in the rate of profit.¹¹

His concepts and evidence do not hold water in my view. Zarembka argues that there is a major problem concerning variable capital v in the denominator in the commonly-expressed organic composition of capital, C/v . That is because v can change without any change in the technical composition. Using instead what he calls the "materialized composition of capital" - $C/(v+s)$ - movement in C/v can be separated between the technical factor and the distributional factor, since $C/v = (1 + s/v)$. With this approach, Zarembka reckons, using US data he can locate no rise in the organic composition of capital in the US and no connection between Marx's basic category for laws of motion under capitalism and the rate of profitability.

But I think his $C/(v+s)$ category conflates Marx's view of the basic 'tendency' (c/v) in capital accumulation with the lesser 'counter-tendency' (s/v) and thus confuses the causal process. This makes Marx's law of profitability 'indeterminate' in the same way that Sweezy and Heinrich, etc claim.¹² As for the empirical consequences of rejecting Zarembka's argument, I refer you to an excellent paper by Lefteris Tsoulfidis.¹³

As I said previously, there were a host of sessions on Brazil, southern Africa and China, most of which I was unable to attend. On China, what I did seem to notice was that nearly all presenters accepted that China was 'capitalist'¹⁴ in just the same way as the US or at least Japan or Korea, if less advanced. And yet they all recognised that the state played a massive role in the economy compared to others - so is there a difference between state capitalism and capitalism?

There were other interesting papers on automation and AI (Martin Upchurch) and on bitcoin and a cashless economy (Philip Mader), as well as on the big issue of imperialism and dependency theory (which is back in mode).¹⁵

The main plenary on the state of capitalism was addressed by Fiona Tregena from the University of Johannesburg. Her primary area of research is on structural change, with a particular focus on deindustrialisation. She has promoted the concept of 'premature deindustrialisation'. This can be defined as deindustrialisation that begins at a lower level of GDP per capita - and/or at a lower level of manufacturing as a share of total employment and GDP - than is typically the case internationally. Many of the cases of premature deindustrialisation are in sub-Saharan Africa - in some instances taking the form of 'pre-industrialisation deindustrialisation'. Professor Tregena has argued that premature deindustrialisation is likely to have especially negative effects on growth.

Nonsense

As for the state of political economy, Andrew Brown of Leeds University has explained some of the failures of mainstream economics, particularly marginal utility theory.¹⁶ Marginal utility theory has not to this day been developed in a concrete and realistic direction - not because it is just vulgar apologetics for capitalism, but because it is theoretical nonsense. It can provide no comprehension of the macroeconomic aggregates that drive the reproduction and development of the economic system.¹⁷

'Financialisation' is something that dominates IIPPE conferences. It is a

concept that has some value when it describes the change in the structure of the financial sector from pure banks to a range of non-deposit financial institutions and the financial activities of non-financial corporations in the last 40 years. But I am not happy when it is used to suggest that the financial crash and the great recession were the result of some new 'stage' in capitalism.¹⁸ From this, it is argued that crises now occur not because of the fall in productive sectors, but because of the speculative role of 'financialisation.' Such an approach, in my view, is not only wrong theoretically, but does not fit the facts as well as Marx's laws of motion: the law of value, the law of accumulation and the law of profitability.

For me, financialisation is not a new stage in capitalism that forces us to reject Marx's laws of motion in *Capital* - neoliberalism is not some new economics of financialisation giving us a different theory of crises from Marx's. Finance does not drive capitalism: profit does. Finance does not create new value or surplus value, but instead finds new ways to circulate and distribute it. The kernel of crises thus remains with the production of value. 'Neoliberalism' is merely a word invented to describe the last 40 years or so of policies designed to restore the profitability of capital, which had fallen to new lows in the 1970s. It is not the economics of a new stage in capitalism.¹⁹

Sure, each crisis has its own particular features and the great recession had that, with its 'shadow banking', special investment vehicles, credit derivatives and the rest. But the underlying cause remained the profit nature of the production system. If financialisation means the finance sector has divorced itself from the wider capitalist system, in my view that is clearly wrong ●

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

Notes

1. <http://iippe.org>.
2. See <https://thenextrecession.files.wordpress.com/2018/09/iippe-2018-abstracts.pdf>.
3. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2017/08/08/ten-years-on>.
4. See https://thenextrecession.files.wordpress.com/2018/09/ivanova_quantitative-easing_iippe_forthcoming.pdf.
5. www.nytimes.com/2018/09/12/opinion/botching-the-great-recession.html?partner=rss&emc=rss.
6. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2017/07/26/profitability-and-investment-again-the-ameco-data>.
7. (see JA Kregel, 'Budget deficits, stabilization policy and liquidity preference: Keynes's post-war policy proposals' in F Vicarelli (ed) *Keynes's relevance today* London 1985, pp28-50.
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16. http://iippe.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/IIPPE_Tr_Wkshop_1_June_2012_Brown.pdf.
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SOUTH AFRICA**Where next for the SACP?**

As the ANC continues to lose support, Peter Manson looks at the dilemmas of the 'official communists'

Readers will not need reminding of the central role of the South African Communist Party - both during the anti-apartheid struggle and in the current turmoil over the future of the African National Congress.

It is well known that the party was from the outset a major driving force within the ANC, and its cadre have occupied key positions both during the armed struggle and afterwards. For example, the SACP finally publicly acknowledged on the day of Nelson Mandela's death in December 2013 that 'Madiba' had been a member of the SACP central committee until he was instructed to leave the party - probably at some time in the 1960s: it was felt that the leader of a 'broad liberation movement' should not be seen to be a communist, although Mandela "became a great and close friend of the communists till his last days", according to the SACP statement. In fact a good number of other prominent ANC figures were, or had been, party members also.

Perhaps because it was leading an armed struggle, the SACP was most certainly among the most radical of all 'official communist' parties - and, as we shall see, the legacy of this radicalism survives today in the form of the party's continuing revolutionary rhetoric, despite the downright reactionary role it has sometimes played within the ANC government.

For instance, this is what the 1989 SACP programme had to say about the forthcoming insurrection:

The seizure of power will only be assured if the revolutionary movement has already effectively prepared the necessary political and organisational forces with the capacity to launch an offensive for the seizure of power at the right moment ...

An insurrection, unlike a coup, is a mass revolutionary upsurge of the people in conditions which hold out the possibility of a seizure of power. It does not lend itself to blueprinting in the same way as a coup does. The call for an insurrection can only be placed on the immediate agenda of struggle if, and when, a specific revolutionary moment has emerged. However, the task of making adequate preparations for a possible insurrectionary 'moment' needs attention even during the phase when it is not yet imminent.

An insurrection is an act of *revolutionary force*. But, it is not always an *armed* uprising. An all-round civil uprising could lead to an insurrection even when the armed factor is absent or secondary. History has seen successful insurrections of both types.¹

In other words, 'Peacefully if we can, violently if we must'. And the programme went on to outline the factors that it believed needed to be present before such an insurrectionary seizure of power could occur:

... a combination of mass upsurge, in which working class action at the point of production will play a key role, mass defiance, escalating revolutionary combat activity, intensified international pressure, a situation of ungovernability ... and growing demoralisation, division, vacillation and confusion within the power bloc.

This was in fact a description of a revolutionary situation. The SACP continued:



Members of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the ANC armed wing, study in the library of its Lusaka HQ

The subjective forces - both political and military - must be built up so that when these seeds of revolution begin to germinate, the vanguard will be able to seize the historic moment. In this sense, all-round mass action, merging with organised and armed activity, led by a well-organised underground, and international pressure, are the keys to the build-up for the seizure of power.

The reference to "international pressure" is interesting. There is no doubt that for the SACP the role of the Soviet Union was the key - undoubtedly the party believed that a post-liberation South Africa would be part of the Soviet sphere of influence. Perhaps, despite all the talk of a flourishing post-apartheid democracy, the SACP hoped it would become the African equivalent of the likes of Czechoslovakia or Poland, operating a Stalinist version of 'socialism' under one-party rule. In reality, of course, almost before the ink was dry in the 1989 programme, the collapse of 'bureaucratic socialism' was underway - the USSR was no more by the time apartheid was negotiated out of existence.

Talking of negotiations, how did the SACP view their role? Its warnings were clear and accurate:

We should be on our guard against the clear objective of our ruling class and their imperialist allies, who see negotiation as a way of pre-empting a revolutionary transformation. The imperialists seek their own kind of transformation, which goes beyond the reform limits of the present regime, but which will at the same time frustrate the basic objectives of the struggling masses. And they hope to achieve this by pushing the liberation movement into negotiation before it is strong enough to back its basic demands with sufficient power on the ground.

Ironically, the negative outcome the SACP foresaw was what actually transpired. Just five years later apartheid had been replaced by a regime totally in tune with the requirements of South African capital and the international bourgeoisie.

In other words, the defeat of apartheid had two sides. Undoubtedly it represented, on the one hand, a heroic victory for all those who had sacrificed so much - often including their lives. Not only did it see the abolition of all formal restrictions based on race,

but huge new opportunities for our class - the removal of a whole range of oppressive measures and practices, and their replacement by the freedom of the working class, alongside all progressive forces, to organise.

However, on the other hand, we have to accept that, from the point of view of the ruling class, apartheid could not continue indefinitely. Not only was there ongoing mass opposition and a developing revolutionary situation that could only be averted through the abolition of the old system. But apartheid was also acting as a fetter on the development and expansion of capital. Its hugely bureaucratic restrictions - on eligibility for certain jobs, for instance, and its oppressive pass laws meant that capital was often prevented from employing the workers it needed, who could not always easily move to areas where they were required. It is true that apartheid facilitated the ruthless exploitation of sections of the proletariat, but more and more it was holding back capital accumulation.

As late as 1987 Margaret Thatcher labelled the ANC "a terrorist organisation", but she was very much out of tune with the requirements of imperialism by that time. The bourgeoisie - in South Africa and internationally - was looking for an end to apartheid and aimed to transform the ANC into an organisation that could help bring about a regime that would oversee a South Africa that was more secure from its point of view.

Hillel Ticktin once stated at the CPGB's Communist University that capitalism, in and of itself, is "anti-racist". By this he meant that what matters to capital is the exploitation of labour-power - fundamentally it is not interested in the ethnicity or gender of the bearers of that labour-power: they can be men, women - or children; they can be black or white.

Personally I think that 'non-racist' is the more accurate term. Capital may certainly use racism to divide us - apartheid was a prime example of that; but it can also use *anti-racism* towards the same end. For example, when the establishment in the UK proclaims its opposition to racism, one of its aims is to persuade us that what matters is our common Britishness: black and white, worker and capitalist - we all have a common, united interest. It is a way of diverting workers from effective independent organisation on a class basis.

So there was a ruling class interest in ending the old system and negotiating a smooth transition to the

post-apartheid order. The SACP had warned against such an outcome, but in the end it went along with it.

Social democratic

Undoubtedly the ANC's own programme - the Freedom Charter, adopted in 1955 - was drafted very much under the influence of the Communist Party: in fact it has the SACP written all over it.

I am not talking about the obviously correct calls to abolish all forms of racist discrimination and establish a range of democratic rights and freedoms, but in particular the demand for the central role of the state in overseeing a broad and wide-ranging nationalised sector. According to the charter,

The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole. All other industry and trade shall be controlled to assist the wellbeing of the people.

However, the Freedom Charter was not a programme for the replacement of capitalism. For instance, it stipulated: "All who work shall be free to form trade unions, to elect their officers and to make wage agreements with their employers." Its call was for a range of democratic and pro-worker measures under the existing order, some of which were highly ambitious, given the state of development in South Africa. For example:

- "Education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children."
- "Rent and prices shall be lowered, food plentiful and no-one shall go hungry."
- "A preventive health scheme shall be run by the state."
- "The aged, the orphans, the disabled and the sick shall be cared for by the state."

The question of how all this might be brought about in a single country - particularly one of such mass poverty, unemployment and homelessness - was not touched upon, but in my view it can best be summarised as a (highly ambitious) social democratic programme, to be implemented under capitalism. Of course, the SACP might have envisaged a rather different order before the collapse of the Soviet Union, but obviously that did not feature in the Freedom Charter.

In other words, there is a marked contrast between the party's largely principled programme for revolution and what it publicly demanded of

a post-revolutionary government. However, the constraints of the capitalist world order imposed a rather different reality, which meant that the new government, including its 'official communist' element, settled for something rather less ambitious.

It is true that the ANC's 1994 Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) contained some of the Freedom Charter's social democratic elements. For example, there was a mass housing programme, which aimed to provide something approaching a permanent home for the millions of shack-dwellers. Hundreds of thousands of tiny square blocks, known as 'RDP houses', were built. Eventually they were provided with access to running water and electricity (if you could afford to pay for it).

Neoliberalism

But within two years the RDP was ditched - by now the right-moving ANC leadership had been won over to the need to more closely embrace capital and its interests, and in 1996 it revealed what was proclaimed as a more 'realistic' alternative to social democracy in the shape of what can only be described as the neoliberal Growth, Employment and Development Programme (Gear). Far from fulfilling the Freedom Charter pledge for large elements of industry to be "transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole", Gear spelled out a programme of widespread privatisation: ironically there had been a high proportion of state ownership under the apartheid regime - in mining, transport, telecommunications and postal services, for instance.

Linked to this programme of privatisation was what the ANC dubbed "black economic empowerment" (BEE). Unfortunately, however, it was not aimed at the impoverished millions. Its aim was to bring more blacks into positions of ownership and senior management in the private sector. For example, companies applying for state contracts had to demonstrate that they were not (entirely) white-owned and white-run. However, since there was hardly a huge number of black people who had either the wealth or experience to fill such positions, a system was devised whereby company shares were issued to certain blacks (those with the right contacts), to be paid for out of future profits.

A certain number of individuals lower down the social order were also affected. For example, I know a certain person who, for a very short time, benefited from BEE. Having left the family home, he lived in a shack for several years. However, although I knew him as a Christian evangelical, he joined both the ANC and SACP. As he had some experience in small-scale fishing, via his contacts he was given a modest grant to set up a fishing business. Apparently he used it not to buy a small boat and fishing equipment, but a four-by-four! Not that he was able to keep it for very long.

Rather obviously, however, most of those who benefited from BEE were a little higher up the social ladder. There is, for example, a certain Cyril Ramaphosa, who was the first general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers in 1982. Today, not only is he South Africa's current president: he is also the country's 12th richest man, thanks to the boost he was given by BEE - particularly in the private mining sector, as it turns out.

All this took place under the hegemony of the 'triple alliance' -

What we fight for

the ANC, SACP and the Congress of South African Trade Unions. Clearly this alliance is largely based on working class organisations, especially since the ANC itself - originally driven by the SACP - still contains large numbers of party members, including at the very top. True, under the post-apartheid order, more and more rightwing elements came into their own, yet the ANC still had to defer partially to both the SACP and Cosatu - The Congress of South African Trade Unions - whose leaders were almost exclusively SACP. Many SACP and Cosatu comrades are, of course, also members of the ANC.

And the SACP has always featured prominently in post-apartheid governments - currently there are six SACP ministers, including Rob Davies, who has been trade and industry minister since 2009, and the party general secretary, Blade Nzimande, who has the transport portfolio. Interestingly another of the six is someone who is not listed by Wikipedia as an SACP man: Gwede Mantashe, the minister of mineral resources. Up until the end of last year Mantashe had been ANC general secretary, but, following the ANC's internal elections of December 2017, he was named ANC national chair. While the South African media do not usually refer to his SACP membership, he remains a member of its central committee, according to the SACP's own website.²

How many of the ANC's 249 MPs are SACP members? This is not a widely publicised statistic and I have only seen two articles where a precise figure has been ventured. One stated that there are 17, while the other claimed the true figure was 80! Clearly the party itself is not exactly forthcoming with this information, but I would estimate that between 30 and 40 of the ANC's MPs are party members.

The reality is that the SACP has continued to play a central political role - even though the ANC (on behalf of which its government members have operated) has been implementing a programme which has moved a very long way from the social democratic elements of the Freedom Charter.

Racialised

How does the party justify all this? Well, it still insists that the ANC has been leading the "national democratic revolution" (NDR), whose aim has been to overcome "racialised inequality" and open the way to socialism. Of course, this has led to frequent accusations of staginess - a claim which the SACP vigorously denies: in fact the NDR is the "most direct route to socialism in South Africa", according to numerous party documents. It is part of an uninterrupted process and a necessary prerequisite for socialism (in one country, of course).

So how has the NDR been progressing in reality? Well, out of a population of 56 million, there are approximately 10 million shack-dwellers and officially 5.9 million unemployed people of working age. That represents 27% of the population and, even so, is actually a considerable underestimate - especially when you consider that hundreds of thousands have simply given up looking for employment: they try to make ends meet as best as they can - by, for instance, buying and selling various commodities to passing motorists at road junctions.

So what of actual inequality? Well, according to the World Bank's Dr Paul Nomba Um, more than 75% of South Africans "slipped into poverty" at least once between 2008 and 2015:

Half of South Africans during the 2008 to 2014-15 period were considered chronically poor or having average consumption below

the upper-bound poverty line. At least 78% of South Africans were in poverty at least once during this period ... About 40% of South Africans lived below the lower-bound poverty line in 2015, up from 36.4% in 2011.³

In other words, inequality has substantially increased. The Gini coefficient - recognised as the best measure of economic inequality - stood at 0.65 in 2015, making South Africa officially the most unequal country in the world. And, while a small number of whites have themselves been dragged into poverty and a tiny minority of blacks have escaped it, I think it is safe to say that, as a result of the legacy of first colonialism and then apartheid, inequality remains "racialised".

Unsurprisingly, recent years have seen increasing disillusionment in the ANC, whose election returns have been steadily declining. And the grip of the SACP over the trade union movement has gradually been weakening, as more and more longstanding members have begun to see through all its talk of the NDR being the "most direct route to socialism".

A turning point came in August 2012 with the Marikana massacre, when 34 striking miners were shot dead by police armed with automatic weapons. The role of the current president Cyril Ramaphosa in the slaughter has been well chronicled. Ramaphosa - who had a substantial monetary interest in Lonmin, the British-owned company that employed the strikers - sent out several emails claiming that, far from being engaged in a simple industrial dispute, they were "dastardly criminals"; what was needed was unspecified "concomitant action". The very next day the largely unarmed 34 miners were mowed down - many were shot in the back while trying to escape being killed.

Of course, the ANC, the SACP and Cosatu unions had been placing a large portion of the blame on the breakaway Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (Amcu): if you rebel against SACP-led unions, you deserve everything that might come your way. The SACP position had been that there was violence on all sides, so let's not rush to draw any conclusions - wait for the official enquiry (which, as expected, turned out to be a complete whitewash).

It was in these circumstances that former SACP loyalists began to see the light. In 2013 the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa), under the leadership of former SACP stalwart Irvin Jim, decided that enough was enough. Its annual conference agreed to withdraw support from both the ANC and SACP, and work towards the formation of a new workers' party. Despite the fact that Numsa is the largest South African union, with around 338,000 members, Cosatu responded by expelling it from the federation in 2014 - under the pretence that it had been 'poaching' other unions' members.

Now Numsa has set up another union federation - the South African Federation of Trade Unions (Saftu), which claims 700,000 members, as opposed to Cosatu's 1.8 million. Note that there were other, smaller federations already in existence and the country's total union membership stands at some 3.4 million (compared to 5.9 million unemployed, remember).

Rival party

So what has happened to the new workers' party promised by Numsa and Irvin Jim? Well, not very much. On May Day this year Numsa announced that the "Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party" would be formed before the end of 2018 and in July, speaking at an event organised by the Socialist Workers Party here in Britain, Ronnie Kasrils - the former

SACP member and ANC minister, who himself has become increasingly disillusioned - declared that the SRWP will be launched in October.

Since then the South African section of Peter Taaffe's Committee for a Workers' International, called the Workers and Socialist Party (Wasp), has indicated that the launch will actually take place in December. But Wasp is less than fully supportive of such a new party. According to Sheri Hamilton, "Our attitude towards the SRWP is that if it wants to play a role in filling the working class political vacuum then it should be open, democratic and built on the basis of a federal structure, which unfortunately is not the case at the moment."⁴

It is typical of the CWI that, whatever position on such matters is adopted in Britain must apply everywhere else. So, if anything, the SRWP will be too leftwing for Wasp - what South Africa needs most of all, according to the CWI, is the equivalent of the Labour Party, not a party proclaiming itself to be revolutionary.

But, in reality, while SACP leaders like comrade Jim use revolutionary and Marxist terminology, they actually yearn for the good old days of the Freedom Charter. They openly call for a return to the social democratic policies it espoused. And, while Numsa *et al* do not harp on too much about "racialised inequality", they do identify the main problem as "white monopoly capitalism". In response to this the SACP correctly asks whether 'black monopoly capitalism' would be any better.

So will the SRWP be formed in time to contest the 2019 general election? That remains to be seen. But we do know that the ANC's overall majority could now be under threat. In the late 1990s it won two-thirds of the parliamentary seats - enough to be able to change the constitution. But in the 2016 local elections the ANC was down to 54% support - it lost control of several major cities as a result.

However, under South Africa's completely proportional electoral system, whereby the percentage vote recorded for a given party is translated into the same proportion of MPs - and there is no artificial minimum threshold - even the smallest of parties has a chance of electoral success. There are 400 seats in parliament, which means that just 0.25% of the total vote is required for the election of any MP.

The largest opposition grouping is at present the Democratic Alliance, which polls at around 20%. The DA traces its roots to the founding of the (whites-only) liberal, anti-apartheid Progressive Party back in 1959. Now it boasts a black leader, but its main support still comes from the white population, as well as people of mixed race (still referred to using the apartheid-era label of 'coloured').

Then there is the left-populist Economic Freedom Fighters, which refers to the SACP as the "so-called Communist Party". But the EFF is in reality African-nationalist, despite the fact that its members sport red berets. While the EFF marks another sign of the disillusionment in the ANC, it is not at all progressive, as sections of the left claim, including the Socialist Workers Party. It has no organisational connection to the working class. But the EFF does not look any more likely than the DA to challenge the ANC as the country's largest party.

However, the SACP itself has reacted to the loss of illusions in the ANC - especially with the rampant corruption that characterised the presidency of Jacob Zuma - with talk of a new "popular front", and the need for a "reconfigured alliance" with the ANC. Such talk increased more and more towards the end of Zuma's second term, with the SACP claiming that South Africa had fallen victim to "state capture" by capitalists, thanks

to the influence in particular of the Gupta brothers, who were said to exert extraordinary influence over Zuma, allegedly dictating who should be appointed to head various ministries. In 2017 the SACP consistently called for Zuma to stand down.

As a result, while the ANC has been losing support, SACP membership has been shooting up. At its congress in July 2017 it announced a total membership of 284,000, organised in "over 100 branches" across the country. However, there is something not quite right about those two figures. They would mean that each branch has on average 2,840 members - rather a lot, don't you think? The truth is that for the SACP - rather like the SWP here in Britain - a 'member' is someone who has done the equivalent of filling in an application form. In other words, the official membership figure does not accurately reflect the number of actual activists.

However, I have no reason to doubt that support for the SACP has been growing substantially - that official figure has more than doubled in the last few years. This has been driven by the same loss of faith that has seen the creation of the EFF and the moves towards the SRWP - despite the fact that the SACP has played an important role within the ANC, not least through ministers like Rob Davies.

But the SACP continues to employ revolutionary jargon, such as the slogan, 'Socialism is the future - build it now'. It insists that now we need to move rapidly towards the "second, more radical phase of the national democratic revolution".

It is now very likely that the SACP will contest the 2019 general election under its own name - the "reconfigured alliance" will be formed afterwards, between ANC and SACP MPs, if the leadership's wishes come to fruition. And there will undoubtedly be SACP MPs elected, thanks to the party-list system of proportional representation.

In my view the fact that the SACP could stand under its own name is objectively positive - without wishing to exaggerate the situation, it is a (modest) move towards working class independence. And there is a certain parallel between the huge increase in its official membership and the pro-Corbyn movement here in Britain. Both are a reaction to the politics of the mainstream and the desire for a positive alternative. And both provide Marxists with a site for struggle.

While very few of those who have junked the SACP and called for a working class alternative - ie, those in Numsa and other unions - have anything approaching genuine Marxist politics, they are at least for the working class. The truth is, they should have remained in the SACP and fought within it. It is a milieu within which revolutionaries can work in order to fight - not only for working class independence, but for genuine Marxism.

But now there could be a second such milieu in the shape of the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party - if it happens. There is no matter of principle that states we must work within one rather than the other - it is a question of judgement and individual circumstances.

One thing is for sure - the working class is in desperate need of a principled, internationalist, Marxist party, and the ground in South Africa is much more fertile for the formation of such a party on a mass basis than it is in Britain ●

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Notes

1. 'The path to power': www.sacp.org.za/main.php?ID=2638.
2. www.sacp.org.za/main.php?ID=3405.
3. www.iof.co.za/news/south-africa/south-africa-worlds-most-unequal-society-report-14125145.
4. www.socialistworld.net/index.php/international/africa/south-africa/9944-south-african-workers-reject-ramaphoria

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Turkey has never given up occupied land

A vindictive and pitiless regime

The likes of Joe Robinson cannot be tolerated by Erdoğan, writes Esen Uslu

A former British army veteran who briefly served as a combat medic with the Kurdish forces defending Kobanê against Islamic State in 2015 has been sentenced to seven years and six months imprisonment. Joe Robinson, 25, was detained in a resort town on the Aegean coast in the summer of 2017. After a lengthy trial he was convicted of being a member of a terrorist organisation.

After taking part in fighting in Syrian and then Iraqi Kurdistan for five months, Robinson returned to Britain, and he was promptly arrested at Manchester Airport. After a 10-month-long investigation he was released without being charged. Most probably he had developed a false sense of security following this, and decided it was safe to travel to Turkey for a holiday. He had not realised - or simply could not comprehend - that Turkey is headed by a vindictive regime that never forgets. It has been waging a war of conquest along its southern borders, and must punish those who stand opposed to its aims.

One expects that those foreign fighters who joined the International Freedom Battalion to defend Rojava alongside forces of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) against the onslaught of IS have had first-hand experience of what Turkey is capable of doing. But perhaps some lessons need to be learnt the hard way. So far eight British IFB fighters have lost their lives for a cause they believed in deeply. Their ultimate sacrifice - and those of all other IFB fighters in defence of democracy and freedom against all the odds - reminds me of the glorious traditions of the International Brigade in Spain, when Hitler's regime provided military aid, including air support, to Franco's fascist forces.

In Rojava and Iraqi Kurdistan the same role has been played by Turkey - with the financial support of the Gulf regimes. All armed Islamist groups were trained, supplied and armed by Ankara from the very start of the Syrian revolution. Their freedom of movement through Turkish territory was secured and all medical services, including subsequent recuperation, were provided in Turkey. Who could forget how the spokesman for the Turkish regime smirked while he boasted about Kobanê's imminent fall?

IFB fighters joined the war without hesitation, despite the fact that the odds were stacked heavily against them. Each of them assumed a Kurdish *nom de guerre*, which was very relevant to the struggle. They were part of the legendary defence of Kobanê, which has since been instilled in the memory of all progressives in the middle east, if not the world.

Supporting Kurds

The IS defeat in Kobanê and successive victories in the later stages was such a blow to the Turkish regime, it could not forgive or forget. The pitiless nature of the regime in its long-drawn-out fight against



Joe Robinson: jailed for fighting IS

the Kurds is well known, but its failures on the ground, combined with its pitiful standing in the international arena, has guaranteed its vindictiveness against anybody who supports the Kurds.

The regime's spokesmen and their mouthpieces in the press have been attacking everybody - starting with the United States and the European Union, through to Amnesty International and the international media, down to various religious missionaries - and try to portray them all as enemies of Turkey because they do not toe the government's line on Kurdistan. Any opposition is treachery.

Even the financial crisis brought about by the government's own incompetent policies is explained away to the people as an attack organised by foreigners wanting to stop Turkey's mercurial progress. The xenophobia is pumped up under the guise of anti-imperialism.

Journalists who have exposed Turkey's involvement in clandestine arm shipments to Syria have been harshly treated. A former editor of the nationalist daily *Cumhuriyet* was sentenced to imprisonment and, despite the fact that he is an MP with parliamentary immunity, has not been released. Another journalist fled the country and has been unable to return, while many others have been locked away for long periods while awaiting trial. Thousands of members of the press are now in jail. The same goes for academics, teachers and students.

In this atmosphere the incursions of Turkish armed forces into Syria and the continuing campaign in Iraqi Kurdistan have raised the bar. Domestically manufactured 'unmanned aerial vehicles' carrying domestically developed precision missiles are being used indiscriminately. Aerial reconnaissance covers what are continuous air raids on Kurdish areas,

not only across the border, but within Turkey itself.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, Turkish armed forces have built 11 bases along the routes connecting the Qandil mountains to Turkey's borders. The stated aim of 'denial of area control to the Kurds' is the phrase used to justify the continued occupation of Iraqi territories. The area under Turkish control extends 25 kilometres into Iraqi territory. Of course, there is no independent confirmation of this, since nobody but officially sanctioned journalists are allowed in the region.

Meanwhile, the propaganda machine of the Turkish state claims every week that yet another key leader of the Kurdish guerrilla forces has been killed - such claims must now have reached more than one thousand. And so-called "security zones" declared within Turkey itself have meant that people living in those areas have been unable to return for

months. Once again no independent journalists are permitted during military operations. And forest fires caused by the bombing have raged without any attempt to extinguish them.

In almost every major city in the western part of Turkey leaders and cadre of the People's Democratic Party (HDP) are being detained on terrorism charges. Anti-American sentiment is encouraged on the pretext that the US is supporting the formation of a Kurdish zone along the southern border. And the government has claimed success through the occupation of Azez and Afrin. Meanwhile, there is the building of 11 so-called observation posts in Idlib - military units are actually stationed there.

To date, the Turkish army of the modern republican era has never withdrawn from any piece of land it has occupied on this or that pretext, beginning with the ancient Antioch province of the Ottoman Empire. It had fallen under French occupation after World War I, but was occupied in 1938 and then incorporated into Turkey. Then northern Cyprus was invaded in 1974 on the pretext of saving Turkish Cypriots from a massacre and, while a shambolic 'independent' state was declared there in 1983, the Turkish occupation is ongoing after a quarter of a century. With rich pickings awaiting prospectors of underwater oil the Turkish regime has no intention of quitting the island.

Turkey's claims on Greek territory are also ever present. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been open in his desire to rewrite the Lausanne Treaty - the basis of the peace settlement following World War I. The airforces of Turkey and Greece - supposed partners within Nato - ended up firing on each other after weeks of mock dog-fights over the Aegean Sea. Eventually international pressure forced them to pull back.

The regions of Mosul and Kirkuk in Iraq, together with the Antioch province of Syria, have been considered Turkish property since the swearing of the national oath in the first assembly of nationalist forces in 1919. There is a never-ending desire to dominate those regions - in fact the free movement granted to IS and its occupation of Mosul were facilitated on the same grounds.

Therefore those like Joe Robinson cannot be tolerated by the Turkish regime ●

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