

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



SPEW asks to affiliate, but Peter Taaffe's overtures are spurned by Jennie Formby

- Letters and debate
- Labour's clause four
- Liverpool conference
- Momentum on banks

No 1221 Thursday October 4 2018

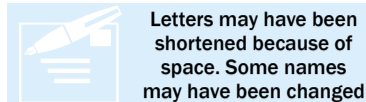
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LETTERS



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

Racist endeavour

So now the Labour Party has accepted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition/working document as to what anti-Semitism actually is. This work has often been described as "internationally recognised" (not least over and over again in *The Guardian*) and I suppose that it is. That is, on a level with 'An Englishman, a Scotsman and an Irishman go into a bar ...' There they see a framed copy of the document on the wall and say in unison: 'I've seen that before!' This 'recognition' has been one of the many lies in the smear campaign: the alliance has 31 members, of which six, apparently, have "recognised" the document. As far as I am aware, it is unknown how many, if any, have put it into law and how many, if any, have accepted all 11 examples.

Anyway, the Labour Party can now show itself as a shining example to the world, and its members can no longer claim that the "existence of the state of Israel is a racist endeavour". This raises a further question, however: are we allowed to say that the formation of the USA was a racist endeavour? Given the ethnic cleansing and the centuries of dependence on slave labour, it is tempting. We must obviously fear the risk of extradition to face 'The House Un-American Activities Committee' if we go too far.

So how have all the other states come into existence? In Europe this was the outcome of centuries of feudal feuding, as Perry Anderson pointed out in his *Passages from antiquity to feudalism*. Feudal lords had only one means to increase their wealth and that was by gaining new territory; this might be by marriage or by conquest, but the point then was to keep it. Hence centuries of warfare, including the rise and fall of great empires, such as the Swedish and the Lithuanian, and over time the consolidation of more or less natural parcels of land that became nations. At the time they didn't need to be 'nations': they were just the land owned or ruled over by whoever it was.

Religion played a growing role, of course, with, especially, rivalries between Protestant and Catholic rulers - the Dutch, for instance, cast off Catholic Spain. But, while there was great hatred and fear, victories and defeats, courage, foresight and stupidity, these were battles seen as being fought between more or less equal human beings - even if some of them were clearly heading for eternal damnation.

Racism was something else. As Theodore Allen explores in *The invention of the white race*, Africans were accepted in the earliest years in North America - they could even hold white indentured servants. Racism was needed, and constructed, so that black people could be held as slaves. With the spread of European imperialism, this also provided rationalisation for the massacre, rape, pillage and enslavement of peoples all over the world. They were of lower culture and intelligence, they were brutish and uncivilised and they were, perhaps best of all, not Christians. These were beliefs that needed almost no justification for several hundred more years.

Were there any states then that came into being by racist endeavour? I would suggest that the USA and

Australia are glaringly obvious. To this day I don't think that there is any country in the Americas that is ruled now, let alone at their foundation, by indigenous people. In Asia we have the longstanding countries of China and India and, no doubt, a few others. They may have been trampled on, conquered and ravaged by racists, but they do not owe their existence to those endeavours.

But what of Africa? We have ancient states in Egypt and Ethiopia. Africa is notorious for the straight lines between states, drawn by racists with neither knowledge nor interest of the peoples inhabiting these countries. And then we come to what is often referred to as the Middle East. After World War I, when both the Arabs and the Zionists had been promised self-government, we had, as might have been expected, the carve-up between imperial France and imperial Great Britain - a racist carve-up, in that neither country could care less about the local inhabitants; a long, peaceful rule through puppets and the protection of imperial interests, including shipping and oil, were the only concerns. Syria and Lebanon to France; and Iraq, Jordan and Palestine to Britain.

But Britain had promised a state to the Zionists and so there was a push to make it so, against some opposition for a while, but eventually leading to success. And so, in this racist mish-mash, we have the state of Israel - alone in the region and quite unusual in the world - which is not the result of a racist endeavour. How strange.

Jim Cook
Reading

Sloppy

The newly relaunched *Tribune* magazine first issue was printed in September 2018. The first falsehood it contained could not have appeared any earlier, coming straight after the title. Not only that - the falsehood is a major one, a whopper. It carries the subtitle, "Britain's oldest democratic socialist publication".

The Socialist Party of Great Britain have published the *Socialist Standard* every month, uninterrupted, since September 1904. *Tribune*, by contrast, was first published in 1937 - a detail which is also trumpeted on the cover.

The SPGB is a companion party of the World Socialist Movement, of which all companion parties operate democratically, regarding this as inseparable from socialism. One such companion party, the World Socialist Party of the United States, marked their centenary in 2016, including advertising enquiries with *Jacobin*, whose owners now also own *Tribune*.

This sloppy attitude to facts that are easy to check portends badly for the new *Tribune*.

Jon D White
SPGB

No Blairite

Dave Vincent, in the course of correcting some editorial mistakes, unfortunately introduces one of his own in describing Hugh Lanning as a Blairite. (Letters, September 13).

I was one of the minority of the left in PCS that supported Mark Serwotka's campaign for general secretary in 2000 against Barry Reamsbottom and Hugh, but I haven't lost my bearings. Following Mark's landslide victory, Reamsbottom attempted to set the result aside and cling to power through an internal coup. Hugh, to his great credit, loyally opposed the coup. He has long been associated with both Palestine and Cuba solidarity, been a vice-chair of Unite Against Fascism, and has been a frequent contributor

to the *Morning Star* - none of them known as Blairite projects. He spoke at an anti-English Defence League rally in my borough in 2012.

In 2017, he became the first UK national to be banned from entering Israel because of his support for the BDS movement. In retirement he played a prominent role in Diane Abbott's campaign to be Labour's London mayoral candidate in 2015 - a campaign in which Diane was very much seen as the candidate of the left.

Richard Price
Leyton & Wanstead CLP

Third campism

Paul Demarty lays out all around him in his article, 'The poverty of left remainers', but has no answers himself on how to proceed, apart from the third campist, "the British state and a EU bureaucracy ... both are in enemy hands, ... both must be destroyed and a genuine socialist internationalism put to work replacing them" (September 27).

The purpose of a 4,000-word article should be to attempt some answer to this pressing problem, but 'Neither London nor Brussels, but international socialism' is a very comfortable place theoretically when the fierce winds of the class struggle blow about our ears.

Capitalism is national, socialism is international. 'Workers of the world, unite' is not only possible, but absolutely indispensable for socialism and eventually the social and economic egalitarianism of communism. Capitalism can and must expand its trade and economy internationally, but can never unite politically - not least because its production for profit constrains expansion, due to the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, causing cyclical crises, and therefore leads to trade wars. These always highlight the national homes of all transnational corporations and the barrier to the expansion of the productive forces necessary for human development. It is not just the distribution of wealth that is needed, but a mode of production unconstrained by profit motives - one based on production for human need.

Nonetheless, Paul does at least approach the answer on a few occasions, only to draw back in terror. He correctly points out that back in 1973-75: "The Labour left took many of its political cues from the Communist Party, whose strategic objective was to break Britain from diplomatic alliance with the US into formal non-alignment and ultimately friendship with the Warsaw Pact. From this point of view, the EEC was the human face of Nato. When the ailing Heath government succeeded in dragooning Britain into membership, Harold Wilson promised a referendum on whether to stay, and duly delivered - thus the peculiar sight of Tony Benn sharing a platform with Enoch Powell. In the end, Britain remained."

Brexit or remain does matter. It is clear that the forces to the right of Theresa May are viciously racist, viciously anti-immigrant and for import controls. The Brexit vote has enormously strengthened Tommy Robinson and the Democratic Football Lads Alliance. Our stance as revolutionary socialists really is not a choice between two wings of the ruling class. For any genuine fighter for socialism, it is the effect that Brexit has had and will have on working class consciousness that is the most important. If every individual national ruling class, every imperialist ruling class convinces the working class in their own state to think that they can solve

their own problems within their own state by putting up trade barriers and keeping out the immigrants, foreign goods and services etc, that would be an absolute disaster for global class-consciousness. It is not just about Britain, but essentially global.

And workers are changing their minds in the face of the obvious job losses Brexit will entail. The second referendum would have got through Labour conference if the bureaucracy had not done its bureaucratic manoeuvring with the assistance of the union bureaucracy, not least Len McCluskey of Unite, who played such a disastrous role in imposing the IRHA definition and in scuppering open selection.

Those Trotskyist and other groups who are for Lexit now are as politically and ideologically dominated by the Communist Party of Britain as back in 1975. If we take a quote from *The British road to socialism*, the CPGB's 1951 programme, where they charge the Tories and the Labour leaders with betraying the interests of 'Britain'. Thinking the interests of 'Britain' to be the interests of British capitalism, they say: "The restoration of British national independence, which has been given away by the leaders of the Tory, Liberal and Labour parties, is the indispensable condition for Britain's recovery and political, economic and social advance. The Communist Party declares that the leaders of the Tory, Liberal and Labour Parties, and their spokesmen in the press and on the BBC, are betraying the interests of Britain to dollar imperialism. Our call is for the unity of all true patriots to defend British national interests and independence."

That is a complete abandonment, of course, of class politics - a popular front collapse. Moreover, defending the national sovereignty of an imperialist country like Britain is defending the right of British imperialism to 'defend' its colonies and semi-colonies. So, if we take another leading advocate of the left exit, the RMT union, in 2009 under the late Bob Crow it was notoriously soft on the Labour Party's call for "British jobs for British workers". This was a 'great' campaign - the Socialist Party supported it, while the Socialist Workers Party was somewhat better, but reluctantly supported it in the end. It was launched with the help of *The Sun* and *The Daily Star*. They had huge front-page covers promoting this campaign. And the strikes that resulted were ones that large sections of the capitalist class were absolutely delighted to support, because they knew that what was happening was a fight within the working class. Workers were blaming other workers - that was the essence of the situation.

As revolutionary socialists you have to raise your sights to the world stage. You must understand that the crisis of capitalism is global - truly international - not located in one country. The whole idea of capitalism in a single country is long gone, as Marx explained quite clearly. So the Stalinist idea of socialism in a single country is a complete farce, a lie.

There was no socialism in the USSR or in China and there could not be, because socialism depends on developing the productive forces to their highest level. Socialism does not depend on gaining power in a single country, passing laws through parliament and then hoping that the army will not shoot you. That is absolutely not how it is going to happen.

In 1923 Trotsky explained: "The democratic republican unification of

Europe - a union really capable of guaranteeing the freedom of national development - is possible only on the road of a revolutionary struggle against militarist, imperialist, dynastic centralism, by means of uprisings in individual countries, with the subsequent merger of these upheavals into a general European revolution.

"The victorious European revolution, however, no matter how its course in isolated countries may be fashioned, can, in consequence of the absence of other revolutionary classes, transfer the power only to the proletariat. Consequently the United States of Europe represents the form - the only conceivable form - of the dictatorship of the European proletariat."

But Paul conceded there may be other left remainers besides Michael Chessum and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty: "Suppose the left remainers were absolutely right, and the international working class has a compelling interest in continued British membership of the European Union. It would then simply be the case that there was a commonality of interest with finance capital in making that happen - and a limited common front on that issue would be no more unprincipled than trade union support for Liberal legislation in the unions' favour in the 19th century, or for that matter many of the electoral arrangements between the Bolsheviks and the liberal bourgeois parties in pre-revolutionary Russia."

Left remainers are absolutely right, despite the opportunism of some. And Paul is, of course, right: it was unprincipled of Michael Chessum to take the £70,000 cheque from Soros. But he nonetheless concedes that it is possible to be a left remainer and still be principled. "Chessum's peculiar bedfellows" do not "give the lie to the sagacity of his electoral advice", he says, but he needs far better arguments than that to make a case against left 'remain'.

The problem is that the internationalism of revolutionary socialism is a marginal political stance today. Paul seems to suggest it is not principled to be a Brexiteer/Lexiteer and remain true to socialist principles. But if you take no stance at all - in the tradition of third campists like Max Shachtman and Hal Draper - then no-one can accuse you of anything apart from abstentionism.

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

Sophisticated

Paul B Smith makes one very good point in his article, 'Into the swamp' - a "review" of Yuri Slezkine's *The house of government*:

"The Marxist belief in the possibility of a classless future is thoroughly secular. The notion of classlessness depends on the ideas that it is possible to end the capitalist division of labour, create an abundance of products sufficient to meet people's needs, shorten the time necessary to reproduce society through the use of robots, enlarge the amount of time individuals have to develop their creativity and sociability, generate surpluses controlled by producers and democratise the planning process within a global society" (*Weekly Worker* July 12).

Actually, it is the only good point - the rest is complete drivel and nonsense. Some sections appear to be psychedelically driven. And even PBS's one good point is flawed. I don't think there were many "robots" around in Marx's time. Central to Marxism is the fact that labour is the source of all created value and wealth. In a society run by and in

the interests of working people, the *existing* means and capacity of production and distribution would be more than adequate to ensure that all working people had access to all the basic means of life, housing, food, water, health, education, culture, etc.

Two basic reasons: One, the removal of the capitalist class and the abolition of the extreme, unequal allocation of existing wealth and income in society; Two, the removal of the profit motive would itself allow the existing productive forces of wealth and value to increase massively in order to meet human need. A third factor is that the elimination of non-useful, wasteful and destructive production would itself create and free up massive additional productive capacity to meet human needs.

The stupendous increase in socially useful production from existing production capacities would also enable massive reductions in the average working day, week, year and lifetime, freeing up substantial time for working people to engage in culture, education, voluntary work and contributions to engage fully in the running of society and the economy. The introduction of robots cannot but help this paradigm shift, but they are hardly central.

PBS states: "I do not know a single person who has respect for any of Stalin's writings." I just find that incredibly arrogant and offensive. I assume PBS from his lofty attitude is employed in some academic ivory tower. He writes occasionally on the Soviet Union, but refuses to read one of the principal protagonists in its creation and development. So he has no real idea of the challenges, ideas, choices, debates and opportunities which were literally the lifeblood of real, living, vibrant Soviet society in the 1920s and 30s. He therefore disqualifies himself from having or expressing any opinion on the subject.

Marx, Engels and Lenin were the scientific pioneers of a potential socialist alternative to capitalist society, but Stalin and his leadership team were actually engaged in the immeasurably more challenging and difficult tasks of not only establishing socialism in an extremely backward country and in an extremely hostile international environment, but consolidating, developing it and ensuring by the early 1930s it had not only become the dominant socio-economic system in the USSR, but one capable of withstanding external threats.

Stalin's writings are actually extremely good. He speaks clearly, articulates complex points and issues in ways most people can grasp. He weighs alternatives and evaluates their merits and demerits, and arrives at considered, balanced conclusions. His reports to Communist Party congresses were always balanced, self-critical and challenging. The undoubted successes and achievement of the Soviet socialist system were never allowed to generate complacency or loss of forward momentum.

As part of the leadership core which successfully established, defended, consolidated and led the triumph of Soviet socialism by the early 1930s, Stalin contributed massively to the development of Marxism-Leninism - the theory and practice of how the working class can liberate itself and thereby the whole of humankind. He clearly recognised and articulated that the "overthrown classes" and "the people of the past" still in numbers and influence represented a resentful, angry and increasingly desperate opposition and hatred of the new socialist system.

Stalin's comprehensive and thoughtful analyses of the

dramatically changing international situation, the overall development of world capitalism and imperialism, the rising contradictions and rivalries between capitalist states, the sharpening contradictions and class struggles within those states, the role of social democracy, etc and the contradictions between world capitalism and imperialism and Soviet socialism, in the 1930s were extremely profound and stand the test of time (eg, his reports to the 17th and 18th CPSU congresses in 1934 and 1939).

I think Stalin contributed additionally and specifically to the concepts of socialist agriculture and the national question. He was ferociously focused on ensuring the strategy for socialisation of agriculture, built carefully and steadily on existing, emerging cooperative and collective practices: the complex class stratification of the peasantry had to be understood and the working masses had to be worked with and persuaded to develop collective and ultimately state farms (eg, 'Dizzy with success' *Works* Vol 12, p197).

Stalin's thoughts on the development of a universal language, the national question, the merging of nations, etc were, I think, extremely considered, balanced and extraordinarily brilliant (eg, *Works* Vol 10, pp373-83) - and actually extraordinarily relevant to our current conversations about the European Union and Brexit.

Stalin as a proletarian Bolshevik revolutionary demonstrates intellect, sophistication and communication skills far in advance of most of 'our' middle class academics. I suspect that a lofty refusal to read Stalin and positively engage with his thoughts and arguments is a simplistic and obvious cover for not having the will or capability to do so.

But PBS's article had one positive outcome: I bought the book and it is a powerful, sobering and fascinating read.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

Freedom Charter

Jack Conrad is essentially correct in his criticism of my description of the African National Congress programme as "social democratic" ('Not social democracy', September 27).

The 1955 Freedom Charter was, of course, largely drawn up by the South African Communist Party and

should be seen in the context of the SACP's own programme for a two-stage revolution. The first stage - the national democratic revolution - aimed to overthrow apartheid and introduce wide-ranging democratic and pro-worker reforms, while key sectors of the economy would be "transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole". In other words, a programme of large-scale nationalisation - although, according to the SACP's 1989 *The path to power*, "At the same time, the state will protect the interests of private business, where these are not incompatible with the public interest."

But the intention was to proceed as swiftly as possible to the second stage - the 'official communist' version of socialism - although the SACP programme warned that prior to the complete victory over apartheid it was essential to maintain "the unity in action of the oppressed and democratic forces around the basic national democratic demands"; and added: "To weaken this unity by placing the attainment of socialism on the immediate agenda would, in fact, be to postpone the very attainment of socialist transformation."

However, "Victory in the national democratic revolution is, for our working class, the most direct route to socialism and ultimately communism" - and the Freedom Charter ought to be read in that context. In other words, it was not intended to be an end in itself, as the term 'social democratic' implies.

Nevertheless, when today those who have become disillusioned with the SACP's leadership hark back to the good old days and call for the full implementation of the Freedom Charter, they do not see it as just the first stage. After all, the SACP's programme saw "international support" - in the shape of the Soviet Union and other "socialist countries" - as a key factor, while today things are obviously rather different.

It is true that those like Irvin Jim, general secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, still talk about socialism as their ultimate aim, but in reality their programme tends to be limited by the confines of the Freedom Charter. In that sense - in the context of today's rebellion against the SACP, when the Freedom Charter is detached from the two-stage programme of old - it can be regarded as social democratic: ie, limited to the winning of a range of reforms under capitalism.

Peter Manson
London

A good job

Thanks to the efforts of our readers and supporters, we managed to make our £1,750 target for September. The last couple of days of the month brought us five donations - with a special mention going to comrade JT for his £50 standing order. Also worth a mention is comrade AR, who is making two regular monthly payments - by standing order and PayPal. We ended the month on £1,792.

As for October, we have got off to the usual good start, thanks to all those standing orders that come our way in the first couple of days of each month. Amongst the 16 we received, SW and AC both donated £30, while DL and II gave £20 each.

As I write, there has been just one PayPal donation since October 1 - PM's usual £15 - plus a generous £100 bank transfer

from TG. And the single cheque received is also worth a mention - not for the amount, which was a modest £4, but for the note that came with it. Two weeks ago, I mentioned the cheque received from comrade "IDS", which arrived without a covering note.

But this time he's made amends by writing a few words. First of all, he doesn't, under any circumstances, want to be referred to as IDS (for obvious reasons), so he's given us an extra initial - thank you, comrade IJDS! He writes that he thought we deserved "a further contribution, because I think you're doing a good job".

Anyway, after just three days our October fighting fund stands at £329. Let's make sure we get past that £1,750 barrier once again ●

Robbie Rix

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday October 7, 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 October 9, 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: '*The sleeping beauty and other tales: the deep structure of magical myths*'.
Speaker: Chris Knight.

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

Afghanistan - end the war

Friday October 5, 5pm: Protest, Downing Street, London SW1.

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

Anti-Semitism, Palestine and freedom

Saturday October 6, 3pm to 5pm: Discussion, Birkbeck, University of London, Malet Street, London WC1.

Organised by Socialist Worker Student Society:

www.facebook.com/SocialistWorkerStudentSociety.

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

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.

Justice for Ballymurphy 11

Saturday October 13, 5pm: Picket, Irish embassy, 17 Grosvenor

Place, London SW1. Kitson and Jackson are war criminals!

Organised by Irish Republican Prisoners Support Group:

www.facebook.com/Irish-Republican-Prisoners-Support-Group-London-136462699810807.

Stop the DFLA

Saturday October 13, 12.30pm: Counterdemonstration, Old Palace

Yard, London SW1. No to the Democratic Football Lads Alliance.

Organised by Stand Up To Racism: www.standuptoracism.org.uk.

Venezuela Solidarity Campaign

Saturday October 13, 10am: AGM, followed by celebration of

Hugo Chávez's legacy, 1.30pm to 3.30pm. Speakers include George

Galloway, Francisco Dominguez (VSC), Kate Hudson (CND), Colin

Burton (Labour Friends of Progressive Latin America).

Organised by Venezuela Solidarity Campaign:

www.venezuelasolidarity.co.uk.

Working for peace

Wednesday October 17, 7.15pm: Launch meeting, Ruskin House,

3 Coombe Road, Croydon.

Organised by Croydon Peace Council:

www.londoncnd.org/events/2018/10/17/croydon-peace-council-launch.

Grass Roots Left

Saturday October 20, 12 noon to 4pm: Relaunch of Unite rank-and-

file grouping, Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1.

Speakers include Jerry Hicks

Organised by Grass Roots Left:

www.facebook.com/events/163906434203778.

For pensioners' rights

Wednesday October 24, 11.30am: Rally, Old Palace Yard (opposite

House of Lords), London SW1; followed by lobby, 1pm, committee

room 14, House of Commons.

Organised by National Pensioners Convention: www.npcuk.org.

Renationalise the rail

Wednesday October 24, 7 pm: Meeting, first floor, The Wellington,

37 Bennetts Hill, Birmingham B2. 'Prospects for renationalisation'.

Speakers: Ian Scott (Birmingham TUC), Pat Collins (ex-RMT EC).

Organised by Birmingham Socialist Discussion Group:

ser14@btinternet.com.

Socialism 2018

Saturday November 10 and Sunday November 11: Socialist Party

school, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, Bloomsbury, London

WC1. Organised by Socialist Party in England and Wales:

www.socialism2018.net

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.

TORIES



Boris Johnson addresses vast Tory Home 'fringe' meeting

Still no way out

Paul Demarty watches the fur fly at the Birmingham conference

Whither the Conservative Party? After Theresa May's 'Dancing queen' performance at Birmingham, Britain's 'natural party of government' is looking less the part than it has at any conference since the brief, abortive leadership of Iain Duncan Smith.

At that time, of course, there was the small problem that the media had swung behind Tony Blair's New Labour, and was not to start swinging back for another few years. No such problem this time, seeing as how the Labour Party is led by a man who may as well be Errico Malatesta as far as the media are concerned.

Yet no media organisation, surely, is silver-tongued enough to put a positive spin on what happened in Birmingham. The Tories are at war - the bad kind of war, for an organisation of their sort, which is open civil war. The battle lines are well-carved, at this point. Jacob Rees-Mogg - who presumably had some kind of operation to remove his self-doubt in his youth - welcomed delegates to conference at a packed fringe meeting, where he seemed unable to decide whether the prime minister was a dead or merely dying duck. Either way, she could not be expected to fly through a thunderstorm. Or something. Rees-Mogg's rhetoric ever reaches further than pettifogging matters such as logic can permit.

Boris bother

Theresa May can *probably* survive such rhetoric. More serious problems, however, come from the blonder quarters of the Brexit faithful. Boris Johnson has been nothing if not busy in the run-up to this year's conference. Calculated 'scandals' - over the burka with respect to street furniture, of the Chequers deal with respect to suicide bombing - led into another 4,000 word broadside published in *The Daily Telegraph* and on Facebook on

September 27, and then - on the very eve of conference - an interview in *The Sunday Times*, where, between endless attempts to appear perfectly reasonable, he managed to describe the PM's plan for Brexit negotiations as "preposterous" and "deranged".

Team May replied in force - in the person of 'Spreadsheet' Phil Hammond, who abandoned his usual impeccably bureaucratic style to point out that Johnson's scheme, now called 'Canada plus' or 'super Canada' in the lexicon of Brexit fantasy football, was absurd in its own terms. The Europeans had already rejected it - indeed, it was precisely "fantasy world" stuff. "We can spend our time sitting at a table, banging it and demanding something that our negotiating partners have clearly told us is not on offer," Hammond told the *Daily Mail* on October 1, "or we can try to find a way through."

With the stage duly set, Team May and Team Boris spent the conference ducking it out. Headline speeches and policy flotations on October 2 were to be followed by Johnson's packed out 'chuck Chequers' fringe. On the other-than-Brexit front, Johnson accused the front bench of trying to "steal Corbyn's clothes", embarking on a great crusade against 'socialism' - by which he presumably means the few fig leaves on offer from John McDonnell. He wants the high-speed rail link, HS2, canned (we note that fellow blonde Brexiteer Andrea Leadsom has picked up the call as well), which is a nice thing to go after the government over, since it is scarcely possible that there is any appetite for disentangling from it with so much else going on, but equally the whole thing really is an indefensible boondoggle - a recipe for embarrassment, in other words.

The real difficulty, however, is Brexit. And the truth is that both sides

are paralysed. Hammond mocks Johnson's intransigence, and failure to realise the impossibility of his demands. Yet the uncomfortable fact remains that the Chequers deal has also been sent packing by the European negotiators; so May and Hammond are hardly on solid ground either. Hammond offered a pious hope that, in spite of differences of opinion on Brexit, the Tories would remember how much unites them. Alas, they are united on, among other things, their insistence on indulging in fantasy, when it comes to negotiations with the Europeans.

Thus *The Times* reports that the government is prepared to make concessions that would in practice rule out separate trade deals for several years in order to break the deadlock - a leak that fired up the Brexit true believers into a real frenzy.

Out of the hole

The Tories are in a mess of their own making - in large part, anyway. The party lobbed a grenade into British politics, in the form of David Cameron's cunning plan to hold a referendum on membership of the European Union. Under Cameron's successor, Theresa May, it contrived to call an election that was its to lose ... yet managed to lose it (or at least fail to win it) anyway.

It would be unfair to blame them entirely. We live in turbulent times, and 'natural parties of government' are feeling the pinch. The putatively unelectable Jeremy Corbyn proved electable enough to enormously increase Labour's share of the vote, if not to win outright. These two facts are themselves hardly unrelated. May went for two election strategies at once. In one version, she would steal Labour's clothes, and set up the Tories as the party of British workers, on a chauvinist basis, with a few crumbs tossed out and an end to

overt austerity rhetoric. Hammond - ironically, given the current situation - was to be ditched; a new age of red Toryism inaugurated. In the other, she was to represent the opposite - the safe pair of hands, the last bulwark against a Corbyn-Scots nationalist "coalition of chaos". The former was associated with Nick Timothy, May's then chief of staff; the latter with Lynton Crosby, the Australian electioneering 'genius' who has achieved nothing but laughable failures these last few years.

No politician on earth could have made a good go of that, and May did not. The 'safe pair of hands' approach demands a rigorous effort to stick to the script; the mould-breaking red Tory demands visionary excess. The wide perception of May as 'robotic' on the campaign trail is in the end a result of this cognitive dissonance.

Humiliation is not a good look for a Tory prime minister, so it is May's very survival that is remarkable. It seems that, apart from Rees-Mogg - who is quite happy to hurl himself off the cliff edge and flap his arms - and the inveterate gambler, Johnson, the Tories have been shaken from their appetite for risk. Upending May, as she and her allies tirelessly remind us, is an invitation to further chaos.

The least worst of all options, however, is hardly going to stop people from grumbling. Johnson's complaint about creeping 'socialism' in the cabinet is - as he might put it - preposterous, but not stupid politics. The fact that May and her allies keep returning to some version of 'proletarian Toryism' - that the revenant shade of May's former advisor, Nick Timothy, still lurks in No10 - is a matter of concern for those who were overjoyed at the total victory of neoliberalism after Thatcher. Not a few such types were horrified by Corbyn's election in 2015, precisely

because it would drag politics as a whole to the left - on economic issues at any rate. The Tories have spent the last 40 years combining visceral pro-capitalism with national chauvinism; now they try, sometimes, to swerve back into 'one-nation' welfarism. The bourgeoisie fears a new wave of banker-bashing and populist demagoguery, and thus wails hysterically about the Tories becoming 'anti-business'. By singing the same tune, Johnson seizes the opportunity.

On the plus side for May, she has new friends. In particular, Georgie Greig's new regime at the *Daily Mail* has reined that paper in from its hard-Brexiteer crusading. Its line is basically loyal to No10. It ran Hammond's anti-Boris hit piece, and - when every other paper led with the blonde one's threatening presence on October 2 - the *Mail* gave an adulatory write-up of the government's plans for the post-EU immigration regime (given how much this depends on the terms of Brexit, we can only assume this credulous front page is deliberately so).

Between this and the fact that Tory conferences decide nothing and are not typically the occasion for defenestration (even IDS was spared until a week or two after the 2003 jamboree), we surmise that May is not in any immediate danger. Johnson must also know that; his objective is to signal to the whole world that he is ready to step up and 'do his duty for the country', as and when. The trouble for her is 'events, dear girl, events': whether or not the particular plan laid out by *The Times* is a goer, there will be compromises and failures, and hysterical comparisons on the far-right Tory benches; in this tinderbox atmosphere, a government could fall very quickly. ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

SPEW

A funny way to support Jeremy

SPEW has written to the Labour Party asking to affiliate. Peter Manson looks at the background

Those who do not read *The Socialist* may not be aware that the Socialist Party in England and Wales has applied to affiliate to Labour - a couple of weeks ago the SPEW weekly published correspondence on the matter between Labour's general secretary, Jennie Formby, and its own leader, Peter Taaffe (September 19).

This is of particular interest, since for more than two decades SPEW insisted that Labour was now just another capitalist party - like the Tories or Liberal Democrats. But in its April 6 letter to Jennie Formby, in which SPEW expressed a wish "to meet with you to discuss the possibility of our becoming an affiliate of the Labour Party", comrade Taaffe describes the election of Jeremy Corbyn as "the first step to potentially transforming Labour into a mass workers' party", standing on an "anti-austerity programme". So now "all genuinely anti-austerity forces should be encouraged to affiliate".

While we should, of course, welcome SPEW's application for affiliation, it is surely pertinent to ask why SPEW stresses the need for an "anti-austerity programme" above all else. It does this even though it correctly states in the same edition of *The Socialist*: "When the Labour Party was founded, it was a federation of different trade union and socialist organisations, coming together to fight for working class political representation": ie, nothing so limited as merely opposing spending cuts. I will explore this in greater detail below.

Eventually, on July 27 - ie, almost four months after receiving comrade Taaffe's original letter - Jennie Formby replied, beginning her letter, "Dear Mr Taaffe". She pointed out that Labour rules prevent the affiliation of political organisations with "their own programme, principles and policies" - unless they have a "national agreement with the party". Also groups which stand candidates against Labour are automatically barred: "As the Socialist Party is part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, who stood candidates against the Labour Party in the May 2018 elections, it is ineligible for affiliation."

In his next letter (August 23) Peter Taaffe answered the first point by saying that SPEW wanted a meeting precisely to discuss the possibility of such a "national agreement". And, in response to the second point, he said SPEW would much prefer to be part of an anti-austerity Labour Party "rather than *having to stand* against pro-austerity Labour candidates" (my emphasis). After all, while Tusc had not contested the 2017 general election, in this year's local elections in England it stood no fewer than 111 candidates against Labour.

Following this, Jennie Formby replied rather more quickly. On August 29 - this time starting her letter "Dear Peter" - she ruled out any meeting: "Whilst the Socialist Party continues to stand candidates against the Labour Party ... it will not be possible to enter into any agreement." Therefore "there can be no discussions".

As I have stated, it is good news that on the face of it SPEW has at last started to take Labour seriously. But obviously it needs to stop standing against Labour candidates, including those who it says are "implementing savage cuts". As the Labour general secretary points out, while SPEW says it wants to affiliate in order to support Jeremy Corbyn and help defeat the



Norman Rockwell 'Rejected suitor' (1988)

right, "The leader of a political party is judged by their electoral success. Standing candidates against the Labour Party is damaging not only to local Labour Parties, but also to Jeremy."

Nevertheless, Jennie Formby's second letter appears to leave the door open to affiliation by left groups. Such a change would be highly significant, possibly marking a return to the basis upon which Labour was founded in 1900.

Anti-austerity

Let us now examine why SPEW states that what is needed is not a party of all working class formations, including both trade unions and leftwing groups, but one of all "anti-austerity forces". This can be traced back to the changing face of Tusc itself.

Founded in 2010, Tusc was the successor to the short-lived Campaign for a New Workers' Party, and both organisations were open in their aim - made explicit in the CNWP's name - of establishing a new mass party to replace Labour. However, according to the 'updated' statement of aims on its website, Tusc was set up "with the primary goal of enabling trade unionists, community campaigners and socialists to stand candidates against pro-austerity establishment politicians" (October 2016).¹

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

The Socialist Party believes that the Labour Party has now been totally transformed into New Labour, which bases itself completely on the brutal logic of capitalism. Previously, as a 'capitalist workers' party' (a party with pro-capitalist leaders, but with democratic structures that

allowed the working class to fight for its interests), the Labour Party always had the potential to act at least as a check on the capitalists. The consequences of radicalising the Labour Party's working class base was always a factor the ruling class had to take into account.

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

While SPEW was clear that this could not come about immediately, the ultimate aim was stated by comrade Heemskerck to be: "A new mass political vehicle for workers, a new workers' party". He explained:

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

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

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

... the support for Corbyn has created the potential for a mass

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

Since SPEW now apparently agrees that the Labour Party itself ought to be transformed, it is unsurprising that it has dropped the call for "a new workers' party" to replace it - Tusc was supposed to provide the basis for that, remember (always wishful thinking, of course).

So now we find that the purpose of Tusc is suddenly "to stand candidates against pro-austerity establishment politicians" - as if the original aim of "a new workers' party" had never existed. And, I suppose, that is why comrade Taaffe feels obliged to emphasise the need for all Labour candidates to stand on an "anti-austerity programme" and for the party to welcome "all genuinely anti-austerity forces". Only if that happened could Tusc shut up shop!

In its statement following the May 2018 election results, Tusc claimed:

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

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

attempt against Jeremy Corbyn in summer 2016, signing a national open letter of support for the rightwing challenger, Owen Smith.

However,

In a situation where Labour is still so clearly two-parties-in-one ... - with many local 'Labour' candidates standing more ferociously against Jeremy Corbyn than they do the Tories - the task is still there to make sure that politicians of any party label who support capitalism and its inevitable austerity agenda are not left unchallenged.⁴

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

What about the unions?

So has SPEW *really* changed its approach to Labour? For example, why do its comrades in unions like the PCS and RMT still oppose their affiliation to the party? SPEW has argued that, until the Labour right is defeated, it is just a 'waste of money' for the unions to spend thousands on affiliation fees. Yet, in its August 23 letter to Jennie Formby, comrade Taaffe wrote:

We see a very urgent need to organise and mobilise all those who support Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity policies into a mass campaign to democratise the Labour Party, allowing the hundreds of thousands who have been inspired by Jeremy's leadership to hold to account, and to deselect, the Blairite saboteurs.

Surely, if that is the aim, the affiliation of left-led unions like the PCS and RMT could only but help the process.

Perhaps I am being cynical, but the possibility does suggest itself that the principal purpose of Tusc was always something other than its stated aims (either original or amended). Maybe SPEW wanted to work within a broader formation primarily in order to win recruits for itself? It is almost as though SPEW would actually prefer a right-led Labour Party.

However, irrespective of what SPEW is really up to, at least we should be grateful that the affiliation of left groups has been broached once more; and that the Labour general secretary - no doubt after consultation with the leadership team around Corbyn - has left the door open to that possibility.

The Labour Party rules must be changed, so that all the current bans and proscriptions are scrapped. The aim must be to transform Labour into a united front for the entire working class ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. www.tusc.org.uk/about.
2. www.socialistparty.org.uk/is-sue/610/8762/03-02-2010/trade-unionist-and-socialist-coalition.
3. www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/27313/06-05-2018/local-election-results-are-a-major-warning-sign-for-labour.
4. www.tusc.org.uk/17399/08-05-2018/local-elections-2018-the-tusc-results-report.

CLAUSE FOUR

Let it rot in the grave

Labour should not revive the old Fabian clause four, says **Jack Conrad**. Instead a new, genuinely socialist version is needed

John McDonnell told the Labour Party's Liverpool conference that it is "time to give people back control over their lives". Revealingly, when exactly people had "control over their lives" went completely unexplored. Nevertheless, in the name of his thoroughly Keynesian economic programme, this supposed Marxist proceeded to champion Labour's old clause four - adopted, of course, in February 1918. McDonnell insisted that the "clause four principles are as relevant today" for the "challenges of the modern economy" as they were "back then."¹

Apart from the champions of entrenched power and privilege - the Tories, BBC, Murdoch's press, *The Daily Telegraph*, Chris Leslie, Chuka Umunna, Progress, Labour First, etc, etc - McDonnell's speech got a generally positive reception. Naturally, the delegates loved it. Visitors too. Inevitably, he got his standing ovation. In a "snap verdict" *The Guardian's* Andrew Sparrow applauded McDonnell's "inherent seriousness."² Even the *New Statesman's* Stephen Bush offered grudging praise for the "sexy" presentation.³ Meanwhile, in *Labour Heartlands*, Paul Knaggs offered gushing, albeit rather incoherent, support: McDonnell set "an inspirational outlook to a 21st century model, with Labour rebuilding Britain a reality for the many, not the few".⁴ "[B]rilliant stuff," chimed Daniel Morley of Socialist Appeal.⁵

Socialist Appeal, the British section of the International Marxist Tendency, has been pushing the 'Labour4Clause4' campaign over the last year and has, so far, gained the backing of Ken Loach, the celebrated film director, MPs Dennis Skinner, Clive Lewis, Ian Mearns and Ronnie Campbell, and trade union leaders such as Ian Hodson and Ronnie Draper of the bakers' union, and Steve Hedley of the RMT. According to the campaign's website, clause four committed Labour to "the socialist transformation of society".⁶

Goals

Evidently, clause four - amended by Hugh Gaitskell in 1959 and totally rewritten by Tony Blair in 1995 - possesses a totemic status for partisans of the left.

Just before he was formally declared Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn was asked if he wanted to bring back the old, 1918, clause four. He said this:

I think we should talk about what the objectives of the party are, whether that's restoring clause four, as it was originally written, or it's a different one. But we shouldn't shy away from public participation, public investment in industry and public control of the railways.⁷

A very moderate, but, nonetheless, very welcome statement. After all, it helped initiate what has become an increasingly wide debate over clause four.⁸

So should the left follow the lead of Labour4Clause4 and seek to raise the 1918 Lazarus from its grave? Or, on the contrary, should the left seek out a "different" - a far more audacious - clause four? History gives us more than a clue about what the right answer is.

The February 1918 conference not only transformed Labour into a



Leave the old where it belongs

definitive political party (there was to be individual membership for the first time). It also agreed a new constitution, which included these famous lines:

1. To organise and maintain in parliament and in the country a political Labour Party.
2. To cooperate with the general council of the Trades Union Congress, or other kindred organisations, in joint political or other action in harmony with the party constitution and standing orders.
3. To give effect as far as possible to the principles from time to time approved by the party conference.
4. To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.
5. Generally to promote the political, social and economic emancipation of the people, and more particularly of those who depend directly upon their own exertions by hand or by brain for the means of life.

Such formulations (and crucially the fourth clause) are still considered a defining socialist moment - and not only on the Labour left.⁹ Yet, when first mooted, in November 1917, amidst the horrors of inter-imperialist war, Sidney Webb, its Fabian author, had no thought, no wish, no intention of promoting genuine socialism.

Indeed the Fabian Society had long been known as the quintessential expression of the rightwing opportunism infecting the British labour movement. The likes of Sidney Webb, George Bernard Shaw, HG Wells and William Harcourt were pro-imperialist, committed eugenicists and thoroughly elitist. The Fabians wanted Britain to retain its global empire - supposedly in order to educate the "immature" peoples of Africa and

Asia.¹⁰ "Defective" men, women and children were to be dealt with by the extensive use of a "lethal chamber": "if we desire a certain type of civilisation and culture, we must exterminate the sort of people who do not fit in it" (George Bernard Shaw).¹¹ As for the working class, it had to be educated in the spirit and ethos of their betters. Fabian 'socialism' was gradualist and managerial, relying on an alliance with enlightened liberals: in other words, a variety of bourgeois socialism.

In 1917-18 Sidney Webb had three goals in mind.

- Firstly, his clause four socialism and a corresponding insistence on serving the 'national interest' would divert the considerable rank-and-file sympathy that existed for the Russian Revolution into safe, peaceful and exclusively constitutional channels. In June 1917 the enthusiasm generated by the overthrow of tsarism produced a hugely successful labour-movement delegate convention in Leeds. There was talk of establishing workers' and soldiers' councils on the model of Russia's soviets. The October revolution proved to be even more electric. Advanced workers looked towards emulating the Bolsheviks.

- Secondly, by adopting clause four socialism, the Labour Party could both distinguish itself from the exhausted, divided and rapidly declining Liberal Party and please the trade union bureaucracy too. Note, since the 1890s, the TUC had been drawing up various wish lists of what ought to be nationalised: eg, rails, mines, electricity, liquor and land. Clause four socialism also usefully went along with the grain of Britain's wartime experience. There was steadily expanding state intervention in the economy. Nationalisation was, as a result, widely identified with efficiency, modernisation and beating foreign rivals. It therefore appealed to technocratically minded elements amongst the middle classes.

- Thirdly, his clause four socialism had to be implicitly anti-Marxist. Webb knew the history of the Social Democratic Party in Germany well. And, of course, Karl Marx had famously mocked various passages in

its *Gotha programme* (1875) - not least those which declared that every worker should receive a "fair distribution of their proceeds of labour" and that "the proceeds of labour belong undiminished with equal right to all members of society".¹² Contradictory and vacuous, concluded Marx. What is fair? What about replacement means of production? What about the expansion of production? What about those unable to work? More than that, Marx described these and other such ill-defined formulations as unnecessary concessions to the followers of Ferdinand Lassalle. Lassalle's *Workers' programme* (1862) called for "an equal right to the undiminished proceeds of labour". Obviously Webb wanted to give clause four a distinct Lassallean coloration not out of admiration for Lassalle, but because he wanted to distance the Labour Party from Marxism.

Red ribbon

Almost needless to say, clause four was mainly for show. A red ribbon around what was Labourism's standing programme of social liberalism. In parliament Labour had long supported Liberal governments and their palliative measures of social reform. Because of this alliance, the party even found itself divided over the abolition of the House of Lords and the fight for female suffrage. While a small minority - eg, George Lansbury and Keir Hardie - defended the suffragettes and their militant tactics, the majority craved respectability. As Ramsay MacDonald wrote, "The violent methods ... are wrong, and in their nature reactionary and anti-social, quite irrespective of vote or no vote."¹³

The adoption of clause four did not mark a fundamental break with liberalism. Even if put into effect, clause four socialism remains antithetical to working class self-liberation. Capitalism without capitalists does not count as a socialist goal. True, railways, mines, land, electricity, etc would pass into the hands of the British empire state.¹⁴ Capitalist owners would be bought out - eased into a comfortable retirement.

But, as they vacate the field of production, a new class of state-appointed managers enters the fray. In terms of the division of labour, they substitute for the capitalists. The mass of the population, meanwhile, remain exploited wage-slaves. They would be subject to the same hierarchical chain of command, the same lack of control, the same mind-numbing routine.

Marxism, by contrast, is based on an altogether different perspective. If it is to win its freedom, the working class must overthrow the existing state. But - and this is surely vital for the challenges of both today and tomorrow - in so doing the proletariat "abolishes itself as a proletariat, abolishes all class distinctions and antagonisms, abolishes also the state as state".¹⁵ Capitalist relations of production and the whole bureaucratic state apparatus are swept away. Every sphere of social life sees control exercised from below. All positions of command are elected or chosen by lot and are regularly rotated. Hierarchy is flattened. Alienation is thereby overcome.

What is produced, how it is produced and why it is produced radically alters too. Need, not exchange, is the ruling principle. And such an association of producers alone creates the benign conditions that puts to an end the ecologically disastrous production for the sake of production and allows for the full development of each and every individual, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, nationality or so-called race.

Admittedly, the old clause four resulted from progressive political developments. The Russian Revolution has already been mentioned. But there is also the formation of the Socialist International, the worldwide celebration of May Day, the considerable influence of the socialist press, the increased size of trade union membership, the formation of the shop stewards network and the election of a growing body of Labour MPs. Then there was World War I. Criminally, between 15 and 19 million died. Another 20 million suffered appalling injuries. Because of all this, and more, capitalism was widely considered

morally bankrupt, abhorrent, outmoded and doomed. Socialism more and more became the common sense of the organised working class.¹⁶

Fabian socialism meant, however, eschewing unconstitutional methods, slowly expanding the provision of social welfare and persuading *all classes* of the benefits that would come to the nation, if the commanding heights of the economy were put in state hands. In other words, the Fabians *consciously* sought to ameliorate the mounting contradictions between labour and capital ... and thus put off socialism. Understandably, Frederick Engels branded the Fabians as a:

band of careerists who understand enough to realise the inevitability of the social revolution, but could not possibly entrust this gigantic task to the raw proletariat alone ... Fear of revolution is their guiding principle.¹⁷

And, needless to say, the years 1918-20 witnessed army mutinies, colonial uprisings, brutal Black and Tan oppression meted out in Ireland and a massive strike wave. The working class was in ferment. But, now equipped with clause four, Labour leaders could both promise to deliver a "death blow" to the "individualistic system of capitalist production", and dress up in socialistic colours that "great Commonwealth of all races, all colours, all religions and all degrees of civilisation that we call the British empire" (*Labour and the new order* 1918).¹⁸ Reformist wool was pulled over militant eyes.

Previous attempts

Interestingly, before 1918 attempts to commit the Labour Party to one or another version of socialism met with failure. The 1900 founding conference, meeting in London's Farringdon Hall, rejected by 59 votes to 39 the resolution moved by James MacDonald of the Social Democratic Federation, calling for the "socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange". Delegates from the Independent Labour Party argued that such a commitment was premature and would alienate the trade unions and therefore damage the infant movement. A suitably vague fudge was agreed. As a result, the SDF accused the ILP of an "incomprehensible" and "deplorable" act of "treachery, to which we have, unfortunately, by this time become accustomed".¹⁹

The socialist societies wielded considerable influence over the Labour Party. Leave aside any representation via affiliated trade unions, the SDF was guaranteed two seats on the 12-strong NEC, the ILP two and the Fabians one. Despite that, in frustration, the August 1901 conference of the SDF voted 54-14 in favour of disaffiliation. A big mistake - as freely admitted not so many years later by its main leaders.

Further unsuccessful attempts to commit the Labour Party to public ownership followed in 1901 and 1903. Two years later conference passed a motion calling for the "socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange". But this was not treated as a constitutional amendment. In 1907 there came another attempt, but once again it was rebuffed as being divisive.

The explanation for the caution lies with relations with the trade unions which were politically still Liberal; and the Labour MPs, who were too often mere Lib-Labs. While most Labour leaders considered themselves socialists by conviction, they were also mortally afraid of upsetting trade union big wigs and losing out in the polls. What appeared acceptable to likely voters - in other words, *skilled male workers* - set the limits.²⁰ So, instead of fearlessly presenting a bold socialist vision and reaching out to the widest sections of the masses, Kier Hardie,

Sidney Webb, Arthur Henderson, Ramsay MacDonald and co chased the vagaries of popularity. With the growth of militancy, radicalism and revolutionary sentiments in 1917-18, socialist declarations were now considered a sure way of adding to Labour's ranks in parliament.²¹

A Tony

Nevertheless, the Blairising of clause four was hugely symbolic - the groundwork having been done by the Eurocommunists and their *Marxism Today* journal. Eric Hobsbawm's 1978 'Forward march of Labour halted?' Marx memorial lecture provided an authoritative intellectual veneer.²² Revolutionary socialism was declared dead and buried, the working class a shrinking minority. Only if Labour accepted capitalism and reached out to the middle classes would it have a future. Neil Kinnock, John Smith and finally Tony Blair dragged the party ever further to the right. Out went the commitment to unilateral disarmament, out went the commitment to comprehensive education, out went the commitment to full employment, out went the commitment to repeal the Tories' anti-trade union laws, out went the commitment to "the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange".

By sacrificing the old clause four in the full glare of publicity, Blair and his New Labour clique sought to appease the establishment, the City, the Murdoch empire, the global plutocracy. Capitalism would be *absolutely* safe in their hands. A New Labour government could be relied upon to not even pay lip service to a British version of state capitalism. Leftwingers such as Tony Benn, Dennis Skinner, Diane Abbott and Ken Livingstone protested, trade union leaders grumbled, but the April 1995 special conference voted for Blair's new clause four with 65% in favour.

Needless to say, his version is stuffed full of managerial guff and classless nonsense - just what one would expect from the architect of New Labour. After all, one of Blair's big ideas was to replace 'socialism' with 'social-ism'. Another was communitarianism. But, of course, the media glowed with admiration. Crucially, Rupert Murdoch agreed to unleash his attack dogs in favour of Blair. Within a few months John Major was almost universally derided as a total incompetent, heading a sleaze-mired government.

Riding high in the opinion polls, Blair inaugurated a series of internal 'reforms'. Conference was gutted. No longer could it debate issues, vote on policy or even embarrass the leadership in front of the media. Instead the whole thing became a rubber-stamping exercise. Then there were the tightly controlled policy forums, focus groups and the staffing of the party machine with eager young careerists (most on temporary contracts). Blair thereby asserted himself over the national executive committee ... considerably reducing its effectiveness in the process.

Calls for a return to the old clause four are therefore perfectly understandable. But why go back to a Fabian past? Instead we surely need to persuade members and affiliates to take up the cause of "replacing the rule of capital with the rule of the working class". Our socialism would (a) introduce a democratically planned economy, (b) end the ecologically ruinous cycle of production for the sake of production and (c) move towards a stateless, classless, moneyless society that embodies the principle, "From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs" (see model motion below).

Towards that end the Labour Party

needs to be reorganised from top to bottom. A special conference - say in the spring of 2019 - should be called by the NEC with a view to radically overhauling the constitution and rules, and undertaking an across-the-board political reorientation.

As everyone knows, Labour members loathe the undemocratic rules and structures put in place by Blair. The joint policy committee, the national policy forums - the whole sorry rigmarole should be junked. The NEC must be unambiguously responsible for drafting manifestos. And, of course, the NEC needs to be fully accountable to a *sovereign* conference.

Reclaiming

Real Marxists, not fake Marxists, have never talked of reclaiming Labour. It has never been ours in the sense of being a "political weapon for the workers' movement". No, despite the electoral base and trade union affiliations, the Labour Party has been dominated by career politicians and trade union bureaucrats: a distinct social stratum, which in the last analysis serves not the interests of the working class, but the continuation of capitalist exploitation.

Speaking in the context of the need for the newly formed Communist Party of Great Britain to affiliate to the Labour Party, Lenin said this:

... whether or not a party is really a political party of the workers does not depend solely upon a membership of workers, but also upon the men that lead it, and the content of its actions and its political tactics. Only this latter determines whether we really have before us a political party of the proletariat.

Regarded from this - the only correct - point of view, the Labour Party is a thoroughly

bourgeois party, because, although made up of workers, it is led by reactionaries, and the worst kind of reactionaries at that, who act quite in the spirit of the bourgeoisie. It is an organisation of the bourgeoisie, which exists to systematically dupe the workers with the aid of the British Noskes and Scheidemanns [the German social chauvinist murderers of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht - JC].²³

Despite all the subsequent changes, this assessment retains its essential purchase. Labour is still a "bourgeois workers' party". Of course, once Corbyn was formally announced leader, on September 12 2015, things became more complex. Labour became a chimera. Instead of a twofold contradiction, we have a threefold contradiction. The top - the leader, the shadow cabinet, the NEC, the Victoria Street HQ - is dominated by leftwingers, who are moving to the right; the middle - the PLP, the European PLP and Labour council groups - is dominated by the right; the rank and file is dominated by left-moving leftwingers.

Corbyn is certainly not the equivalent of George Lansbury or Michael Foot - an elementary mistake. They were promoted by the labour and trade union bureaucracy after a severe crisis: namely Ramsay MacDonald's treachery and James Callaghan's winter of discontent. Corbyn's leadership is, in the first instance, the result of an historic accident. The 'morons' from the PLP lent him their nomination. After that, however, Corbyn owes everything to the mass membership.

That has given us the possibility of attacking the rightwing domination of the middle from below and above. No wonder the more astute minds of the bourgeois commentariat can be found expressing worries - not so much over

the prospects of a Labour government in itself, but a Labour government that triggers a crisis of expectations and a popular explosion of anger.

Of course, there is the danger that Corbyn will be drawn into yet further rotten compromises. We have already seen Trident renewal, a 'jobs and the economy' Brexit and the disgraceful collapse before the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' witch-hunt. In other words, it would be fatal for the leftwing rank and file to content itself with playing a support role for Corbyn. Nor should the role of the leftwing rank and file be to provide a mere counterweight to the rightwing pressures being exerted on Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and Diane Abbott.

No, the left needs to organise around its own distinct aims and principles, not least our own, new version of clause four ●

Notes

1. *Daily Mirror* September 24 2018.
2. *The Guardian* September 24 2018.
3. *New Statesman* September 24 2018.
4. labourheartlands.com/john-mcdonnell-the-red-meat-of-a-socialist-manifesto.
5. www.socialist.net/john-mcdonnell-clause-iv-more-relevant-than-ever.htm.
6. www.socialist.net/labour4clause4-campaign-launched-to-restore-labour-s-commitment-to-socialism.htm.
7. *The Independent* August 21 2015.
8. Eg. Owen Jones in the first, relaunch, edition of *Tribune*. He argues for a new clause four - a clause four which would commit the party "to throw off not only the shackles of class, but of any injustice". With equal banality he calls for a clause four which resonates with today and contains a "compelling vision of a future, in which the control of our lives is wrested back from the propertied elite" (my emphasis - O Jones, "Clause four at one hundred" *Tribune* November-December 2018).
9. Socialist Appeal's old comrades in the Socialist Party in England and Wales also have found memories of the 1918 "socialist clause four" (*Editorial The Socialist* September 26 2018). Not surprisingly. When they were deeply ensconced in the Labour Party they were clause four socialists. And it was the attitude towards the Labour Party that split the organisation in 1991. The minority in Militant Tendency - around Ted Grant, Alan Woods and Rob Sewell - became Socialist Appeal. The majority - around Peter Taaffe, Tony Mulhearn, Hannah Sell and Dave Nellist - evolved through Militant Labour and finally became SPEW.
10. SPEW's official doctrine has it that Labour pre-1995 was a "political weapon for the workers' movement" and that post-1995 it became a "British version of the Democrats in the USA" (P Taaffe *The Socialist* June 19 2015). A strategic misjudgement, to put it mildly. And, let us never forget, even after Corbyn first made it onto the ballot, SPEW was arguing that, the "sooner Unite breaks from Labour ... the better" (*The Socialist* July 1 2015). The unkind will call this a premeditated wrecking attempt; kinder souls will put it down to blundering idiocy.
11. See GB Shaw (ed) *Fabianism and the empire* London 1900.
12. DJ Childs *Modernism and eugenics* Cambridge 2001, p9.
13. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 24, London 1989, p83.
14. *Socialist Review* August 1912 - quoted in R Miliband *Parliamentary socialism* London 1973, p25n.
15. The Fabians supported the British government in the 1899-1902 Boer War. They justified their stand in a pamphlet, edited by Bernard Shaw, *Fabianism and the empire* (1900). The Fabians did not want Britain to lose out, when it came to the division of the world by the great imperial powers. As might be expected, the Fabians wanted a *civilising* British empire. The white dominions should be given self-government. However, "for the lower breeds" there should be a "benevolent bureaucracy" of British civil servants and military officials guiding them to "adulthood" (G Foote *The Labour Party's political thought* London 1985, p29-30).
16. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 25, London 1987, p267.
17. 'Common sense' being the continuously changing but widely held outlook of various classes and strata. Gramsci called it "folklore of philosophy", because it exists "halfway between folklore properly speaking and the philosophy, science and economics of the specialists" (A Gramsci *Selections from the prison notebooks* London 1973, p326n).
18. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 50, New York 2004, p83.
19. pdcrodas.webs.ull.es/anglo/LabourPartyLabourAndTheNewSocialOrder.pdf.
20. Quoted in M Crick *The history of the Social Democratic Federation* Keel 1994, p96.
21. Note the mass of *male* workers only got the vote in 1918 - along, of course, with middle class females who were over 30 years of age.
22. Labour gained 15 seats in the December 1918 general election, making it the fourth largest party in parliament after Bonar Law's Tories, Lloyd George's Coalition Liberals and Sinn Féin. It had a total of 57 MPs.
23. *Marxism Today* September 1978.
24. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 31, Moscow 1977, pp257-58.

Model motion

This branch/CLP notes that the old 1918 clause four was drafted by the Fabian leader, Sidney Webb, in order to divert the considerable rank-and-file sympathy that existed for the Russian Revolution into safe, peaceful and exclusively constitutional channels. Clause four was managerial, statist and predicated on the continuation of wage-slavery. It had nothing to do with putting an end to capitalism and bringing about the socialist transformation of society.

This branch/CLP notes that, by sacrificing the old clause four in the full glare of publicity, Tony Blair and his New Labour clique sought to appease the establishment, the City, the Murdoch empire, the global plutocracy. Capitalism would be *absolutely* safe in their hands. A New Labour government could be relied upon not even to pay lip service to a British version of state capitalism.

The Labour Party has been transformed by the influx of tens of thousands of new members and the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader. This branch/CLP therefore believes that the time is ripe to commit the party to this, genuinely socialist, clause four:

1. Labour is the federal party of the working class. We strive to bring all trade unions, cooperatives, socialist societies and leftwing groups and parties under our banner. We believe that unity brings strength.
2. Labour is committed to replacing the rule of capital with the rule of the working

class. Socialism introduces a democratically planned economy, ends the ecologically ruinous cycle of production for the sake of production and moves towards a stateless, classless, moneyless society that embodies the principle, "From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs". Alone such benign conditions create the possibility of every individual fully realising their innate potentialities.

3. Towards that end Labour commits itself to achieving a democratic republic. The standing army, the monarchy, the House of Lords and the state sponsorship of the Church of England must go. We support a single-chamber parliament, proportional representation and annual elections.

4. Labour seeks to win the active backing of the majority of people and forming a government on this basis.

5. We shall work with others, in particular in the European Union, in pursuit of the aim of replacing capitalism with working class rule and socialism.

This branch/CLP calls for this version of clause four to be included as part of Labour's constitution at the earliest opportunity. (For trade unions: This branch/conference calls upon the union to campaign within the Labour Party at all levels for this version of clause four to be included as part of Labour's constitution at the earliest opportunity.)

LABOUR

Aspirations frustrated

Carla Roberts of Labour Party Marxists gives her assessment of the Liverpool conference



It was a very successful conference - from the leadership's point of view. It managed to put a lid on the huge disagreements over Brexit. The defeat of open selection has assured rightwingers that Jeremy Corbyn is not out to get them. And John McDonnell's proposals for limited nationalisations and handing *some* workers *some* shares has persuaded even commentators in the mainstream press that Labour might be 'onto something'. *The Independent* gushed that there

was something different about the Labour Party conference this year - something not seen perhaps for two decades... the party and its leader seemed to be, if not reconciled, at least prepared to unite in the common purpose of winning an election.¹

Is Labour under Corbyn finally safe for capitalism? Corbyn and his allies are certainly trying their hardest to give that impression. In that sense, conference has certainly shown very vividly the huge gap that exists now between the aspirations and the hopes of many members about what the Labour Party is and what it could achieve - and the attempts by the Labour leadership to steer the organisation into another direction altogether.

Take John McDonnell's key speech, in which he outlined his plans for "true industrial democracy". Companies employing more than 250 staff

would have to pay 1% of their assets, or up to 10% of their shares, into an 'inclusive ownership fund'. Although they would not be compelled to pay out dividends, McDonnell reckons that most companies would do so, which would mean up to £500 a year for perhaps 11 million workers.

Anything above £500 would be paid into a fund to help finance public services. McDonnell believes that would provide an extra £2 billion a year for the NHS, etc. Although he was trying to sell all this as being very radical, he was careful to emphasise that it was actually in the interests of capital too. You see, "employee ownership" is likely to increase "a company's productivity" and encourage "long-term thinking".

No wonder many bourgeois commentators seemed sympathetic to the idea. Because in reality there is nothing radical about such sub-John-Lewis-type schemes. They are designed to paper over the cracks of capitalism in decline. Far from empowering our class, the intention is to emphasise a 'common interest' with the capitalists - if we cooperate, both sides will benefit, right? That is why similar programmes have

The rank and file stands clearly on the left, but finds itself thwarted by a Jeremy Corbyn who is determined to appease the right

been introduced in several countries - often by rightwing parties. Surely if we have a share in the ownership of the company employing us, that will make us more likely to work alongside the bosses to help increase profits, won't it? And it would not be a good idea to go on strike.

This scheme would be unlikely to make workers better off. It is obvious that funds diverted to shares for employees would have to be taken from *somewhere* - companies would argue that this additional cost would reduce their ability to increase wages.

McDonnell, of course, knows that workers and capitalists have no common interest and that, far from promoting a more cooperative form of capitalism, we need to establish our own system, based on production for need, not for profit. But now, instead of targeting the *system of capital itself*, he restricts

his criticism to the "financial elite".

When it came to the proposed public ownership of industries like water, energy, Royal Mail and the railways, McDonnell reiterated that this would not represent a "return to the past". This time the nationalised sector would be "run democratically" - with workers' representatives sitting alongside state appointees.

Despite this vision of a more 'ethical', participatory form of capitalism, McDonnell ended his speech by describing it as "socialism" - before shouting "Solidarity!" to the largely approving delegates.

While he might have won over most delegates and *some* commentators in the political mainstream, the problem he and Corbyn have is that, no matter how much they go out of their way to reassure the establishment, the latter just does not buy it. It knows that, with their past record of siding with the workers, neither can be trusted to run the system.

Brexit

The apparent 'unity' that was achieved over Brexit is also rather fragile. The key paragraph of the composited 'super motion' adopted at conference reads:

Should parliament vote down a Tory Brexit deal or the talks end in no deal, conference believes this would constitute a loss of confidence in the government.



In these circumstances, the best outcome for the country is an immediate general election that can sweep the Tories from power. If we cannot get a general election Labour must support all options remaining on the table, including campaigning for a public vote.

In other words, a continuation of the 'studied ambiguity' that has characterised the leadership's position in the last two years. Not a bad tactic - from Corbyn's point of view: let the Tories mess it up and then we'll come to the 'rescue' (anything will look better than their shambles). Let's not rule anything out, but let's be as vague as we can in our proposals.

There is only slightly more emphasis in the motion on demanding a snap general election. The idea is obviously that Labour would win it. And then? Would a Labour government see through Brexit - or call a people's vote? In fact, the motion clarifies nothing at all. There are clearly ongoing huge disagreements between those who insist on going ahead with Brexit and those who want a second referendum (in order to overturn the first one, of course).

Yet, if we read between the lines, there must have been some promises made to the proponents of the People's Vote - otherwise, why would they support a motion that actually took out their key demand? They could have insisted on pushing an alternative motion on this key issue.

It seems that the proponents of a People's Vote are actually rather aware of the fact that saying so - openly, now - would cost the party a huge number of votes (especially when there might be a snap election very soon). Poll after poll indicates that another referendum would lead to almost exactly the same 50-50 split in the population - and many 'remainers' would probably vote for the Liberal Democrats instead - at least they have been consistent in their message. So the plan seems to be to resuscitate this issue only when Labour is in office - *trick* people into voting Labour, in other words.

Of course, the main problem here is that Labour, as a party wedded to the British constitution, is incapable of breaking free from this false choice of 'Brexit' or 'remain'. This also finds reflection in most of the Labour left, which feels it has to opt for one side or the other. However, few take it as far as the campaign, Another Europe is Possible, led by Luke Cooper (ex-Workers Power) and Michael Chessum (a supporter of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty). AWL members were busy at conference handing out hundreds of free T-shirts, canvas bags and campaign packs with the logo, 'Hate Brexit, love Corbyn'. All financed by George Soros's £70,000 donation to AEIP, we presume.

In his post-conference piece in *The Guardian*, Chessum says: "Corbyn must lead the 'remain' campaign with a vow to go into Europe and fight the elite." Hmm, like George Soros, for example? Most capitalists want to remain in the European Union, of course, because it often makes it easier for them to make a buck. The left should stay well clear of such forces.

Unite and open selection

Unite leader Len McCluskey has taken much of the flak for the fact that the very popular demand for open selection - whereby current MPs are no longer automatically reselected - was defeated at

conference and now cannot be discussed again until 2021, thanks to Labour's undemocratic three-year rule.

To a degree, McCluskey deserves the stick he got, of course. At conference, he told anybody who would listen that he would instruct his delegates to vote *in favour* of mandatory reselection of parliamentary candidates - but only *if* that rule change reached conference floor.² In the meantime though, he did everything to avoid exactly that.

Over 90% of CLP delegates wanted to hear (and presumably vote in favour of) the rule change moved by International Labour - but they were defeated by the almost solid union bloc vote. Clearly, some reform is needed here. The fight to democratise the Labour Party cannot be separated from the fight to democratise the trade unions. Trade union votes at conference should be cast not by general secretaries, but proportionately, according to the political balance in each delegation.

But, of course, as McCluskey explained, the union tops (apart from Matt Wrack of the Fire Brigades Union) were only following the wishes of one Jeremy Corbyn:

These plans were presented with the full backing of Jeremy Corbyn at the NEC as a sensible and democratic way forward. I only regret that the leadership did not make that clearer at conference, since doing so would surely have taken much of the sting out of the debate, even if some delegates might have remained unhappy ... If Jeremy and his team - taking the overview of the entire political landscape, including the situation within the parliamentary party and the leadership of Momentum - urge a particular course of action, Unite is not going to go against that without the most serious reasons ... Anyone, including good comrades like Chris [Williamson], who uses ultra-leftist terminology like 'machine politics' and 'bureaucratic machine' risks undermining the wishes of Jeremy Corbyn and the unity he has created.²

McCluskey is unfortunately correct - not just about Jon Lansman's ambivalent position on the issue, but also the fact that Jeremy Corbyn has *not* called for mandatory reselection of MPs. The strategy of Corbyn and his advisors and allies has from day one been that of conciliation: in the hope that, by keeping the centre on board and neutralising as many rightwingers as possible, he would be swept into Downing Street.

Remember, the method of selecting parliamentary candidates was not even part of the remit of the Party Democracy Review - the NEC proposed the reform of the trigger ballot system in order to stop open selection in its tracks. It is interesting how little Jeremy Corbyn gets blamed for these types of manoeuvres.

This is particularly inept tactically, when we consider that the majority of Labour MPs have been plotting against him from day one, if not before. Should Corbyn become prime minister - which is far from certain, even if Labour wins the next general election - he would be held hostage by the Parliamentary Labour Party. In all likelihood the right would try one manoeuvre after another to get rid of him.

By refusing to back mandatory reselection, which would have allowed the membership to rid the

PLP of the anti-Corbyn right, he has seriously undermined his own position.

No Momentum

Momentum played almost no role at conference. Of course, it organised The World Transformed across three venues, but with varied levels of success. It felt smaller than previous events and much less relevant, with most sessions having been outsourced to other organisations. While Freedom of Speech on Israel, the Liverpool 47 and Labour Against the Witchhunt were denied spaces, those allowed to organise at TWT made use of it by putting on such valuable sessions as 'Decolonising yoga' and 'Acid Corbynism'.

Last year, Momentum made a huge effort in advance of conference to gather data from delegates, so that they could be regularly sent text messages, carrying frequently useful voting guidelines. None of that happened this year. Momentum had published an app, but, unless you actively went looking for recommendations, you would not know how Jon Lansman (the owner of Momentum's database) felt about the various conference motions.

Momentum also did not put forward any candidates - or voting recommendations - for positions on the conference arrangements committee or the national constitutional committee (which deals with all disciplinary matters passed on to it by the NEC).

Crucially, Lansman badly folded on the question of mandatory reselection. Having opportunistically jumped on the open selection bandwagon about a week before conference (and collecting 50,000 up-to-date names and email addresses with a petition on the issue), he let it be known during the debate on the Party Democracy Review that Momentum would now prefer that delegates voted in favour of the NEC motion after all - ie, a reform of the trigger ballot rather than its abolition.

Momentum has proved once again how utterly useless it is, when it comes to actually organising the Labour left. Things really started to disintegrate in the wake of the coup on January 10 2017, when Lansman abolished all democratic structures and imposed his own constitution. But the farce over the defeat of the principle of mandatory reselection exposed rather dramatically the huge vacuum that exists on the left of our party. We urgently need a principled, effective organisation of the Labour left that can coordinate the fight for the democratic transformation of the party and sustain a national campaign for mandatory reselection and other important democratic demands. Momentum clearly cannot play that role.

There is some hope that the campaign around the fight for open selection might become permanent and take on the fight for other democratic demands. The FBU's Matt Wrack has declared that his union would support such a move. Chris Williamson MP, in the meantime, has indicated that he will keep his 'Democracy Roadshow' going and continue his campaign for open selection.

Emily Thornberry

Last but not least, the role of Emily Thornberry at conference was very interesting. It is becoming more and more obvious that she is being groomed to take over from Jeremy Corbyn - by both 'moderates' and some on the left. Note John McDonnell's repeated demands that the next leader has to be a woman

(she is the highest-ranking woman in the shadow cabinet). It was also interesting that she positively referenced fellow soft pro-Zionist Jon Lansman in her speech. As a member of the pro-Zionist Labour Friends of Israel, unlike Corbyn she is not tainted by the 'anti-Semitism' smear campaign in the party.

Her rousing conference speech cleverly showed that she's all about 'unity': she made positive references to Tony Blair and Gordon Brown to tickle the tummies of the right; but her main rhetorical fire was directed at reeling in the left: She positively mentioned the suffragettes, International Brigades and the Anti-Nazi League:

We were there in Spain fighting Franco in 1936. We were there in Cable Street that same year fighting alongside the Jewish community to stop the Blackshirts. We were here in Liverpool a year later, when Oswald Mosley tried to speak in this great city and was forced out without saying a word. And we were there in the 1980s - I was there myself - when we marched against the National Front.

She clearly was playing rather fast and loose with working class history. For a start, the Anti-Nazi League, set up by the Socialist Workers Party in 1977, started to wind down in 1980 and finally closed shop at the beginning of 1981. While the Independent Labour Party sent volunteers to Spain, the same cannot be said of Labour, which officially kept its distance (though Clement Attlee did visit British volunteers in December 1937). Also the Labour Party did not support the anti-fascists in Cable Street. As Dave Renton points out,

The main way Labour responded to Cable Street (ie, afterwards) was by calling for a ban on public demonstrations - by the left or the right. Labour conference was shortly afterwards. And announced that it would support what became the Public Order Act. If I recall rightly, the first demo banned after Cable Street was one called by the local and Labour-run trades council. The Labour Party's general approach to Cable Street was neither pro-left nor pro-right, but pro-police.³

Lawrence Parker, in his *Communists and Labour: The National Leftwing Movement 1925-1929*, tells us:

The CPGB had begun to colonise the Labour Party at this point and was already in a very strong position in the Labour League of Youth; so, while the Labour Party may have been officially opposed, there were Labour Party organisations at Cable Street, some of whom would have been influenced by the CPGB. The boundary lines between Labour and the CPGB were very blurred after the Comintern told the CP to enter into Labour. So, when individual Labour members went to Cable Street, some were probably following the instructions of the party ... the Communist Party!

We very much doubt whether a careerist like Emily Thornberry would have been amongst those who went against the official Labour Party line on any of these occasions.

Of course, historical accuracy was not the point of Thornberry's speech. No, having established herself as a defender of all that is

good and noble in recent British working class history, she went for her killer blow - firmly directed at appealing to the right:

There are sickening individuals on the fringes of our movement, who use our legitimate support for Palestine as a cloak and a cover for their despicable hatred of Jewish people, and their desire to see Israel destroyed. These people stand for everything that we have always stood against and they must be kicked out of our party, the same way Oswald Mosley was kicked out of Liverpool.

She basically justified the witch-hunt against many Corbyn supporters who have been accused of anti-Semitism by comparing them to fascists: comrades like Tony Greenstein, Marc Wadsworth - both already expelled - and Jackie Walker, who is about to be thrown out. All of them have been found guilty of anti-Semitism in the media and by rightwingers in the party, even if the official charge is 'bringing the party into disrepute'.

But none of that should surprise us, because Thornberry is a member of Labour Friends of Israel, which features various articles on its website attacking Jeremy Corbyn for his 'softness' on anti-Semitism and proudly declares that it "works closely" with Israel's Zionist Labor Party. LFI is run by Joan Ryan MP and Louise Ellman MP (who also used to run the Jewish Labour Movement).⁴

At an LFI event last year, Thornberry criticised the boycott movement and all those who "deny Israel the right to defend itself from military assault and terror attacks. That sort of bigotry against the Israeli nation has never been justified and it never will be."⁵ The same rationale is, of course, employed by Binyamin Netanyahu, when he orders his snipers to take out unarmed kids or shoot paramedics in the back.

According to Asa Winstanley of the award-winning *Electronic Intifada*, at this year's conference Thornberry tried her best to water down the motion on Palestine. In an hour-long meeting, she heavily leaned on the movers to delete any reference to the *nakba* (Israel's expulsion in 1948 of some 800,000 Palestinians to establish a "Jewish state") and demanded that the motion's call for an immediate arms trade freeze be removed.⁶ But the movers refused on both counts and even made reference to her in their speech. Good on them! Thousands of comrades waved Palestine flags, handed out by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Labour Against the Witchhunt - a fantastic sight.

Emily Thornberry is no leftwinger. And she would be a 'unity' candidate of the worst kind: using slightly leftwing rhetoric to keep the Labour left quiet; painting herself an internationalist, while firmly siding with the Zionist regime in Israel. She would steer the party back to where it was under Neil Kinnock - if not Tony Blair and Gordon Brown ●

Notes

1. www.independent.co.uk/voices/jeremy-corbyn-labour-party-conference-general-election-the-resa-may-conservative-a8558371.html.
2. <https://labourlist.org/2018/09/len-mccluskey-accusing-unite-of-machine-politics-undermines-jeremy-corbyn>.
3. www.facebook.com/simon.hannah.370/posts/1930737516965398?comment_id=1931202936918856.
4. www.lfi.org.uk/in-parliament.
5. <https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/emily-thornberry-criticises-bigotry-of-israel-boy-cotters>.
6. <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/asa-winstanley/defying-israel-lobby-labour-votes-arms-freeze>.

ECONOMICS

More momentum on the banks

Real measures to control finance are needed, argues **Michael Roberts**

A couple of weeks ago, I participated in a session on what to do about the banks at the Momentum event, The World Transformed, in Liverpool. This was, of course, taking place alongside the Labour Party conference and attempting to complement it with debates, discussions, etc.

The session on banking took place at the same time as Jeremy Corbyn was speaking with other big names in a separate TWT session. Nevertheless, over 100 came along to discuss what to do about the banks. The chair was Sarah-Jayne Clifton of the Jubilee Debt Campaign - part of a global movement working to break the chains of debt and "build a finance system that works for everyone".¹ Founded in 1996, it is a UK-based charity focused on the connections between poverty and debt.

Matt Wrack, the general secretary of the Fire Brigades Union led off the session. The firefighters have a socialist clause in their constitution and have campaigned since the end of the great recession for Labour to nationalise the big banks. The FBU commissioned a pamphlet called *Time to take over the banks*, co-written by Mick Brooks, a Labour economist, and myself.² Matt Wrack pointed out that Labour had a great opportunity to act on the banks when the global financial crash ensued, but the then Labour leadership - infused with "neoliberal", pro-market, pro-finance ideas - did nothing, except bail them out.

Indeed, Labour leaders adopted 'light touch regulation' of the banks, praising the City of London. As chancellor in 2004, Gordon Brown even opened Lehman Bros' new Canary Wharf office, saying "Lehman brothers is a great company that can look backwards with pride and look forwards with hope".³ As we know, the bankruptcy of this rapacious US investment bank was the trigger for the global financial meltdown. Yet it seems, said Wrack, that even now the current trade union and Labour leaders are unwilling to grasp the nettle and deal with the big banks.

Fran Boait of Positive Money spelt out how neoliberal, pro-market ideas dominated thinking on finance. Mainstream economists did not see the global financial crash coming and on the whole have not offered any real changes, except to suggest more capital backing for banks. Positive Money campaigns for

an economy that isn't driven by housing bubbles, stock market booms and a bloated financial sector, and where wealth isn't concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. Instead, investment in productive sectors of the real economy, such as affordable housing, helps to boost incomes, bring down inequality and serve society's needs.³

Ann Pettifor is a well-known UK-based analyst of the global financial system, director of Policy Research in Macroeconomics (Prime) - a network of economists concerned with Keynesian monetary theory and policies - and an important advisor to the current Labour leadership on economic policy. Ann argued for the Bank of England to be brought under democratic control and then used to provide funds for the big banks - as long as they were committed to use it "productively" in investment and jobs, etc. This would go alongside the current Labour proposal for a National



Speculate, speculate, speculate

Investment Bank (NIB).

Public service

In my view, none of these approaches is likely to deliver what we need: namely, turning banking into a public service for the many and not a speculative, tax-evasion tool for the few rich investors and corporations. Surely, the history of the period leading up to the global financial crash - the wild credit boom, the sub-prime mortgage crisis, the 'toxic' derivatives, etc - has shown that the big banks will not be a public service without them being publicly owned with democratic accountability. And the period since (the last 10 years), only confirms that view.

In my contribution, I outlined briefly how the big banks, even after the end of the global crash and the bailouts, have carried on just as before - it is business as usual. Or as Lloyd Blankfein, the head of Goldman Sachs, the world's most predatory investment bank, once said: they continue to do "God's work". And what has doing "God's work" entailed over the last 10 years? A never-ending litany of scandals - particularly by British banks.

Take RBS, Britain's largest bank, which was partly nationalised after the crash. Before that it had been run by 'Fred the Shred' Goodwin (so named for his penchant for slashing lower-ranked banking jobs and bank branches). Sir Fred Goodwin was knighted for his "services to the banking industry" by the then Labour government. He was noted for his bullying of staff and his love for risky ventures and huge bonuses. After driving RBS into near bankruptcy in the crash, he left - but not before taking a fat pension and handshakes from the RBS board, as have all the senior executives of the banks when they have been asked to 'step down' following a scandal.

After the crash, RBS was prominent (while still part-nationalised) in the notorious Libor-rate rigging scandal, where bank traders colluded to fix the interest rate for inter-bank lending. Libor sets the floor for most loan costs across the world. That rigging meant that local authorities, charities and businesses ended up paying billions more than they should for loans. The rigging activities of RBS appeared to have been even worse under the 'watchful' eye of Stephen Heston, appointed when the bank was nationalised. For two years after Heston got the job, the Libor traders in this publicly owned bank carried on rigging the rate, even though they knew it was illegal.

Then there is Britain's next biggest bank, Lloyds Bank (also part nationalised), which took over the scandal-ridden Bank of Scotland in the crash. Along with all the other banks, it has had to compensate customers for mis-selling them personal injury insurance to the tune of £5 billion.

During the crash, Barclays Bank was run by Bob Diamond. It has now been revealed that when Barclays was threatened with partial nationalisation, its board loaned money to Qatar, which then invested in the stock of the bank to the tune of £12 billion. In this way, the bank avoided state control by issuing more loans for equity. It is still not clear what 'commissions' were paid to Qatari investors.

And then there is HSBC. In the US, HSBC was fined \$5 billion by the federal authorities for 'laundering' money for Mexican drug cartels! In Switzerland, former chairman Stephen Green was also doing "God's work" for HSBC. Reverend Green, an ordained vicar, in 2009 published *Good value* - an extended essay on how to promote "corporate responsibility and high ethical standards in the age of globalisation"! The good reverend was in charge of HSBC's private banking division based in Switzerland, which was engaged in concealing the ill-gotten gains of thousands of rich people in many countries who did not want to pay tax. HSBC arranged various schemes to enable them to recycle their cash back to the UK and other countries without tax payments.

Indeed, tax evasion is just what privately owned, as opposed to democratically accountable, banks get up to: providing tax avoidance and evasion for very rich people and corporations.⁴ Take the very latest scandal emerging from Danske Bank, Denmark's largest. After the global crash up to 2015, Danske's Estonian branch laundered over \$200 billion of Russian and British corporate cash to avoid tax. UK corporate entities were the second-biggest proportion of customers, behind the Russian mafia, of 15,000 non-resident customers at the Estonian branch of Danske, making this one of the biggest money-laundering scandals ever. Surely we cannot let this continue?

A proper banking service should take our deposits, look after our savings and offer loans to households and small businesses for big-ticket items at reasonable interest rates. But the current banking system is much more interested in speculating in financial markets for big bucks, making corporate finance deals and

helping the rich evade payments - while top executives take home huge wages, bonuses and pensions.

Britain's banks cannot even do the basics properly, because they do not spend enough on their staff and systems. There has been a stream of outages and failures in internet banking systems. As current Conservative minister Nicky Morgan put it,

It simply isn't good enough to expose customers to IT failures, including delays in paying bills and an inability to access their own money. High-street banks justify the closure of their branch networks on the basis that they are providing a seamless online and mobile phone banking service. These justifications carry little weight if their banking apps and websites cannot be relied upon.

As for providing credit for productive investment in the economy, it is a joke. In our report for the FBU we calculated that less than 6% of bank assets go to industry for productive investment. The big five British banks control 60% of all lending; their firepower for investment is much greater than Labour's proposed NIB will ever have. But the big five banks do not use that credit productively. The NIB will not succeed in turning the British economy around if the big five continue to do "God's work". Instead, another financial crash and recession is more likely.

Public ownership

So public ownership of the big five is essential. Even if the government bought all the shares at market price it would cost only a one-off 3% of GDP (not that full compensation to shareholders is merited). That could easily be financed by the issuance of government bonds and serviced easily with the revenues and profits from the big five. The top executives of these banks would then be paid civil service salaries and have no shares - bank workers and trade unionists would sit on the boards to ensure accountability. Public ownership does not mean more bureaucracy - on the contrary, it means more democracy.

What can public service banks do? Well, take the example of North Dakota. The main bank in this rightwing US state has been publicly owned since the great depression. It looks after the deposits of customers and provides loans for households and farmers, and any profit it makes goes back to the state government. It does no speculation and no laundering. It

did not suffer during the global crash.

As for investment, take the role of China's state banking system. Whatever we might say about the autocratic, one-party dictatorship in China, its state-owned banks provide credit to support a national investment programme that has transformed China's infrastructure.

I came up to Liverpool on one of Britain's privatised train routes. It left one hour late because of "engineering works" and crawled up to Liverpool at a maximum speed of 75mph. On the same day, China launched a new high-speed service (220kmh) from Hong Kong to China, linking it with 15 cities: punctual, modern and cheap. This high-speed rail service reduces the need for air flights and lowers the carbon footprint. And all this was financed by state bank loans and railway bonds.

It was argued at the Momentum session by Fran Boait and by several in the audience that we do not want great big bureaucratic banks, but more diversification: regional banks, coops, credit unions, etc. I agree. Germany's banking system is predominantly state-owned at regional level with savings banks and development banks. Linking the nationally owned big five with such regional and local banks would be the way to go. Indeed, I have even drawn up a plan for such a banking system.⁵

But this will only work if we have the core of banking in public hands. If diversification means keeping the big five still owned by capital with just small banks and credit unions around the periphery and/or competing with the big five, then that would be like saying the health service should have at its centre big private health companies with only small public operations in the community.

There seems to be a reluctance to opt for public ownership at the centre of the banking system. Why only railways, energy and water? The lack of momentum on this crucial cog in controlling the economy 'for the many, not the few' seems to be partly based on fear of the media and the City of London's response. But breaking up the banks or taxing them, or giving workers shares in them, as John McDonnell is now proposing, will provoke just as much antagonism from capital - but without delivering banking as a public service and a force for productive investment.

I do not quote Lenin very often. But he hit the nail on its head (as he often did), when he said:

The banks, as we know, are centres of modern economic life, the principal nerve centres of the whole capitalist economic system. To talk about 'regulating economic life' and yet evade the question of the nationalisation of the banks means either betraying the most profound ignorance or deceiving the 'common people' by florid words and grandiloquent promises, with the deliberate intention of not fulfilling these promises.⁶ ●

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

Notes

- [1. https://jubileedebt.org.uk/news/trustee-vacancies](https://jubileedebt.org.uk/news/trustee-vacancies).
- [2. www.pbi-uk.org/its-time-to-take-over-the-banks](http://www.pbi-uk.org/its-time-to-take-over-the-banks).
- [3. https://positivemoney.org/about/our-vision](https://positivemoney.org/about/our-vision).
- [4. https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2016/04/12/opening-the-panama-canal](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2016/04/12/opening-the-panama-canal).
- [5. https://thenextrecession.files.wordpress.com/2018/09/banks-1.png](https://thenextrecession.files.wordpress.com/2018/09/banks-1.png).
- [6. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/ichtci/04.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/ichtci/04.htm).

REVIEW

Forgotten communities

Garry Lyons **The last seam** Daljinder Singh (director), various venues



This play about the second-last coal mine to close in Britain, Hatfield Main, features voices from the abandoned and forgotten coal communities. It is a sort of visual radio programme, in so far as it is really a kaleidoscope of words and language. There is a solitary on-stage prop of a pit-head locker and a fallen metal tower, but the rest of the images are essentially conjured up in sound.

There are five characters, but they represent more than just five individuals, sometimes swapping to another persona, or incorporating the stories and memories of other interviewees into one dialogue. I know this because some of my words and analysis are incorporated into the memories and life stories of the characters. Basically though, the bulk of the memories and tales come from Les Moore and his sister, Sheena, her best friend, Brenda, and pitman-cum-community activist Mick Lanaghan.

It is rather like a 3D 'pub crack': the tales and memories are hard, gritty, very funny and down-to-earth - but occasionally tragic and heartbreaking. The play will

'Easington colliery' by Paul Oughton

Garry Lyons worked with members of the mining community to create a truly memorable piece of theatre

certainly strike a lot of chords in the pit communities and towns where it tours.

Mind you, there is also the inclusion of a cross-dresser, who was not a coal miner - his self-supporting dialogue runs side by side with all the reflections on mines and miners. Some might find this confusing, but presumably it is included to demonstrate that not everyone in a pit village is a miner, or a stereotypical cloth-cap-wearing pitman. His life ran in conjunction with that of the miners, but it was almost like a parallel universe.

One striking inclusion - which is, of course, totally typical of the pit communities nationwide - was the statement from one of the characters that she was a 'leave' voter in the EU referendum. She explained how much she resented the liberal left elite telling her she was a "fascist" for believing in a wider form of internationalism than was now the 'party line' of much of

the liberal left. While this will meet with widespread identification in the core audiences of the pit villages, it will doubtless cause incomprehension among middle class members.

If I had to make criticisms I would come up with two. Firstly, there is too much 'bad language', in my view. I say that because traditionally miners do not usually swear and curse in public, but the writer tells me that this is actually how the stories were related. So I guess it is just me then.

Secondly, I do not know who told the writer that Hatfield still had enough coal for 20 years. I laughed out loud at that. Conservative estimates would suggest that it could continue supplying for nearer 1,000 years - although an area director of the National Coal Board once assured me jokingly that, the way Hatfield miners did their work, it would last 2,000 years!

Either way, I think this play will cause a sensation ●

David John Douglass

Showings

Friday October 5, 7.30pm: Grove Hall, Stockingate, South Kirkby, Pontefract WF9.

Saturday October 6, 8pm: Jump Club, Wentworth Road, Jump, Barnsley S74.

Sunday October 7, 7pm: Rossington Memorial Hall, McConnell Crescent, Doncaster DN11.

Tuesday October 9, 7 pm: Woodlands Rhino's, Princess Street, Woodlands, Doncaster

DN6.

Wednesday October 10, 7 pm: Askern Miners Welfare Club, Manor Way, Askern, Doncaster DN6.

Thursday October 11 and Friday October 12, 7.30pm: The Peacock, 287 High Street West, Sunderland SR1.

Sunday October 14, 7pm: Stainforth Central Club, Bridge Hill, Stainforth, Doncaster DN7.

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

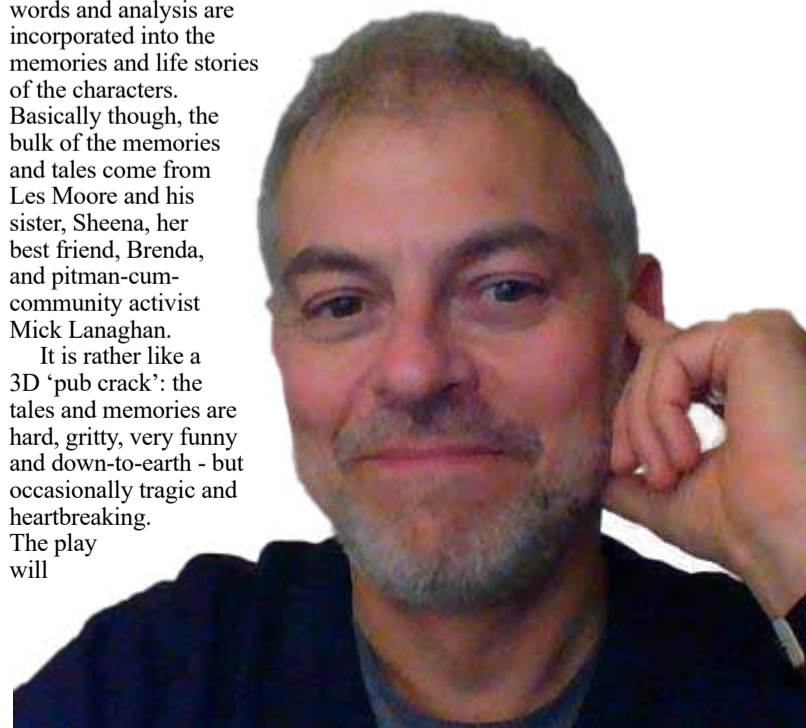
■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

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

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

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

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weekly Worker

**Intolerant
atmosphere
becomes
toxic**

Doing the job of the right

Momentum in Scotland seems to have joined the witch-hunt against the left. Chris Cassells reports

The witch-hunt of Labour Party socialists has taken a new, disturbing turn in Scotland, with the executive committee of the Campaign for Socialism (CfS - Momentum's counterpart in Scotland) taking the lead.

Despite criticisms of the Momentum leadership's handling of the witch-hunt and its lack of support for its victims, Jon Lansman's organisation, to date, has preferred to let others do the actual witch-hunting. Not so CfS. In August, CfS launched its own witch-hunt against two of its members, Sandy McBurney and Colin Deans. The former's crime was sharing an article in the CfS members Facebook group authored by the Jewish leftwing anti-Zionist writer, Robert Cohen, titled 'The Jewish establishment's "war Against Corbyn" risks bringing real anti-Semitism to Britain' - an article widely shared on social media by the group, Jewish Voice for Labour. The latter was accused of anti-Semitism for stating in the same Facebook group that Jehovah's Witnesses, Slavs, communists and trade unionists, among others, were murdered alongside Jews during the holocaust.

In neither case was any external pressure exerted on the CfS EC to instigate disciplinary proceedings - in fact, both cases appear to have been initiated by the leadership itself.

At present, CfS has no agreed disciplinary processes or code of conduct. An attempt to pass such a code at the CfS AGM in March failed after members rejected its strange and vague formulations - including, in an inversion of basic democratic principle, the stipulation that local groups are accountable to the CfS EC and that members can be expelled for "jeopardising" CfS's relationship with the Labour Party, or indeed CfS's "reputation", whatever that means. Undeterred, the EC decided to adopt *de facto* the rejected code - though even that was modified on an *ad hoc* basis, as events progressed - and suspended Colin and Sandy at an EC meeting on August 4, appointing a three-person panel and setting disciplinary hearings for September 15 at the Unite offices in Glasgow.

In one of the many contraventions of natural justice, the accused were denied access to the CfS members Facebook group and therefore the evidence of their alleged misdeeds - though it turns out that the offending posts were long deleted. In Sandy's case, the secretary could not even tell him which website the link was posted from and consistently used the wrong title for the article, claiming it was headlined 'The Jewish war on Corbyn'. At no point was there any suggestion that the article itself was anti-Semitic: the charge related purely to the title and so its misrepresentation is of some significance.

As the 15th approached, comrades outraged at the EC's blatant contempt for the membership and disregard for basic democratic principles began organising, in the best tradition of



The thought police are after you

the labour movement, for a solidarity demonstration outside the hearings. The demonstrations were to be silent and placards were to include only slogans supportive of the two comrades, with no explicit criticism of the CfS. Three days prior to the hearing, the venue was switched "due to unforeseen circumstances" to Govanhill Baths - a community venue in the south of the city. Later that day, the accused received emails informing them:

You will be aware we have now had to cancel two potential venues for your disciplinary panel. The venues in both cases have expressed concern about the nature of the planned protest which you have endorsed, and the effect it could have on others using the building.

Neither were in fact aware of this, nor - at least in the case of Govanhill

Baths - is this true. In fact, the Baths declined to play host to the witch-hunt of two Labour Party socialists on a point of principle. The argument that picket lines are intimidating and cause 'stress and anxiety' is, of course, a favourite of the rightwing press. In this case, it is absurd, given that the silent picket was to show support for two CfS members and had nothing at all to do with the venues.

Tried in absentia

The comrades were informed that, unless they could confirm that the picket would not go ahead - which they could not, given they had not themselves organised it - the hearing would be held in their absence and in secret. The decision of the panel would be "based solely on the evidence available" - which is to say, based on nothing, given there was no actual evidence - to which the accused would be allowed to add a written statement.

In the end, a series of questions were sent to both comrades. Both provided written responses: Colin gave sources for his post, including the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the international committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration; Sandy included statements in his defence by Robert Cohen and Jewish Voice for Labour, explaining that there was no anti-Semitic content or intent in respect to the title of the article in question.

The questions themselves were leading, rambling, vague and, in some cases, contained basic factual errors - for example, the title of the article shared by Sandy was incorrect yet again. They were reminiscent of the sort of questioning levelled during a workplace disciplinary - with that toxic mix of officiousness, pettiness, ineptitude and self-satisfaction, usually resulting from the knowledge that the outcome

is already determined. And, sure enough, on September 19 Sandy and Colin were informed that the panel had unanimously voted for their expulsion from CfS - a decision that had been ratified by the EC. There would be no right of appeal. Both remain full and active members of the Labour Party.

Members of the recently formed Labour Briefing Scotland group have called for an extraordinary general meeting to reject the expulsions and condemn the EC for acting unconstitutionally and well beyond its authority. In a sign of the depths of bureaucratism to which the EC has sunk, despite the fact that sufficient signatures from the membership had been gathered, the secretary maintained that no EGM would be held until each signatory had personally emailed him with proof of their membership of CfS. This would be simple enough to arrange, but once again it demonstrates the EC's shameless readiness to make the rules up as it goes along.

To the outside observer this sorry tale will appear ridiculous and bizarre - largely because it is. There is simply no way that Sandy or Colin - both socialists with a long track record of anti-racist activity - have behaved in an anti-Semitic manner, or that the disciplinary process was anything other than a farce. In fact, the CfS witch-hunt is almost certainly an attempt by the leadership to get rid of two - and presumably this is just the beginning - of its most vocal leftwing critics.

The CfS has not called a members' meeting since the AGM in March, despite being required to hold at least four a year, and is increasingly little more than a career network for aspiring Labour movement full-timers. Ordinary members are viewed at best as little more than phone-bank and door-knocking fodder, who exist only to support the career aspirations of their leaders; and at worst a liability to be gotten rid of, with no regard to democracy or natural justice.

However, socialists in the CfS, which has over 1,000 members, should stay and fight back, working to transform the organisation into a democratic, members-led, socialist movement; one that is capable of defending Corbyn, fighting for the democratisation of the Labour Party, and winning a Labour government capable of implementing pro-working class reforms at the next general election ●

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